SOME REFLECTIONS ON EPISTEMIC JUSTIFICATION

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to define a plausible concept of epistemic justification for empirical knowledge of the external world and to investigate whether it is possible to justify beliefs. Three accounts of epistemic justification will be considered: strong internalism, weak internalism and externalism.

With regard to the first aim, I will argue that we cannot choose an account of justification, independently of our contingent epistemic needs. With regard to the second aim, I will argue that, whatever account of justification we adopt (more or less demanding), no justification for our empirical beliefs on the external world can be achieved.

Keywords: Scepticism, Internalism, Externalism, Justification, Foundation, Infinite regress, Theory of knowledge.

"If truth consists in a correspondence of thought with something outside thought, thought can never know when truth has been attained".

Bertrand Russell

1. Strong Internalism and Infinite Regress.

The aim of this paper is twofold, since we will attempt to answer two different questions: (i) what is epistemic justification? (ii) is it possible? Our field of inquiry will be the empirical knowledge of the external world.

Epistemic justification is widely conceived as the *differentia specifica* between mere true belief and knowledge. In the contemporary debate, internalist and externalist accounts of justification have been offered.[1] The externalist holds that, for an epistemic subject to be justified, not all the justificatory factors need to be accessible to him; the internalist denies that principle. If we call β the property which raises the likelihood of a belief being true, externalist justification consists in the obtaining of B; internalist justification consists in (i) the obtaining of β and (ii) the subject's awareness that β is there.

In addition to this general distinction between internalism and externalism, we can also distinguish between internalist accounts with different grades of internality, and externalist accounts with various grades of externality.

I will begin with a discussion of the validity of these conceptions of justification. Then, I will attempt to show that, independently of the account we adopt (internalist or externalist), there are serious difficulties in justifying our beliefs.

In particular, I will deal with the problem of the infinite regress of justification and suggest that neither internalism or externalism can save justification from the threat of infinite regress. Therefore, we should be prepared to accept the idea that our beliefs are not justified, since they are not justifiable.

Reliability and Accessibility.

Accounts of justification can be considered from at least two points of view: *reliability* and *accessibility*.

As we have just seen, both externalists and internalists think that a belief that *p* is justified only if it has a certain property ß (for example: being observational, being coherent with some other belief, or

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[1] See, for instance, Kornblith (2001).

being acquired by a reliable method, being caused by the fact that p)[2], which increases the probability of its being true.

Let us say that *reliability* is the level of that probability. For instance, a belief about what is happening in front of me is more reliable if acquired using both my sight and hearing than using my hearing only.

Let us say that *accessibility* is the level of awareness of the presence of the property ß. While the externalist takes the condition of accessibility of justification to be unnecessary for a subject to be justified in a belief, the internalist asks for a certain amount of accessibility, i.e. of awareness of the presence of ß.

The amounts of reliability and accessibility required may vary. I do not take the degree of reliability to be terribly important for the construction of a concept of justification. In fact, we can decide to require different amounts of reliability on different occasions: in everyday life we may require less reliability than in a judicial trial, in a scientific experiment or in a philosophical debate. We set the level of credibility of beliefs, in accordance with our epistemic needs. This means that the concept of justification is flexible: what is sufficient for justification on certain occasions may not be sufficient on others. Analogously, there can be different opinions (in different social contexts) on how much money a person should own in order to be defined as rich, but this does not cast doubt on what money is.

The problem of how much justification is required is different from the problem of what a justification is. And the latter will be my area of investigation.

The question of accessibility really seems to shape the concept of justification itself.

1.1. The Requirement of Accessibility

Any internalist account of justification requires an awareness on the part of the epistemic subject that property ß obtains. We can, however, distinguish between a strong and a weak account.

According to a strong internalist account the subject's belief that *p* is justified if and only if:

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[2] I conceive the property β in a very broad sense, which includes anything which could confer credibility on a belief. The fact that a belief has been acquired in a reliable method is a particular case of the property β.

(1) the belief that *p* has the property ß,

(2) the belief that *p* having the property ß significantly raises the probability that *p* is true,

(3) S believes that (1),

(4) S believes that (2),

(5) S is justified in believing that (1),

(6) S is justified in believing that (2).

With regard to reliability, we can notice that this account allows for justified false beliefs, since the property ß is not sufficient for the truth of *p*: condition (2) is expressed in terms of "raises significantly the probability that *p* is true". We could have strengthened the reliability of the justification by saying that the presence of the property ß "implies that *p* is true" or we could have weakened it by stating that it "moderately raises the probability that *p* is true". By varying the strength of (2), we can establish different levels of reliability.

With regard to accessibility, this account is highly internal: not only does the epistemic subject need to believe that *p* has the property ß, but he also needs to be (strongly internally) justified in this belief.

(1)-(6) account is certainly highly internalist, but we can conceive of an account where a further condition holds. Some internalists think that J is a justification for S's belief that *p* only if S believes that J is a justification. This further condition is quite problematic. *In the first place*, there are no reasons for requiring that the subject is aware of being justified. We just want him to be aware of the satisfaction of all the conditions that make him justified and we are not entitled to rule out as a non-knower a person who is not well acquainted with the theory of justification. We want S to be an epistemic subject, not an epistemologist. *In the second place*, the formulation of such a condition would be problematic. The formula

(7) S believes that (1)-(6) constitute a justification

would be unhelpful. On the one hand, if (1)-(6) did already constitute a justification, (7) would be unnecessary (the belief that (1)-(6) constitutes a justification would add nothing). On the other

hand, if (1)-(6) did not count as a justification, (7) should not hold (the belief that (1)-(6) counts as a justification would be false). So we had better to dismiss condition (7).

1.2. In Search of a Legitimate Strong Internalist Account.

Let us go back now to our original (1)-(6) account. One might object that this definition of justification is illegitimate (in virtue of a vicious circularity). The formulation of conditions (5) and (6) refer to the concept of justification itself, which is what we are trying to describe. It is an illegitimate definition of the same kind as the following moral principle: "Your duty is to obey your duty".

Consequently, we will replace conditions (5) and (6) by two pairs of conditions, giving us the following account:

- (8) the belief that p has the property ß,
- (9) the belief that p having the property ß significantly raises the likelihood that p is true,
- (10) S believes that (8),
- (11) S believes that (9),
- (12) the belief that (8) has the property γ
- (13) the belief that (8) having the property γ significantly raises the likelihood that (8)
- (14) is true,
- (15) the belief that (9) has the property δ,
- (16) the belief that (9) having the property δ significantly raises the likelihood that (9) is true.

Let us label the (8)-(15) schema the "strong internalist account" (SI).

The SI account is not affected by vicious circularity and, therefore, illegitimate; but that does not mean that it does not lead to an infinite regress. Let us consider, for instance, condition (9): it expresses one of the beliefs that S must hold in order to be justified in his belief that p. S is said to be justified in believing that (9) if and only if

(8.1) the belief that (9) has the property ß.1,

(9.1) the belief that (9) having the property ß.1 significantly raises the likelihood that

(9) is true,

(10.1) S believes that (8.1),

(11.1) S believes that (9.1),

(12.1) the belief that (8.1) has the property γ.1,

(13.1) the belief that (8.1) having the property γ.1 significantly raises the likelihood that (8.1) is true,

(14.1) the belief that (9.1) has the property δ.1,

(15.1) the belief that (9.1) having the property δ.1 significantly raises the likelihood that (9.1) is true.

