

Sceptical and Practical Criticisms of Epistemic Externalism¹

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ABSTRACT: The paper introduces and discusses two different types of criticisms of epistemic externalism. First, there are criticisms of externalism which I call *sceptical criticisms*. So-called sceptical critics state that the externalist conception of justification leads to the consequence that no belief is justified and hence no belief constitutes knowledge. I defend the claim that sceptical criticisms of epistemic externalism are generally wrong, because the conclusion which they infer from available premises is too strong. However, I suggest that epistemic externalism can be effectively criticized to be implausible, but for different reasons. I introduce a second type of criticisms which I call *practical criticisms* of epistemic externalism. So-called practical critics argue that from the externalist point of view it is impossible to identify the epistemic status of beliefs. This means, in turn, that even if the externalist conception of justification was true, it would be practically useless, and therefore implausible.

KEYWORDS: Epistemic externalism, epistemic internalism, Gettier problem, justification, knowledge.

1. Introduction

Epistemic externalism is a thesis which does not concern the content of one's beliefs, but it typically relates to conditions under which a belief is justified or constitutes knowledge. According to epistemic internalism, the alternative approach traditionally contrasted with externalism, justification of beliefs is dependent solely on internal factors, i.e. factors internal to the believer's cog-

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nitive perspective or factors to which the believer has special cognitive access. For example, if I carefully watch the colour of my table in bright daylight, I may have a (internally) justified belief that the table before me is black. In contrast with internalism, epistemic externalism claims that justification of beliefs is primarily a matter of the belief's origin, focusing on its causal history or the reliability of its source. In general, such factors are neither internal, nor accessible to the subject's point of view. Returning to my example, my belief that the table before me is black may be (externally) justified if my visual perception from which the belief stems is functioning properly and therefore is reliable. The paradigmatic case of an externalist theory of justification which I will prefer also in this paper is *reliabilism* devised by A. Goldman (see Goldman 1979). Roughly, according to this theory, the justificatory status of a belief depends on the reliability of the cognitive process through which the belief was formed. The reliability of a cognitive process is defined as a tendency of the process to produce rather true beliefs than false ones. It is clear that visual perception in bright daylight, for instance, is a more reliable source of beliefs than vision in the dark or in the fog.

The externalist approach to justification emerged as an answer to problems which the traditional internalist understanding of justification was not able to deal satisfactorily with. According to classical internalism, knowledge is equivalent to justified true belief, where justification is understood as subject's possession of adequate reasons in favour of the belief. The roots of this view reach to Plato; more recent influential formulations can be found in Ayer (1956: 34) and Chisholm (1957: 16). The classical internalist conception of justification was significantly called into question by well-known counterexamples formulated by E. Gettier in his famous paper (1963). These counterexamples describe particular situations in which the subject derives her belief from false reasons, though from her perspective the reasons look perfectly ordinarily. However, despite such a mistake, the subject's belief happens to be true thanks to epistemic luck. Thus, according to Gettier, the subject has a belief which is true as well as (internally) justified, but because of the mentioned mistake in deriving her resultant belief she has not knowledge. This problem is usually referred to as *Gettier problem*; it motivated an immense number of attempts to refine or replace the classical tripartite analysis of knowledge.

The externalists diagnose the Gettier problem as occurring because of a weak, or even non-existent, bond between justification of a belief and its truth.² They assume that if they redefine the concept of justification so that it will be in a closer relation to the truth of beliefs, they will be able to

² Internalism explicitly admits that a subject may have a well justified belief which is at the same time false.