The beliefs that (8.1) and that (9.1) need to be justified as well, and so on. Does this SI account lead to an infinite regress?

1.3. The Question of the Infinite Regress.

Before considering whether there is an infinite regress here, we need some clarification.

Clearly, the infinite regress of justification is a serious problem, since it makes impossible to achieve (and, perhaps, conceive) a justified belief. Many philosophers have argued that SI is inadequate because it yields infinite regress.

I note that this delicate inference from the impossibility of an SI justification to the inadequacy of SI is not legitimate.

We have said that we are trying to answer two different questions:

   (i)   what is justification?
   (ii) is justification possible?

We are not allowed to assume that justification should be possible (i.e. we are not allowed to rule out, at the very beginning of our inquiry, a radically sceptical position on justification): it might be that we are (*a priori*) incapable of justifying our beliefs *and* that justification is really what SI says it is. One might object that it sounds naïve to try to keep questions (i) and (ii) too detached. The

more demanding the concept of justification we construct, the more unlikely the possibility of acquiring justification. The thicker the intension, the thinner the extension.[3] Yet, although it is true that the concept of justification is the result of our broadening or limiting (restricting) work, we do not know at this stage in which direction we should work. It may turn out that the sceptical position is the right one.

Therefore, we will stick to the following position, even if it is not univerally accepted: the acknowledgement that SI generates infinite regress will not cast doubt on the validity of SI (question (i)), but rather on the possibility of justification (question (ii)).

It is time now to appreciate if an infinite regress is really generated.

An infinite regress is generated by SI if and only if we require that the elements of the justification chain are all different from each other (i.e. we rule out the possibility of a circle of justification, where a belief that *a* can be used to justify a belief that *b*, which, even indirectly, is at some stage used to justify the belief that *a*).

2. Circular Justification and Coherence Theories.

A kind of account of justification where circular justification is at work is that of coherence theories of justification. Hence, it is worth considering if coherence theories can provide a way out to the infinite regress impasse. Let us distinguish between three types of coherence theories, which will prove relevant for our purpose.

First type. A first group of coherentists share the view that a single belief has to be coherent with another single belief, in order to be justified.[4]

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[3] See Craig (1990), section I.

[4] In the epistemological literature, the concept of 'being justified' is used at least, in two different contexts: (i) it is said that an *epistemic subject* is justified if and only if a certain set of conditions is met (for instance, strong internalist conditions); (ii) it is said that a belief is justified if and only if, for instance, is in a certain relation with other beliefs. I will keep ascribing the property of being justified either to epistemic subjects or beliefs, according to the different contexts of discussion.

Second type. Other coherentists reject the one-to-one relation and want the belief for which we are seeking justification to cohere with all the rest of the beliefs set.

It is to this type that Dancy's motto refers (1985): "a belief is justified to the extent to which the belief-set of which it is a member is coherent".[5] Both coherence theories of the first and of the second type define "being justified" as a property of single beliefs.

Third type. A third view is that which denies that justification is a property of single beliefs: it is only the whole epistemic system to be justified. And it is justified as long as it contains a substantial plurality of interconnections between its constituent beliefs.

All these three views are kinds of coherence theories of justification, since they base justification on a coherence-requirement-only.

I think that, at this point, I owe at least a clarification: the adoption of a coherence theory of *justification* does not imply the adoption of a coherence theory of *truth*, according to which a proposition is true if and only if it coheres with other propositions of the same epistemic system. We could think, in principle, of a coherence theory of justification (the belief *a1* is justified if and only if it is coherent with the beliefs that *a2* and that *a3*) which perfectly fits with a correspondence theory of truth (the propositions *a1*, *a2*, *a3* are true if and only if *a1*, *a2, a3*). Although with some difficulty, it can be believed that justification is a matter of coherence *and* that truth is a matter of correspondence. Walker (2001) on this point: "One can consistently hold […] that coherence provides the criterion for truth, but that the nature of truth consists in something different, a correspondence of some kind".[6]

As Alcoff notices, coherence theories of justification may also differ in the determination of what "coherence" should consist of:

"Some minimalist formulations of coherence require only simple consistency, while

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[5] Dancy (1985), p. 161.

[6] Walker (2001), p. 124. See also Rescher

other, stronger versions require mutual entailment. A middle position […] requires that the elements in a belief set be mutually explanatory".[7]

Our purpose was to see how circular justification works and discover whether it may help us escape the infinite chain problem. So our field of inquiry must be the first and the second type of coherence theories.

Let us start dealing with the first type of coherence theory (which allows belief-belief justification) combined with a correspondence theory of truth.

2.1. Against Coherence Theory of Justification.

I will attempt to offer two arguments against circular justification in coherence systems of the first type: the first argument, more complex, relies on the fact that justification raises the belief's probability of being true; the second argument, more straightforward, relies on a stronger assumption, namely that a belief cannot justify itself.

For the first type of coherentists, the following deduction is valid:

The only requirement for a belief to be justified is to be coherent (whatever "coherent" means: consistent, mutually implied, etc.) with another belief: justification is reduced to coherence.
The relation of coherence is symmetrical: if the belief that *a1* is coherent with the belief *a2*, then *a2* is coherent with *a1*.
Therefore, the relation of justification is symmetrical.

It may be important to notice that coherence is required even in non-coherentist theories of justification, as foundationalism: non-basic beliefs certainly must be coherent with basic beliefs. Yet foundationalism is not a "coherence-requirement-only" system. Non-basic beliefs must also be *derived* from (grounded by) basic beliefs.

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[7] Alcoff (2002), p. 161.

In order to appreciate that coherence theory of justification deserves attention, let us show how the "coherence-requirement-only" (of the first type) works in our everyday epistemic life. We will consider two cases.

First case. After a medical examination for the driving license, I see my doctor coming towards me and I hear him saying: "Your senses are working properly. You are suitable for driving". This common epistemic situation is somewhat surprisingly problematic. I hold, at least, two beliefs:

a My doctor told me that my senses are working properly
b My senses are properly working

In particular, I justify *b* through *a*. Yet I have now the problem to find a justification for *a*, namely for the belief that my doctor told me that my senses are working properly.[8] And I tend to justify *a* through *b*.

Second case. Circularity may be disguised in a more complex chain of justifications. Consider the following set of beliefs:

c Here and now it is raining
d There are drops of water on my jacket
e What my senses perceive is real
f My friend Paul perceives roughly the same things as I do
g My friend Paul has just told me that he sees drops of rain on my jacket

I may justify my belief *c* through *d*. And this may suffice in everyday experience. If a sceptic bothers me and puts *d* in question, I could also reply saying that *d* is justified through *e* (what my senses perceive is real). And a reason for my believing that my senses are not misleading me is that

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[8] We are not considering here the further question of how my doctor's diagnosis is reliable. This question should be legitimately raised only when we can be reliably aware of what that diagnosis consists of.

of checking if a friend nearby (Paul) has the same perception. *f* justifies *e*; *g* (my friend Paul has just told me that he sees drops of rain on my jacket) justifies *f*. If the demanding sceptic is not yet satisfied and keeps asking me how could I ever know that Paul has really told me something about rain, I may answer that what my senses perceive is real (*e* justifies *g*).