eliminate the Gettier problem.³ The before mentioned prominent externalist theory of justification, reliabilism, represents the most significant attempt to redefine justification in these lines. A. Goldman, “the father of externalism” as well as its most famous proponent, develops a process version of reliabilism in (Goldman 1979). He defines justification in terms of the belief’s origin in a reliable cognitive process. A cognitive process is understood as any process which leads to the occurrence of a belief. But which processes can be considered to be reliable? The reliability of a process cannot be defined as successful achieving of justification, because a circular definition would emerge: A belief is justified if and only if it is a product of a process which is successful in achieving justification. Next, the reliability of a process cannot be defined neither in terms of successful achieving of knowledge, because given the tripartite analysis of knowledge a circular definition would emerge once again: A belief is justified if and only if it is a product of a process which is successful in achieving justified true beliefs. According to Goldman, reliable cognitive processes are those which produce prevalent majority of *true beliefs*, i.e. processes which possess *a tendency* to produce beliefs that are mostly true (see Goldman 1979/2008: 338). Regarding the question which specific cognitive processes are reliable, Goldman only provides a list of some instructive examples based on common epistemic intuitions: standard perceptual processes, remembering, good reasoning, and introspection (see *ibid.*). He points out: “What these processes seem to have in common is *reliability*: the beliefs they produce are generally true” (*ibid.*).⁴ After such considerations, Goldman is ready to introduce the central thesis of reliabilism: “The justificational status of a belief is a function of the reliability of the process or processes that cause it, where ... reliability consists in the tendency of a process to produce beliefs that are true rather than false” (*ibid.*). Thus, the decisive factor required for justification of beliefs consists in successful registering of truth by means of properly functioning cognitive apparatus of the subject. This proposal clearly meets the externalist intention to establish a closer tie between justification of a belief and its truth.

In general, the reliabilist evaluation of beliefs is quite simple: If a belief is produced by a reliable cognitive process, then the belief is justified, and may constitute knowledge, but if the belief-producing process is unreliable, then the belief is unjustified, and cannot constitute knowledge. In the Gettier cases the cognitive process actually used by the subject may be termed “inferring from a false premise.” Obviously, such a process could hardly be

³This move can be also supported by the obvious contention that “epistemic justification implies that one’s belief is objectively likely to be true” (Poston 2008).

⁴However, an exact specification of the proportion of true beliefs needed to count a given process as reliable remains discussed.

considered reliable. It is highly probable that repeated usage of the process in question, i.e. repeated inferences from false premises, would reveal its inability to produce mostly true beliefs.⁵ So reliabilists, unlike the traditional internalist view, resolve the Gettier problem with the suggestion that the resultant belief of the subject in Gettier cases is in fact *unjustified*, because it is produced by an unreliable cognitive process. In this manner they also explain why the belief is not recognized as a case of knowledge. The ability of externalism to cope with the Gettier problem as well as its comprehensible explanation what mistake it is caused by is considered to be a strong reason in favour of this conception of epistemic justification.

2. A problem for epistemic externalism

Despite some initial enthusiasm, the externalist approach has run into its own problems. The price paid for closer connection between the justification of a belief and its truth consists in the unusual feature that, according to externalism, the subject is not required to possess any beliefs concerning the justification of her own beliefs. This feature became a popular target of criticisms of externalism.

Clearly, if justification is dependent on such factors as proper functioning cognitive equipment of the subject or truth-indicating origin of the belief in question, then there is no doubt that such factors are typically external to the subject's point of view. To put it differently, subjects typically have little or none information regarding the factors from which depends the externalist justification of beliefs. Just think how many ordinary believers can tell precisely how reliably works their cognitive equipment or what is the exact causal origin of some belief they possess. Therefore, externalism admits that *a subject may have a justified belief even if she has none further beliefs regarding the justification of the belief*. The externalists build on different epistemic intuitions than traditional internalists – instead of the conception of subjective support of a belief they favour an objectively positive status of the belief, although hidden from the subject's perspective. Some authors explicitly state that the externalist understanding of justification represents a radical departure from ordinary western epistemology (see e. g. Bonjour 1980/2008: 365).⁶

Precisely these characteristics of externalism provoked the emergence of the most profound controversies connected with this approach to justifica-

⁵ The resultant belief produced by this process in the Gettier situation is true only due to epistemic luck.

⁶ Strictly speaking, externalism does not prohibit the subject from forming beliefs about the justification of her beliefs, if they stem from a reliable cognitive process. The externalists only negate the internalist requirement that the possession of such beliefs constitutes a necessary condition of justification.

tion. There are criticisms of externalism claiming that if a subject has none information concerning the justification of her own belief, then her belief is in fact *unjustified*. I will refer to the criticisms of externalism developed in these lines as *sceptical criticisms* of externalism.⁷ The sceptical criticisms lead to a further consequence that given the tripartite analysis of knowledge, the subject's beliefs are not instances of knowledge, because they do not meet one necessary condition, the justification, even if they meet the externalist conditions. In this section I will take a closer look at the arguments utilized by sceptical critics of externalism, while in the next section I will challenge their central claim.