As we can see, circularity can occur between two elements without mediation, as in the first case (between *a* and *b*), or with mediation, as in the second (*g* justifies *f*, *f* justifies *e*, *e* justifies *g*).

It may be worth noticing that the justification system of the second case is a mixed one: the same chain of justification *e-g-e* contains two kinds of justification:

(i)   there is justification through derivation between *g* and *f* and between *f* and *e*;

(ii)   there is circular justification between *g* and *e*.

Both mediated and non-mediated circular justifications are often used in our epistemic constructions. But this does not mean that they are legitimate. We are not asking how we acquire beliefs, but whether our way of acquiring beliefs is justified.

I would argue that any form of circular justification (mediated or non-mediated) lacks an essential property of justification: hierarchy.

Some consideration is needed of what "hierarchy of justification" means.

When we say that belief *l* is justified by belief *m*, we mean that belief *m* contains some justificatory factors, on which the justification of *l* relies. It seems that between *l* and *m* there must be some kind of unidirectional relation (unidirectional as causal relation in science or inference in logic), which we may call "derivation". This is quite intuitive, but let us try to work out why it should be plausible. When we try to construct a justification, we want to make sure that justification raises the probability that our belief is true: we are looking for a justification concept such that if a non-justified belief that *p* has a certain probability of being true, a justified belief that *p* has a greater probability of being true. Let us put things like that: "justified belief" just means "more likely to be true than a non-justified belief". Given a proposition *p*: "there are novels in Tom's library", we are to decide whether *p*. Suppose an epistemic subject has lost all his sensory skills and almost all his memory records and has no other information about the world except those which are necessary to understand the proposition "there are novels in Tom's library". He has no reasonable way to decide

whether *p*. Yet if the subject is given back his sensory skills (but not his memory records), he can start making some investigation and, consequently, change his epistemic neutrality about *p*. He may come to be justified in believing the following propositions:

q: novels are the most common type of book

r: Tom is a novelist

s: I have seen, during a visit to Tom's house, that Tom's bookshelves are full of novels

s1: My senses are working properly.

The appeal to *q*, *r*, *s* raises immediately the probability of *p*; the appeal to *s1* raises the probability of *s* and, mediately, that of *p*.

Higher Probability Principle.

These appeals are able to raise the probability of *p* (i.e. to justify *p*) only if the belief that *p* can be derived from other beliefs that have a greater probability of being true than *p*.

The principle according to which only a belief with higher probability justifies a belief with lower probability, which we have labelled the "higher probability principle of justification" (HPP) is at the basis of any reliable chain of justifications, however long it may be: in the chain *p-s-s1*, *s1* is meant to be more probable than *s* and *s* is meant to be more probable than *p*.

The HPP principle seems to rule out the possibility of both mediated and non-mediated circularity of justification.

The so shaped hierarchical relation of justification (which we can think in terms of the mathematical relation of "higher") is *asymmetrical*: if *a* justifies *b*, *b* does not justifies *a*. Therefore, non-mediated circularity is banned.

Our relation of justification is also *transitive*: if *a* justifies *b* and *b* justifies *c*, *a* justifies *c*. And since it is asymmetrical (if *a* justifies *c*, *c* does not justify *a*), mediated circularity is also excluded.

It is worth noticing that the attribution of probability to beliefs is not at devoid of problems. In the following discussion I will mention a few times indicators of probability, as 0.2 or 0.5. The usage of those indicators is totally artificial and does not imply that we are required to be able to ascribe

exact probabilities to beliefs (or, more worryingly, that I believe to possess a powerful method for exact ascription of probability). I only assume that we possess the following concepts: "more probable", "less probable", "fairly probable". Even the assumption of these concepts is quite risky: yet, since many accounts of justification refer to "the likelihood (of a belief) to be true",[9] I think it is worth to taking the risk.

The HPP principle is a necessary and not sufficient condition for justification, i.e. it is not the unique principle guiding our epistemic inquiries.

There are at least two other individually necessary condition for the establishment of a relation of justification between two beliefs. Let us call them the reliability principle (RP) and the fairly high probability principle (FHPP), with apologies for the new jargon.

Reliability principle (RP).

We want to exclude cases in which the beliefs to which we appeal are very likely to be true, but they cannot reliably ground the belief we want to justify. For example, we might consider the Newtonian gravitational law to be highly justified, but it does not count that much for our beliefs about Tom's library books, apart from the fact that they will normally stay quietly on the shelves.

Moreover, there are different levels of reliability of derivation: the belief that *s* (I have seen, during a visit to Tom's house, that Tom's bookshelves are full of novels) can be reasonably said to ground the belief that *p* (there are novels in Tom's room) better than the belief that *q* (Novel books are the most common in the world) does.

Fairly High Probability Principle (FHPP).

Suppose *a* has a 0.3 probability of being true and *b* has a 0.2 probability of being true. The condition stated by HPP for *a* justifying *b* is satisfied. If *b* can be reliably derived from *a* (so that the RP condition is also satisfied), can *a* be taken to justify *b*? It would be a quite unhappy move to use as a justificatory element a belief which has so little probability of being true (much less than 0.5), for it would be more likely to be false than to be true. We need to require a fairly high probability for the justificatory belief. Yet, the situation is more complex.

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[9] See, for instance, Craig (1990) p. 31 and Goldman (1998).

With regard to the establishment of a belief-belief relation of justification, we have to distinguish between two stages of the subject's epistemic inquiry: before time t the relation of justification has not yet been established; since time t this relation is established. While the probability of the justifying belief remains unchanged, the probability of the justified belief changes (*per definitionem*): justification is what increases the probability of being true. Therefore, we need a Fairly High Probability Principle (FHPP) which states that the probability of the justifying belief must be fairly high since before t (antecedently) and the probability of the justified belief must be fairly high since t (consequently).

Not only the beliefs involved in justification (the justified belief and the justifying belief) need to have different levels of probability before t, but they also need to be fairly probable since t.

Through a combination of the three principles, we can obtain the following schema.

A belief that *p* can be taken to be justificatory of *q* if and only if:

(i)   *p* is more likely to be true than *q*,

(ii)   both *p* and *q* have a probability of being true fairly high since the justification relation is established,

(iii)   the derivation of the belief *p* from *q* is reliable.

Are condition (i)-(iii) jointly sufficient for justification? At this stage we certainly cannot answer, as an answer to this question would presuppose a solution to the internalist-externalist question. (The internalist, for instance, would require the awareness of at least some of the (i)-(iii) conditions).

I would say that (i)-(iii) conditions are the constituent elements of what we have at the beginning labelled as "property β". The condition of the obtaining of property β is satisfied if and only if conditions (i)-(iii) are.

Objection to the schema (i)-(iii).

Let us consider an objection to the (i)-(iii) schema and, in particular, to both HPP and FHPP principles.

In order to select between which beliefs the relation of justification can operate, we have to evaluate three matters: *firstly*, if one of the beliefs grounds the other; *secondly*, if a belief is more probable to

be true than the other and which of them it is; *thirdly*, if both beliefs are sufficiently probable, once the justificatory relation has been established.

The first matter does not create problems: given the belief that *s* (I have seen, during a visit to Tom's house, that Tom's bookshelves are full of novels) and the belief that *p* (There are novels in Tom's room), it is always possible to decide if we are prepared to consider reliable the derivation of *p* from *s*. The second matter is more problematic: it seems that, in order to see whether *s* justifies *p*, we already need to assume their exact probabilities. And this is a substantially difficult matter. It would seem that before we can decide whether a justification relation is established, we must have already got an impressive epistemic result, which would be much more important than that we gain form the establishing of the justification relation.

We might reply that, in order to assess whether a belief is more probable than another, we need not have a precise account of their probability. For instance, we are entitled to say that the probability of *p* (There are novels in Tom's room) is normally higher than the probability of *p1* (There are novels by Robert Musil in Tom's room).

We might, then, conclude that the objection fails to shake HPP (where a notion of relative probability is invoked), but is still valid against FHPP (where a notion of absolute probability seems to be invoked). I take this objection to be more focused, but I am not sure if it really wins. If we conceive a completely bare epistemic inquiry, in which the subject has no epistemic assumptions at all about the world, the objection gets the point. Yet if we conceive a contextualized epistemic inquiry, where the subject already assumes some beliefs to be true (i.e. he has a certain epistemic background), he can reasonably assess whether some other beliefs have a certain probability of being true.

Some supporters of the first type of coherence theory, even if they allow that a single belief justifies another single beliefs, might deny that a probability of being true can be ascribed to a belief before it enters a relation justification with another belief. Therefore, the appeal to HPP and FHPP principles would sound unhelpful.

We can conceive another way of arguing for the asymmetry of justification (and dismissing circular justification) without ascribing even a vague amount of probability to beliefs. It is widely taken that no belief is self-justified: even basic beliefs of foundational theories take their credibility from their

supposed givenness, their proximity with sensory experience, and so on. Let us state that *b* cannot justify *b*. For, if any belief *b* were capable of justifying itself, we should ask why not all beliefs would. And if we only found an answer (for instance, that *b* is based on sensory experience), that answer would count as the "justifying belief" of *b*.

For the sake of argument, let us assume that *b* justifies *c* and that *c* justifies *b*. A circular justification is assumed to be the case. By the transitivity of justification, *b* justifies *b*, which goes against our stated premise. Therefore, circular justification should not be allowed.

Let us now consider second type of coherence theory of justification in combination with a correspondence theory of truth.

It is denied that the justification of a single belief can rely on the support of another single belief. The justification of a belief consists in its coherence with the whole epistemic system to which it belongs. As Bonjour (1985) puts it, "according to a coherence theory of empirical justification, […] the epistemic justification of an empirical belief derives entirely from its coherence with the believer's overall system of empirical beliefs and not at all from any sort of factor outside that system".[10] So, for the supporter of the coherence theory of justification, it is coherence with the entire set of beliefs that justifies a belief. It may be true that a limit case of a set of beliefs could consist of one belief only. Yet the second type supporter may easily require that the belief set considered should be a fairly conspicuous one.

I think that two criticisms can be raised against the second type position.

First criticism. As Kornblith (2002) says, grasping the overall system of empirical beliefs and assess the coherence between them and a new belief is something that simply goes beyond human abilities. It simply cannot be done:

"Even if one could grasp all one's beliefs, one would still need to assess their coherence, and whether they are coherent would have to be something available to a knowing agent upon reflection. […] Now one necessary condition for the coherence of a body of beliefs is that they be consistent. To what extent, then, is the consistency of a body of beliefs accessible to an agent?".[11]

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[10] Bonjour (1985), p. 101.

[11] Kornblith (2002), p. 124.

One might reply that we could, however, be able to consider relatively small systems of beliefs and we can elaborate techniques for a correct assessment of their internal consistency. So, this procedure is not certainly applicable to the entire empirical belief system of a human being, but it can be used within a selected set of relevant beliefs.

Another possible reply could be the following: even if we concede to the critics of such a coherence justification that it is impossible to be certain of the consistency of a huge system of beliefs, as those we need to handle in our life, this does not mean that the account of justification as coherence is incorrect. This account will lead to scepticism (as many correspondence theory accounts do), but can still be considered plausible. Scepticism is not the refutation of an epistemological theory, it is rather the product of it.

Second criticism. It can be argued that it is not the complexity of the coherence-check operation that creates problems; it is rather its utility. Once we have assessed that all the beliefs of a system are coherent (whether 10 or 10 thousand), we have said nothing about their being justified, i.e. their having a sort of reliable connection with reality.

So, it turns out that even if it is possible, in principle, to hold together a correspondence theory of truth and a coherence theory of justification, the latter does not help much to fulfil the semantic correspondence requirements.

Why do not we drop such problematic correspondence standards and adopt a coherence theory for both truth and justification?

2.2. Against Coherence Theory of Truth.

To resume the route we have done so far: we have started considering whether the SI account of justification necessarily leads to an infinite regress of justification. We argued that it does unless circular justification (as conceived in coherence theories of justification) is allowed. It seems that circular justification should be dismissed if we adopt a coherence theory of justification together with a correspondence theory of truth. Yet our internalist conception of justification would not be at a first sight incompatible with a coherence theory of truth.

Although this hypothesis is worth being considered, we can offer two kinds of arguments against it, which we label "epistemological arguments" and "functional argument".

Epistemological arguments.

In the philosophical debate, many classical objections to the coherence theories of truth have been raised.

First epistemological argument. Given a certain proposition *p*, there can very easily be found a set of propositions *A* with which *p* can cohere. So, the requirement of coherence would not allow us to distinguish between true and false propositions.

Walker (2001) also criticizes the fact that coherence theory of truth does not enable us to distinguish between true and false propositions. However, I am not convinced by his argument. Walker's explanation is the following:

"Virtually any proposition can be fitted into some coherent set. The proposition 'Bishop Stubbs was hanged for murder' is in fact false, but one can imagine a world no less coherent than our own in which it is true; there is thus a coherent set of propositions to which it belongs, including perhaps such propositions as 'All bishops are murdered' and 'Bishops are generally hanged', just as there is a coherent set of propositions to which (the truth) 'Bishop Stubbs died in his bed' belongs ".[12]

I believe that this is an incorrect move: when we say that the proposition 'Bishop Stubbs was hanged for murder' is "in fact false", we seem to assume that it has a truth-value which is independent from the coherence with other beliefs and which is rather dependent on the correspondence with the world. We already seem to assume a correspondence point of view before we can assess the tenability of the coherence one. This move begs the question and, in fact, we do not need it. It is sufficient to say that it is always possible to find a set of proposition which the proposition about Bishop Stubbs perfectly fits with.

Yet Walker's reply goes also against this more plausible move:

"The objection misses the point, because it is not being suggested that truth consists in cohering with any arbitrary set of propositions. […] Instead coherence theorists maintain that truth consists in coherence with a set of beliefs".[13]

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[12] Walker (2001), p. 125.

[13] Walker (2001), pp. 125-126. Actually, Walker says that he owes this argument to Russell (1966), but Russell's argu-

Against Walker, I have two arguments. *In the first place*, even if it is true that the reference to an actually believed system of proposition can usually rule out the most strange and "unbelievable" positions, yet nothing can prevent a believer or a scientific community from holding a very implausible system of beliefs. In other words, the shift from propositions to beliefs is not a warrant against weird beliefs.[14] Moreover, an account of truth (either defined in terms of correspondence or coherence) is invoked just to distinguish acceptable beliefs from unacceptable ones.