The sceptical critics of externalism illustrate their point with a number of well-known examples. Among the most famous ones belongs the case of Norman the Clairvoyant thought up by L. BonJour (see BonJour 1980/2008: 369 ff.):

Norman, under certain conditions that usually obtain, is a completely reliable clairvoyant with respect to certain kinds of subject matter. He possesses no evidence or reasons of any kind for or against the general possibility of such a cognitive power, or for or against the thesis that he possesses it. One day Norman comes to believe that the President is in New York City, though he has no evidence either for or against this belief. In fact the belief is true and results from his clairvoyant power, under circumstances in which it is completely reliable. (BonJour 1980/2008: 369)

Since Norman comes to believe that the President is in New York City in a factually reliable way, an externalist should conclude that his belief is justified, and may constitute knowledge. However, one can object: To say that it is Norman who justifiably believes it sounds counterintuitive, because Norman himself is in no way consciously involved in the justification of his belief. Hence BonJour asks: "Are there not still sufficient grounds for a charge of subjective irrationality to prevent Norman's being epistemically justified?" (ibid.).

A similar story in the same vein can be found in a work of K. Lehrer (1990: 163 ff.):

Suppose a person, whom we shall name Mr. Truetemp, undergoes brain surgery by an experimental surgeon who invents a small device which is both a very accurate thermometer and a computational device capable of generating thoughts. The device, call it a tempucomp, is implanted in Truetemp's head so that the very tip of the device, no larger than the head of pin, sits unnoticed

⁷The term "sceptical criticism" was chosen because its proponents deny externalist justification and knowledge. I do not mean to indicate thereby any relationship with the classical problem of philosophical scepticism.

on his scalp and acts as a sensor to transmit information about the temperature to the computational system in his brain. This device, in turn, sends a message to his brain causing him to think of the temperature recorded by the external sensor. Assume that the tempucomp is very reliable, and so his thoughts are correct temperature thoughts. All told, this is a reliable belief-forming process. Now imagine, finally, that he has no idea that the tempucomp has been inserted in his brain, is only slightly puzzled about why he thinks so obsessively about the temperature, but never checks a thermometer to determine whether these thoughts about the temperature are correct. He accepts them unreflectively, another effect of the tempucomp. Thus, he thinks and accepts that the temperature is 104 degrees. It is. Does he know that it is? Surely not. (Lehrer 1990: 163–164)

Lehrer's case illustrates the same point as BonJour's: According to reliabilism, Truetemp's belief should be justified, since it is produced by a factually reliable process. But it may be problematic to admit that it is Truetemp himself who is justified in believing and, hence, that his belief is an instance of knowledge.

The above examples are to be construed as attempts to show that the reliability of a cognitive process is neither necessary, nor sufficient condition of justification, unless the subject herself is somehow involved in this matter. We encounter a clash of intuitions. The understanding of justification proposed by externalists does not meet the traditional internalist standards. The critics of externalism suggest that the theoretical benefits of externalism when dealing with traditional epistemological problems (especially the Gettier problem) may be irrelevant, if, at the same time, it leads to some counterintuitive results.

B. Stroud (1989/2000) addresses a different objection against externalism. Recall that externalists do not require the subject to possess any beliefs concerning the justification of her beliefs. Reliabilists, for instance, focus only on the factual reliability of the cognitive process which produces the belief in question. According to Stroud, this approach leads to the consequence that reliabilism does not allow us to understand how our own knowledge is possible:

The difficulty arises now from the fact that we as human theorists are ourselves part of the subject-matter that we theorists of human knowledge want to understand in a certain way. If we merely study another group and draw conclusions only about them, no such difficulty presents itself. But then our conclusions will not be completely general. They will be known to apply only to those others, and we will be no closer to understanding how our own knowledge is possible. We want to be able to apply what we find out about knowledge to ourselves, and so to explain how our own knowledge is possible. (Stroud 2000: 112)

The core of Stroud's argument consists in the claim that the reliabilist thesis, according to which additional beliefs about the justification of beliefs are not

required, relates also to reliabilists themselves. Thus, they are not required to possess any beliefs about the justification of their own beliefs which results into the consequence that reliabilists themselves do not understand how their own knowledge is possible. In other words, once a subject adopts reliabilism, she adopts the mentioned reliabilist thesis as well, by which *ipso facto* she excludes herself from the set of subjects whose justification and knowledge she can explain.