In the second place, and more radically, if we accept a traditional account of knowledge (as true belief plus some further condition)[15], we want a proposition to be true, independently of the presence of an epistemic subject who believes it to be true. Truth must be a property of propositions themselves and not only of beliefs: therefore, we should invoke an account for the definition of true propositions rather than true beliefs.

Second epistemological argument. A consequence of the first argument is the following: since for almost any proposition we can easily imagine building up a body of proposition which it fits with, we can build a system *A* to justify the belief that *p* and a system *B* to justify the belief that *non-p*. Therefore, *p* is likely to be true in system A and likely to be false in system *B*. This violates the principle of non-contradiction.

The coherentist might reply that the principle of non-contradiction is far from being violated, because it is taken to work only within the same system of beliefs. I would argue that this does not seem to make sense. Let us see why it seems so.

If we cannot think of a propositional truth-value which remains constant, independently of the various belief systems of which the proposition is part, then truth-value cannot be taken to be a property of propositions, but only of belief systems. And if the coherence theory of truth does not give an account of the truth- value of propositions, it can hardly be considered as an alternative conception of propositional truth-value.

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ments is slightly different and does not appear to be fallacious.

[14] Williams (2001), p. 118: "All that matters is that the beliefs in the system support *each other*. Accordingly, there is no distinction between a 'reasonable' belief-system and the delusions of a logically adept paranoid".

[15] As the most basic epistemology studies report, one of the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge is that *p* is true. See, for instance, Ayer (1956), Dancy (1985) and Williams (2001).

It is true that the criterion of propositional truth is given by the belonging of a proposition to a whole set and that, consequently, it would be impossible to assess the truth-value of a proposition independently of the whole set (as it would be impossible for a correspondentist to assess the truth-value independently of the states of affairs of the world). Yet once the truth-value has been decided, it should remain attached to the proposition. One thing is the criterion for truth, another is the concept of truth. The difference between the concept of truth and the criterion for truth is marked by Walker (2001): "One can consistently hold that coherence provides the criterion of truth, but that the nature of truth consists in something different, a correspondence of some kind. […] The coherence theorist [I agree with] holds that for a proposition to be true is to cohere with a certain system of beliefs. […] Coherence, and nothing else, is what its truth consists in".[16]

As Williams (2001) and Alcoff (2001) suggest, we could reply to the first and second epistemological arguments that coherence theories allow relativism.[17] If we abandon the idea that truth must be constrained by external standards (like correspondence of propositions with facts), we may be well prepared to admit that there can be many truths, in conflict with each other.

Is this position epistemologically helpful?

Functional argument.

As I have tried to show at the end of section 2.1., if we concede that truth is not dependent on what happens in the world, it is easier to adopt a coherence theory of justification. In the recent philosophical debate, the contrast between correspondence and coherence theories of truth has so far turned out to be quite undecidable, mainly because such conceptions of knowledge aim at different goals. Correspondence theories attempt to provide a system of beliefs which is the most possible correct image of the world, while coherentism attempts to provide a system of beliefs which is a consistent epistemic construction with a certain explanation power.

The aims being different, it is useless to try to defeat coherentism by saying that it does not give account of how the world really is. Coherentism, almost explicitly, does not ground truth on how the world is.

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[16] Walker (2001), p. 124.

[17] However, it may be worth noticing that the supporters of coherence theories of truth do not say to accept relativism.

I think that a solution to the coherence-correspondence debate is to acknowledge that there is no debate at all. And I am quite serious. For a debate goes on when, with regard to the same question, at least two different answers are given. If the concept of justification is in question, externalists and intrrnalists struggle because they have (at least) two different accounts for a concept of "justification". Such a debate is possible because they both roughly intend "justification" as the *differentia specifica* between knowledge and mere true belief. Then they fight on the set of conditions which an epistemic subject should meet in order to be justified. Atheists and religious people share a common outline of the idea of "God" and disagree about God's existence.

Coherentists and correspondentists do not share any object of dispute but the word "truth". They do not really share any concept or problem. They simply give totally different meanings to the word "truth" and engage a debate to show that a certain meaning is better than another.

If we completely eliminated the word "truth" from our philosophical language, the debate would probably immediately cease. There would simply be a group of people who cared about the coherence of an epistemic system and another group who cared about the correspondence of an epistemic system to the world. And they would probably never dream of engaging in any debate.

So, once having banned the term "truth" (as in a linguistic state of nature), what problem would we put on our agenda if we wanted to have some information about the world and be sufficiently confident about them? I would say that we would primarily require a certain correspondence of our beliefs with the world. It is true that we would probably also want to hold beliefs which are consistent with each other, but among the infinite possible consistent belief-systems, we want to be able to choose the belief-systems which are as most representative of the world as possible. This is why I hold that the truth-as-coherence requirement is not sufficient for our epistemic inquiry.

2.3. The One-Step-Enough Position.

It seems that an infinite chain of justification cannot be avoided. However, one might question whether we are required to be able to run through it all.

It is true that the chain of justifications produced by SI is in principle infinite, i.e. that the (8)-(15) conditions allow us to construe further infinite sub-conditions. But does the fact that it is possible to generate a recursive infinite chain of justification mean that the epistemic subject is obliged to run through it? Obviously, if he is obliged, he is in trouble. But we may cast doubt on this need.

It might be sufficient that the epistemic subject is required to be able to go back one step in the chain of justification. Let us call this idea the "one-step-enough position".

SITUATION 1. Suppose we want to cross the road and we want to make sure that no car is around. We look around carefully, we do not see any car and we conclude that no car is around. In particular, my belief that no car is around has the relevant property β of being observational: I was down in the street and I looked around to get the answer (I did not, for instance, ask my blind old uncle information on the traffic, nor did I make some tortuous statistical calculation on traffic at the week-end). So, the property ß (the belief is observational) is there and I am aware of its presence. Why should the epistemic story not end here? Nobody on this earth, who has normal sight, would ask himself if his sight was good even on that occasion or if some invisible cars have recently been produced. The chain of justification could be just cut after my belief that property ß is there.
I would raise two objections to the one-step-enough position.

First objection. The fact that in everyday life we do not usually run through a long chain of justifications to understand if we can cross the road does not mean that our everyday life beliefs are justified and that SI is not adequate. Epistemology, as it is often said, has a normative task. By saying this, I am not claiming that our everyday epistemic activity does not count or that it is not successful. On the contrary, I prefer to adopt an everyday knower approach to the epistemic problems and I am trying to construct an epistemic model that may suit it. The fact that we do not need to go through a long (or infinite) chain of justification could rather mean that we do not need to be justified at all. We might, for example, also come to the conclusion that for our everyday epistemic needs we need only a two-conditions knowledge (true belief), without justification.

Second objection. Let us consider SITUATION 2. I do not see any car at all around, but a person near me tells me that a big car is rapidly crossing the road and he justifies his belief saying that his belief has the property β (the belief is observational). And if a third person, connected with both of us by phone, asks us about the situation in the street, how can he detect whose belief is more reliable? He might ask ourselves if our sight is all right, if any of us is drunk, and so on. It seems

that in order to choose the most reliable belief, he needs to go back some steps in the regression of the justification chain.