This leads to a further, even more uncomfortable consequence: Among the reliabilist's beliefs there is also the belief that *reliabilism is true*. If one adopts reliabilism, then a bizarre result occurs that one need not dispose of any information about how reliabilism itself is justified. Hence, a reliabilist, in accordance with her own position, does not have to possess any reasons in favour of reliabilism's truth; she does not have to be able to answer the question, why is her favourite theory better than other competing theories? From the theoretical point of view that is a very unsatisfactory result: to hold a theory without submitting any reasons in its favour sounds quite irrationally. What is more, not only reliabilists, i.e. theorists in epistemology, have to concern with this problem. Presupposing reliabilism, this problem relates to any subject willing to find out the epistemic status of their own beliefs.

Nevertheless, we should not be too hasty. On the one hand, the externalist approach to justification does not require the subject to have any beliefs about the epistemic status of her own beliefs. On the other hand, however, externalism does not forbid forming such beliefs. If the cognitive process which is the source of such a belief is in fact reliable, then the subject can acquire a justified belief, and potential knowledge, about the epistemic status of some other belief of hers. If this condition is met, then, contrary to Stroud's opinion, it seems that any subject may understand their own knowledge after all. Is it a plausible way of refusing Stroud's objection? Let us have a closer look at the possible formation of such metabeliefs. If reliabilism is true, and if the given cognitive process is reliable, then by means of this process the subject can reliably evaluate correlations between relevant facts and her corresponding beliefs. So she can assess the reliability of her cognitive processes and, in turn, also the justification, or the epistemic status, of her beliefs. For example, by means of visual perception she can observe facts regarding the external world and compare them with her perceptual beliefs. Similarly, by means of memory she can "observe" facts regarding the past and compare them with her memory beliefs etc.

But such procedures suffer from an evident problem: they involve *epistemic circularity*. N. Lemos comments on this issue as follows: "Can one use memory to support the reliability of memory? Can one use sense perception to support the reliability of sense perception? Many philosophers would

say “no.” Many would hold that one cannot use beliefs from a source, A, to support the reliability of A. They would tell us that such a procedure is epistemically unsatisfactory” (Lemos 2007: 117). There are also more resolute reactions to epistemic circularity. One can be found in R. Fumerton’s work: “You cannot *use* perception to justify the reliability of perception! You cannot *use* memory to justify the reliability of memory! You cannot *use* induction to justify the reliability of induction! Such attempts to respond to the skeptic’s concerns involve blatant, indeed pathetic, circularity” (Fumerton 1995: 177). Obviously, epistemic circularity is considered to be something undesirable. It consists in an implicit assumption of the reliability of a source of beliefs when proving the reliability of the very same source. The undesirability of epistemic circularity is often being made apparent with the use of various analogies. Fumerton compares it to proving the reliability of astrology by reading it in the stars (see *ibid.*). M. Huemer invented a more sophisticated example:

I have on my desk an epistemologically interesting toy called “the Magic Eight Ball.” It is a plastic ball painted like an eight ball, and it is meant to be used as follows. You ask the eight ball a yes/no question. Then you turn it over and see an answer float up to a window in the bottom. Answers include the likes of “Yes, definitely,” “Very doubtful,” and “Cannot predict now.” Now, imagine there were a community in which use of the eight ball was an accepted method of arriving at conclusions. Suppose you meet one of these eight-ball reasoners, and you ask him why he believes that the eight ball is a reliable informant. He swiftly takes out his Magic Eight Ball, says, “Are you reliable?” and turns it over. At this point, if the answer “No” floats up to the window, then the eight-ball reasoner is in trouble. But suppose a definite “Yes” answer appears, and the eight-ball reasoner triumphantly declares that the reliability of the eight ball has been established. Would this be legitimate? Evidently not. (Huemer 2001: 11)

Thus, unless it is already known that the cognitive process in question is reliable, it cannot be used to prove anything, let alone its own reliability. If the process is unreliable, then its unreliability may cause that it produces a false belief concerning its own reliability. To put it more simple, just due to its own unreliability, such process may falsely tell that it is reliable.