So, I would conclude that the justification that was sufficient in SITUATION 1 is not sufficient in SITUATION 2. And we can imagine that a more complex situation can be the case: consequently, a longer run through the justification chain may be needed.

Yet, when we think that an epistemic subject is justified, we want him to be able to support his beliefs in all possible situations. It would be strange to say that he is justified in believing that *p*, on the condition that nobody holding that *non-p* is around or no nasty sceptic is disturbing him.

The one-step-enough position conceives knowledge as the attempt to provide fragments of justification, but not proper justification.

One might object that we are only limited human beings and we must be prepared to accept fragments of justification.

I could reply, in the first place, that it would be a bit ridiculous to accept some justification when no sceptics are around and do some effort to proceed in the justification chain when people doubt my beliefs. In the second place, I would say that the so-called "fragment of justification" could be of no help at all: in fact, however small it is, it always relies on some other beliefs of which we do not know if they are justified (since we have not tried yet to go further in the justification chain).

The one-step-enough position does not seem to solve our infinite regress problem.

3. Weak Internalism.

Let us go on now with our winding route: I have attempted to show that, if we adopt the SI account, we cannot escape the infinite regress of justification. Many philosophers think that, since SI leads to infinite regress, it should be abandoned. I do not think this is a sufficient reason for dropping it: as we have seen in section 1, the infinite regress is a problem for the possibility of justification, not for the validity of SI account. We might stick to SI and, consequently, accept a sceptical position about justification.

However, SI can be criticized on other respects.

3.1. Is Weak Internalism Really Internalism?

A less demanding internalist account of the concept of knowledge is discussed (not proposed) by Craig (1990):

S has a reason for his belief that p if and only if there is something else q, such that:

> " [16] It is true,
>
> [17] S believes it,
>
> [18] Its truth significantly raises the likelihood that p is true,
>
> [19] S believes that [18] holds".[18]

As one can see, on the reliability side, in Craig's account the condition about the existence of a "reliable" property holds too. So, it must be true that the believed proposition p has a certain property [16], but it does not need to be true that the existence of this property necessarily entails the truth of p.[19] Condition [17] is expressed in terms of "significantly raises the likelihood that p is true" rather than "entails the truth of p.

Let us reconstruct this weak account of internalism (WI) in our terms. The subject's belief that p is justified if and only if:

(20) the belief that p has the property β,

(21) the belief that p having the property β significantly raises the probability that p is true,

(22) S believes that (20),

(23) S believes that (21).

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[18] Craig (1990), p. 31.

[19] Condition [17] is expressed in terms of "significantly raises the likelihood that p is true" rather than "entails the truth of p.

The two justification clauses (justifications for belief (20) and (21)), are not invoked in WI: the awareness necessary conditions of the subject are limited to (22) and (23).

The (20)-(23) clauses, as they are shaped, do not lead to an infinite regress.

SI and WI are the two most common ways of putting down the condition of awareness of the obtaining of the property β, which the internalist requires. For the strong internalist, "to be aware" means "to know" (i.e. for the strong internalist, the subject is require *to know* that he is justified). And since an epistemic subject knows if and only if he satisfies the conditions of truth, belief and justification, not only does he need to believe that a certain property β is there, but he has to be justified in this belief. (In the SI account, (12)-(15) are the justification conditions) For the weak internalist, "to be aware" means "to believe truly" and, consequently, no justification for this awareness is required.

Two criticisms, one intrinsic and one extrinsic, can be addressed to WI.

Intrinsic criticism.

The strong internalist could argue that WI is not working properly. He could hold that the awareness extra-condition (which, according to internalists, makes a justification a justification) is not really given, if S is not required to be aware of the reasons for (20) and (21).

The weak internalist would (felicitously, I think) reply to the strong internalist that he is just begging the question: he is assuming that the awareness of justification does not merely consist of the belief that the justification conditions (20) and (21) obtain, but also of some further condition(s). And this is exactly what is in question. Moreover, he could reasonably argue that it is the more demanding internalist who has the burden of providing an argument for the necessity of his further condition(s). Clearly, the strong internalist's argument would rely on the view that "to be aware" means "to know". At this stage, we had better let the stong internalist and weak internalist struggle with each other and consider another possible objection to WI.

Extrinsic criticism.

It is one thing is to be aware of a justification, another to be aware of why it is a justification. How can we decide which of the two suits our epistemic needs?

I would like to draw attention to the fact that weak internalism and one-step–enough position, although similar, do not coincide. Both of them hold that a finite chain of beliefs is possible, but this is the only common idea. For the one-step-enough position we must look for justificatory beliefs for our beliefs about β. Yet we must be at any time able to go back one step and look for a further justification, if these justificatory beliefs are questioned (i.e. when someone disagrees with us and we have to give reasons in support of our belief). For the weak internalist, no justification of the awaress belief is needed at all and no steps back to fragments of justifications could be given. Weak internalism is, therefore, less demanding than the one-step-enough treatment of strong internalism: the epistemic subject needs only to be aware that he is justified.

In conclusion, I would say that WI is only partially internal: the epistemic subject is allowed to hold certain beliefs (namely, (20) and (21)) without having access to their justification. The choice of dismissing the justification condition for (20) and (21) is a kind of externalist move.

WI can be said to be a case of quasi-internalism: at a certain point in our epistemic system, we adopt externalism. And the externalist might reasonably ask: why are you not externalist from the beginning, like me?

We will consider in section 4. what the externalist offer consists in.

3.2. The Question of Infinite Regress.

We have so far attempted to assess whether WI is a valid concept of justification. Let us shift to our second main question, that of the possibility of justification.

Weak internalist definition of justification does not produce an infinite regress, but it seems that the threat of infinite regress is only postponed. Let us consider the following thought-experiment (very similar indeed to that I have offered with regard to the one-step-enough position).

I want to know whether *p*. I come to believe that *p*, since I can easily satisfy the required (20)-(23) clauses: the awareness condition is met, and no infinite regress is produced.

Suppose that I believe that *p*: there are mosquitoes around me now.

And the following conditions obtain

(20) the belief that *p* is observational,

(21) the belief that *p* being observational significantly raises the probability of its being true,

(22) I believe that (20),

(23) I believe that (21).

But just on another epistemic occasion, maybe in the middle of the night, when I am not sure if I am dreaming or asleep, I might be required to justify (20). Or a nasty sceptic in an epistemology seminar could ask me to justify (21).

In conclusion, it seems that the weak internalist does not provide any solution for dealing with these situations and it has always to hope that there will be no nasty skeptics in the seminar room.

4. Externalism.

The externalist holds that justification does not need to be accessible, i.e. that for a subject to be justified in believing that *p,* he does not need to believe that he is justified in believing that *p.*

Externalists place some of the justificatory factors beyond the accessibility of the subject.

4.1. Two Kinds of Externalism.

Multiple accounts of externalism have been built so far. We are not interested in going through all the differences between them. Let us say that there is only one difference that it seems to matter, for the purpose of this analysis: some externalist accounts do not seem to allow for justified false beliefs; other externalist accounts do.