It seems that because of the threat of epistemic circularity it is not possible to identify from the subject’s viewpoint which cognitive processes of hers are in fact reliable and, in turn, which beliefs of hers are justified and may constitute knowledge.⁸ This finding leads to an interesting and significant re-

⁸ Externalists usually respond to the charge of epistemic circularity so that we have no other choice than using those belief-forming processes which we naturally possess. They believe that epistemic circularity need not always be vicious (e.g. see Greco 2000: 184–187). Nonetheless, this view is not yet sufficient for claiming that whichever of our cognitive processes escapes the circularity problem.

sult: As it turned out, reliabilism, and externalism in general, *neither requires* the subject to possess beliefs concerning the justification of her beliefs, but, what is more, *nor allows* possessing such beliefs, should their possession be reasonable. Hence, the externalist approach to justification does not allow the subject to have any epistemically legitimate access to the conditions of justification of her own beliefs. Returning to Stroud, the consequence that the subject does not understand her own knowledge holds, indeed. This is a fundamental problem of externalist theories that cannot be averted by some simple theoretical modification. It follows from the very essence of externalism, i.e. from shifting the attention to factors outside of the subject's cognitive perspective.

3. Sceptical criticisms of externalism

Objections against epistemic externalism described in the previous section are quite well-known within epistemology. My main concern in this paper is to take a closer look at further interpretations of the problems as well as the consequences which philosophers derive from them. There is one line of thought claiming that the impossibility to identify the conditions of justification of a belief is equivalent to saying that the belief in question is *unjustified*, and hence, does not constitute knowledge. For instance, McGrew and McGrew (2007) defend the following thesis: "If it is in principle impossible to show decisively that S's belief that *p* is justified, then S is not justified in believing that *p*" (McGrew and McGrew 2007: 73). These authors conclude that even if a belief satisfies all conditions required by externalism, it is epistemically unjustified, unless the subject can recognize that those conditions are satisfied. They state that, in the end, the externalist position entails "epistemic anarchy": "it entails that there is, *in principle*, no way of decisively distinguishing genuine epistemic principles from absurd ones and hence no way of decisively distinguishing beliefs that have positive epistemic status from those that do not" (ibid.: 82). There are also opinions claiming that the externalist non-identifiability of justification leads to violation of the rational nature of knowledge. Cruz and Pollock (1999) insist that in order to distinguish between "right" and "wrong" knowing one has to possess epistemic norms placed within one's cognitive perspective. In other words, the subject needs to possess internal criteria of "right" knowing in order to know rationally. On the contrary, to admit that epistemic norms do not have to be internal equals to giving up the distinction between knowledge and non-knowledge. According to these authors, the externalist understanding leads to the consequence that knowledge is deprived of its rational character, and thus of its epistemic value (see Cruz and Pollock 1999: 132–133).

Such criticisms of epistemic externalism can be considered as typical cases of what I call *sceptical criticisms* of externalism.⁹ However, I will try to show that this line of criticising externalism is generally wrong, because it is too hasty. The impossibility to identify the justificatory status of beliefs from the subject's viewpoint does not necessarily mean that the beliefs fail to meet the conditions required by reliabilism, or other externalist theory, and that they fail to be justified in this sense. Notice that there are two different things logically independent from each other:

- (1) the justification of a belief, i.e. the factual fulfilling of the conditions of justification;
- (2) the identification of the justification of a belief from the subject's viewpoint.

An externalist would say that even if we cannot identify any of our justified beliefs, it is still not a sufficient reason to conclude that none of our beliefs are justified. We may possess plenty of beliefs which are factually justified in the way externalism requires, although it does not necessarily mean that the subject should have any access to such justification. Indeed, the reliabilists, and externalists in general, pay careful attention to the difference between *the description of justification* and *the identification of justification*; with emphasis placed on correct description of justification and knowledge. The earlier mentioned "father of externalism", A. Goldman, makes an important note in this regard: "Truth conditions should not be confused with verification conditions. My analysis of "S knows p" does not purport to give procedures for *finding out* whether a person (including oneself) knows a given proposition" (Goldman 1967: 372).¹⁰

I argue that those who I call the sceptical critics of externalism are insufficiently sensitive to the indicated difference. From the difficulties connected with *identifying* the externalist justification they infer that the externalist *description* of justification is itself mistaken which leads them to the conclusion that in the externalist framework, beliefs are unjustified. However, such inference is *wrong*; as I pointed out, the question of identifying justified beliefs is logically independent from the question whether the externalist descrip-

⁹ Another example of this kind is presented by R. Fumerton. His "resolute reaction" to epistemic circularity cited in the previous section continues: "Frankly, this does seem right to *me* and I hope it seems right to *you*, but *if* it does, then I suggest that you have a powerful reason to conclude that externalism is false" (Fumerton 1995: 177).

¹⁰ In a different paper (Goldman 1980), A. Goldman distinguishes between "regulative" and "theoretical" conceptions of justification. Whereas the former ones provide the subject with instructions how to improve her set of beliefs, the latter ones only concentrate on an accurate description of justification-production. In this light, internalists generally aim at regulative conceptions, while externalists are interested in theoretical conceptions. The point is that failing to discriminate between those two types of conceptions may lead to misguided or unfair objections against each of them.

tion of justification holds. Therefore I conclude that *the sceptical criticisms of externalism are misguided*, because the conclusion they infer from available premises is too strong, which makes them implausible.

A possible explanation of the sceptical critics' conception may consist in the supposition that their view is too reliant on the traditional internalist optics. According to internalism, only such information count as justification which is, or can be, stated by the subject herself. If the subject does not, or cannot, possess some information, then it is not a part of justification. But the externalists understand justification in a different way, focusing on objective features of beliefs. Once these features occur, the belief gains a positive epistemic status – even without requiring the subject to understand these features, and hence, to understand the epistemic status of the beliefs at all. It is surely a great change in accounting justification, when compared to classic internalism. Yet, the inability of the subject to understand the justification of her own beliefs does not constitute a sufficient reason for a total refusing of externalism. Contrary to the view of the sceptical critics, the subject may still have many beliefs which are factually justified in the way externalists suggest.

4. Practical criticisms of externalism

Now I return to the statement that externalism does not require the subject to possess any beliefs regarding the epistemic status of her own beliefs, but, on the other hand, it does not explicitly prohibit her from forming such beliefs. In the second section of this paper I demonstrated, in conflict with the externalists' intentions, that there is no epistemic relevant way how the subject could obtain such metabeliefs. This leads to the uncomfortable result that provided externalism, the subject disposes of no reasonable way how to relevantly identify the epistemic status of her own beliefs. I want to stress again, as I indicated in the previous section, that the impossibility to identify justification does not equal to failing in acquiring justified beliefs. In the terms of reliabilism, many beliefs may possess the property "to be the product of a reliable cognitive process," irrespective of the subject's knowing which beliefs do in fact possess that property.

Thus, I do not argue with externalism at the level of describing justification; I want to draw attention to problems occurring at the level of identifying justification. At this latter level it seems that externalism *de facto* leaves the subject in a state of *complete epistemic ignorance*. In this section I will present some of the implications of this remarkable result. At the same time, I will also show relevant ways of criticizing externalism which I call *practical criticisms*, and which, in contrast to sceptical criticisms, I consider plausible.

First of all, a subject adopting reliabilism is restricted to conditional formulations of the form “if – then.” She is not able to provide a definite answer to the question whether a given belief of hers is justified. She can only say that *if* reliabilism is true, and *if* the given belief is reliably formed, *then* the belief is justified and may constitute knowledge. But *if* the given belief is not a product of a reliable cognitive process, *then* it is not justified, and hence it is not knowledge. Although such conditionals express exact conditional relations between the justification of beliefs and the reliability of their sources, they are completely useless in evaluating the real epistemic status of some given belief.