As for the internalism, we are looking for those accounts which allow justified false beliefs.

First kind of externalism.

Let us consider Armstrong's definition of externalism:

    "According to "Externalist" accounts of non-inferential knowledge, what makes a
    true non-inferential belief a case of *knowledge* is some natural relation which holds

between the belief-state, Bap, and the situation which makes the belief true. It is a matter of a certain relation holding between the believer and the world".[20]

The natural relation between the belief state and the world has widely been conceived in terms of causality: "a person knows some proposition, *p*, only if there is an appropriate causal connection between the state of affairs that makes *p* true and the person's belief in *p*".[21]

It seems that these conceptions of justification are necessarily truth-conducive, since they ground justification on the presence of a proper connection between the belief and a (real) state of affairs in the world.

Not only the believed proposition *p* must carry a particular property which makes it sufficiently credible, but also the belief that *p* must be caused by a fact of the world (or properly connected to it). It is difficult to imagine a belief really caused by a fact of the world which turns out to be false.

Second kind of externalism.

Sosa's definition of reliabilism seems to determine a kind of justification which does not grant truth, but (as we said for internalism) significantly raises the likelihood that a belief is true:

> "S's belief that p at t is justified iff it is the outcome of a process of belief acquisition or retention which is reliable, or leads to a sufficiently high preponderance of true beliefs over false beliefs".[22]

The allowance of reliabilism for false justified beliefs is sharply noted by Goldman (1998): "Reliabilism is an approach to the nature of knowledge and of justified belief. […] A justified belief may itself be false, but its mode of acquisition (or the way it is subsequently sustained) must be of a

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[20] Armstrong (1973), p. 157.

[21] Swain (1998). Bonjour's (1985) causal definition is similar (p. 34): "The epistemic justification or reasonableness of a basic belief depends on the obtaining of an appropriate relation, generally causal or nomologic in character, between the believer and the world". See also Goldman (1967).

[22] Sosa (2001), p. 147.

kind that typically yields truths". This point is explained further, through appeal to everyday epistemic needs: "People do not need infallible or certainty-producing processes to have justified beliefs, according to reliabilism, only fairly reliable ones".[23]

The question whether reliabilism is the only form of externalism which allows for false justified beliefs goes beyond the purpose of this paper. Henceforth by the word 'externalism' we will refer to the second kind of externalism.

Externalism maintains the first two conditions of SI and drops all the others. An epistemic subject is justified in his belief that *p* if and only if:

(24) the belief that *p* has the property ß,
(25) the belief that *p* having the property ß significantly raises the probability that *p* is true.

No awareness of the obtaining of those conditions is required. We might say that the externalist account has some virtues, in respect to WI and SI. It is not as highly demanding as SI. Moreover, no subject is required to believe anything without justification (as (22) and (23) conditions of WI force the subject to do).

Moreover, what we expect from the satisfaction of a justification condition seems to be fully given: externalist justification marks a difference between mere true belief and knowledge, since it involves the fulfillment of some additional conditions to mere true belief.

Why should we ever ask for more? Could not a belief be justified independently from the fact that I know (or believe) that it is? The externalist holds that it is one thing for a belief to be justified, another for me to believe it justified. The question whether I believe that I am justified does not affect the property of 'being justified' of my belief and only arises when *I* ask myself whether I am justified. The problem of justification of my belief occurs only from an internal point of view, which is far from being necessary.

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[23] Goldman (1998). Swain (1981) is a study of reliabilism in terms of probability.

4.2. Internalism vs. Externalism.

4.2.1. First Internalist Objection.

A possible internalist objection (of both weak and strong forms) would be that the externalist view of the problem is quite inappropriate. In fact, the justification condition (which distinguishes between a case of knowing and a case of mere true belief) does not concern the belief in itself, as if it were an external thing out of the epistemic control of the subject. It does concern the subject's being justified in believing that *p*.

When externalists and internalist debate on the conditions for a subject to be justified, it is obvious that "being justified" is meant to be a property of epistemic subjects and not of beliefs.

The externalist might easily reply that he agrees: certainly it is the subject that is justified. But it is still questionable whether 'being justified' means either 'believe a proposition with some kind of property ß' or 'being aware that the proposition believed has some kind of property ß'. According to the externalist, a subject is justified by being suitably situated in respect to what he knows. And also this condition regards the subject himself, not just the belief.

4.2.2. Second internalist Objection.

However, the internalist might remain unsatisfied and continue thus: when we are judging whether the subject is justified in a certain belief, we want to be sure that he is epistemically responsible, i.e. that he can express some reasons for holding that belief. To "have good reason for a belief" is the traditional formula of the justification condition on many popular tripartite accounts. The simple obtaining of a certain significant property (without his awareness) would not enable the epistemic subject to offer any reason for his belief.

The externalist would reply that it is not at all obvious that "being justified" means "having good reasons". The internalist seems to beg the question. We could also put the matter like this: "having good reasons" is quite an ambiguous formula: it can mean either "there being good reasons" or "being aware of good reasons". The problem is to know what meaning is preferable.

If justification must be the *differentia specifica* between knowledge and true belief, that difference could be well marked also by an externalist account of knowledge. What we need is to be able to

distinguish between the case in which Paul rightly believes that the History of Art Seminar is at 2 pm on Monday because he has guessed so and the case in which he has accurately read the Lecture List edition of "The Reporter". The externalist could successfully show that

(i)   in the latter case the belief was produced by a reliable method, while in the former it was not;

(ii)   the latter case would be universally considered a knowledge case, while the former would not.

Therefore, the externalist would conclude,

(iii)   the "reliable method" condition is suitable to mark the difference between knowledge and true belief.

4.2.3. Third Internalist Objection.

An internalist might hold that in some cases the externalist condition is not sufficient to rule out cases of lucky guessing (which are a kind of mere true belief cases). The internalist might want to draw our attention to a case where the externalist conditions are satisfied, but the subject still makes a lucky guess.

Suppose Samantha is on holiday abroad with her friends when the porter of her block, who is generally a serious and reliable man, phones her to announce that thieves have just broken into her apartment. Samantha gets visibly anxious and Susan, one of her friends, tells her that the porter's announcement was just part of a candid camera. Actually, however, thieves did break into Samantha's flat and the porter was not joking. Susan has invented a story in order to calm down her frightened friend. Now let p be the following proposition: "Thieves broke into Samantha's apartment".

Suppose that just after the porter's phone call (at time t1) Samantha believes rightly that p. Just after Susan's lie (at time t2) Samantha believes wrongly that *non-p*. Are we prepared to grant Samantha knowledge at t1 and ignorance at t2? Of course. Yet at t2 Susan has more experience and more

epistemic evidences that guide her inquiry on *p*. Why should she trust the porter's announcement and mistrust the plausible explanation given by her close friend?

It would seem that at t2 Samantha has more evidence for believing that *non-p*, or at least she has equal evidence for both *p* and *non-p*. Therefore, the internalist would challenge the externalist saying that what makes Samantha attain a true belief is just luck – and the externalist position would not be able to avoid the luck factor. The externalist should add further conditions to his undemanding schema.

I would reply (with the externalist) that this objection misses the point. It is true that it cannot be anything but luck that makes Samantha choose between the two informants.[24] Are we prepared to say that the method of acquiring beliefs about our apartment through the testimony of our trustworthy porter is unreliable? No, we should not. And what about the method of trusting a quite explanatory close friend's testimony? I would say that we have to distinguish between t1 and t2.

At t1 the porter's testimony is the only one available and there are no reasons for mistrusting it. Therefore, to trust the porter is the most reliable method at t1.

At t2 Samantha faces two conflicting reliable methods. Yet Susan's testimony, since it can plausibly explain some more things, sounds to be the more reliable one and gives Samantha a reason for mistrusting the porter. Therefore, to trust Susan is the more reliable method at t2.

Both methods were reliable. It actually happened that the first method leads to truth, the latter to falsehood. But this is not a reason for dismissing Susan's testimony as unreliable: we have already stressed a few times that justification is not a truth-warrant; Samantha's belief that *non-p* at t2 is just an example of justified false belief.[25]

Despite the fact that a luck factor is involved indeed, I would not call Samantha's belief that *p* at t1 a lucky guess: an epistemic subject can be said to lucky guess when he is using an obviously unreliable method or when he is no method at all.

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[24] It may be worth noticing that in the "Samantha case", the two conflicting reasons for p and non-p consist in two testimonies, but it can be easily constructed a case where the two conflicting reasons consist in two simple bits of sensory evidence.

[25] If we adopted an externalist account of the first kind, for instance a causal theory, then the belief that *non-p* at t2 would appear non justified, since it would not be causally connceted to the theft. As we said, externalist accounts of the first kind do not admit justified false beleifs.

However, it should be stressed that a kind of luck factor operated in Samantha's choice of the informant. (Samantha's knowledge about the theft depends on which informant she happen to trust) Yet it is one thing to say that the epistemic subject is making a lucky guess, *without being properly situated* (i.e. without following a reliable method) in respect to the facts; it is another thing to say that the epistemic subject is *lucky in being properly situated* (i.e. in following a reliable method).

Moreover, we can consider highly reliable scientific methods as well. Suppose Dr. Wrong has elaborated a theory of stars which has so far proved to be valid (since no evidence has falsified it). Dr. Right finds out a new bit of sensory evidence which falsifies it. Should we say that Dr. Right has made a lucky guess? I would not say so. Dr. Right has just been more lucky in finding out a crucial piece of evidence.

Even in the highest internalist account, luck plays a role: a subject can be very lucky in being able to satisfy all the internalist conditions (he is aware, clever and has good evidence) on the truth of a proposition, while another subject (with some mental disabilities) might not be. Yet we would not say that the luck of the first subject (who is clever, aware and right) disqualifies him as a knower.

5. The Sceptical Challenge.

5.1. *The Impossibility of Choosing between Internalism and Externalism.*

The internalist might be, at this point, persuaded that the externalist conditions are sufficient to rule out lucky guess cases. Yet he might argue that this is not the only role a concept of justification should play. He might wonder whether we are really prepared to grant knowledge to a subject whose belief is properly connected to the world, but who is completely ignorant about this connection. Does he know who just finds himself believing a true belief (even if produced by a reliable method) without being able to explain why he holds it?

I believe that there is no way to decide the dispute between internalism and externalism: justification is what we need it to be. Our epistemic needs vary according to different epistemic situations: a medical doctor may need to satisfy a higher amount of awareness (in giving hid diagnosis) than his ill patient (in describing his symptoms).

The same applies to the dispute between the strong internalist and the weak internalist, that we have left fighting over the so-called "extrinsic criticism" in section 3.1. There is no striking reason for deciding whether the awareness condition should be strong or weaker.

We can imagine that the justification conditions lie on an imaginary shelf, in an ordered succession, from the most externalist to the most internalist. Our contingent epistemic needs will help us to choose those more adequate for the given circumstance.

5.2. *The Impossibility of Justification.*

In the previous section we have argued that there is no final choice between externalism and internalism. Yet the question of the possibility of justification is still open.

We have seen that SI, since it produces infinite regress, makes justification impossible.

We will treat WI and externalism together. Both WI and externalism justifications rely on justificatory conditions which are not themselves justified (as (20) and (21) for weak internalism and (24) and (25) for externalism). Once we have stated (and agreed) that the subject is justified only if, for instance (20) hold, we need to assess whether (20) actually holds, and so on. (20) becomes the new belief which we have to justify. The same procedure applies to the externalist conditions: how can we know whether a method is reliable?

As one can see, we are led again into an infinite regress of justifications (and, as argued in section the comfortable one-step-enough position does not seem to solve the infinite regress problem).

The same infinite regress problem, which the strong internalist includes in his highly demanding definition, comes again on the scene. Weak internalism and externalism clearly do not yield infinite regress, but also they cannot avoid it: they postpone it.

It seems to turn out that the different accounts of justification set for themselves different goals. The strong internalist attempts to provide some route (even if infinite!) to gain knowledge; the externalist limits itself to give us the correct definition of knowledge.[26] The former also attempts to answer the question of how we acquire knowledge, the latter answers the question of what knowledge is. The weak internalist has an intermediate role.

The problem of the possibility of knowledge is not at all solved by weak internalism or externalism: how can we be sure that "the obtaining of an appropriate relation" does really obtain?

There are serious problems for justification. Russell (1967) puts the question about the justification of empirical beliefs on the external worlds in the following terms: "If truth consists in a

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[26] With a slogan, we could say: "The strong internalist wants to give us a recipe (even impossible) for justification; the externalist gives us the concept alone".

correspondence of thought with something outside thought, thought can never know when truth has been attained".[27]

Let us consider the question in some detail. As we have seen in the examples of section 2.1., when we are to justify our empirical beliefs about knowledge of the external world, we can only appeal (*per definitionem*), directly or indirectly, to our senses. Yet, unfortunately, it seems that there is no reason for believing that they are reliable. The Cartesian evil genius (or the postmodern brains in vat laboratory) could always be at work.

Sceptical arguments of this kind (which I label "arguments form possible error") rely on the following *a priori* premise: it is *possible* that none of the *a posteriori* propositions (concerning the external world) which the epistemic subject has evidence to believe is true, i.e. it is *possible* that the epistemic subject is in error for every *a posteriori* proposition (concerning the external world) that he has evidence to believe true. The *a priori* conclusion states that it not possible for the epistemic subject to know any *a posteriori* proposition (concerning the external world), since he cannot check the truth of the *a posteriori* propositions that he claims to know (he cannot decide which propositions satisfy the *truth* condition for knowledge). While it is possible that an *a posteriori* proposition believed by the epistemic subject is in fact true,[28] it is not possible for the epistemic subject to distinguish between a true *a posteriori* proposition and a false *a posteriori* proposition about the external world.

The sceptical arguments from possible error are not self-refuting, since they deny the possibility of knowledge of *a posteriori* propositions on the basis of an *a priori* proposition.

In conclusion, let us go back to our two starting questions. With regard to the *first question*, we can say that we cannot choose an account of justification, independently of our contingent epistemic needs. With regard to the *second question*, we have to say that, whatever account of justification we adopt (more or less demanding), no justification for our empirical beliefs on the external world can be achieved and that the sceptic's challenge is still strong.

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[27] Russell (1967), p.21

[28] This would be just a lucky guess, since the belief could not be justified.

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