This result constitutes a more serious theoretical problem for the externalists themselves. They face the absurd outcome that once they adopt externalism, they will not dispose of any relevant information supporting the belief that externalism is true. To put it differently, once they adopt this position, they will have at hand no adequate reasons in favour of the position they defend. A similar objection is addressed by B. Stroud (2000) suggesting that the externalist theoretician is situated in a precarious situation allowing him to make only conditional statements:

I don't know whether I understand human knowledge or not. If what I believe about it is true and my beliefs about it are produced in what my theory says is the right way, I do know how human knowledge comes to be, so in that sense I do understand. But if my beliefs are not true, or not arrived at in that way, I do not. I wonder which it is. I wonder whether I understand human knowledge or not. (Stroud 2000: 119)

According to Stroud, the externalist can only *insist* that externalism is true, even without providing reasons in its favour, and require the others to accept it. However, such attitude is highly unsatisfactory from the philosophical point of view.¹¹

The practical criticisms of externalism generally consist in accusing this approach of its inability to satisfy the philosophical curiosity. Undoubtedly, the major interest of epistemological investigations rests in the determination whether our beliefs correspond to reality; or, in solving the question whether we really know the things we think we know about the world. But, to answer conditionally that *if* our beliefs satisfy certain external criteria, *then* they are justified, and *if* they do not, *then* they are unjustified, still without any practical instruction how to differentiate between these two options from the subject's point of view, seems definitely insufficient, with respect to the objec-

¹¹ Summary of the most serious deficiencies of externalism in these or closely related lines are offered by several authors; for instance see Fumerton (1995), Stroud (2000), and Bergmann (2006).

tives of epistemology. Externalists focus primarily on the objective features of justification and attempt to create its original description. Nonetheless, even if their description is true, their approach to justification cannot be successful, unless they allow the subjects to make functional evaluations of their own beliefs from the first-person viewpoint. The question arises, what for does the subject have “factually justified beliefs”, if she does not have the opportunity to realize their epistemic status? Without understanding how we know, how could ever develop science, philosophy, and any theoretical project at all? This result is also incompatible with common epistemic intuitions according to which the subject should certainly dispose of a way of distinguishing between knowledge and non-knowledge.

What I call the practical criticisms is based on the thesis which we came to in this paper: provided externalism, *no subject has and cannot have any reasonable information about the justification of her own beliefs*. The first part of the thesis, stating that any subject *has not* metabeliefs on justification, is consistent with the externalist claims which, as we already know, do not contain such requirement. But the second part, stating moreover that any subject *cannot have* metabeliefs on justification, exceeds the intentions of externalism and calls into question its plausibility. In contrast to the sceptical critics who draw from it a hasty conclusion suggesting that externalism is false, a practical critic should only point out that this consequence of externalism causes its inapplicability for human objectives in the field of epistemology. At first sight it is not as much as a direct refutation of externalism, but, however, finding out that externalism describes justification in a way which makes it irrelevant for human interests, is in my opinion not less serious and represents a radical undermining of this approach.

5. Conclusion

The reader can surely see that I am not inclined towards the externalist assessment of belief-justification. On the one hand, I find this theoretical branch quite inspiring and I do not doubt its importance for the epistemology of the second half of the 20th century. But on the other hand, the difficulties connected with the practical applicability of externalist theories look so far insurmountable, which, I think, is a too serious deficiency preventing one from accepting externalism. However, refusing a theory or an approach has to be based on the right kinds of reasons. That might well be the main point of my paper. I tried to demonstrate that the impossibility to identify the epistemic status of a belief from the subject's viewpoint does not pose a problem for the externalist description of justification. Thus I have shown that one popular way of criticizing externalism, claiming that it leads to sceptical outcomes, is in fact misguided. In my opinion, the only correct possibility left for a critic

of externalism, though not less powerful, consists in pointing to its practical uselessness in achieving human objectives.

Last but not least, what are the prospects of this situation? One possible way of dealing with the controversy between internalism and externalism may lie in focusing on the concept of justification itself, as specified in the works of internalists and externalists, respectively. There already are suggestions that these two lines of thought do not use the same concept of justification, but refer to different things when speaking about it (see e.g. recent papers Nuhlíček 2013a and 2013b). If such suggestions are right, then there a new space is opened for reflecting the relationship between the internalist concept of justification and the externalist one. What I see as the next step is an attempt to reconcile those two concepts, or, to put it differently, to find a broader epistemological framework in which the internalist as well as the externalist qualities of beliefs will find their proper role.¹²

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¹² One interesting attempt in this fashion is present in W. Alston's work (2005) where he introduces the term "epistemic desiderata" as an umbrella term for different qualities of beliefs which share the common feature that they are in some way epistemologically desirable.

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