

Internal—External: Doxastic Norms and the Defusing of Skeptical Paradox

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INTERNAL—EXTERNAL: DOXASTIC NORMS AND THE
DEFUSING OF SKEPTICAL PARADOX

This brief discussion touches on several interrelated major issues, each of which would require a much more extended treatment if one wanted to command a settled view. My aim, accordingly, is no more than to make a number of points plausible whose importance, if correct, is considerable. They are primarily the following four. First, we should recognize a plurality of norms of belief, broadly divided in particular between those that pertain to the teleology of believing, and those that have to do constitutively with management of a system of belief. Second, we should expect the opposition between so-called internalist and externalist conceptions of knowledge and justification to be extensible in principle to all doxastic norms, and should be receptive to the possibility that externalist conceptions may promise best for some norms, and internalist conceptions for others. Third, and correspondingly, it is to be expected that the paradoxes of skepticism, classically centered on knowledge and justified belief, will be adaptable to doxastic norms in general. (Here it is crucial to separate those “first-order” paradoxes that argue that compliance with a given norm is impossible and those “second-order” paradoxes that argue, for example, that, even if compliance is possible, we are actually in no position to claim that we ever succeed in so complying.) This potential generality in the scope of the paradoxes counsels caution about the widely accepted notion—which will be a central focus in the latter part of the paper—that externalism offers resources to defuse the threat of skepticism. Finally, I will argue that thinking through how externalism is supposed to help with even the simplest form of (Cartesian) knowledge-skeptical paradox discloses a commitment to a doxastic norm of warrant that cannot itself be construed externalistically, if fit for purpose, but is vulnerable to the very same form of paradox.

I

There are more and less ambitious ways to try to understand the notion of a norm of belief. Here we can begin with something relatively minimal. A norm of belief, Φ , is, minimally, any canon meeting the following two conditions:

- (i) Φ 's satisfaction, or nonsatisfaction, by a belief opens it to justified commendation/censure respectively;
- (ii) Φ 's satisfaction can be effectively aimed at by a normal judging subject.

Norms of belief, so characterized, are constraints on belief-formation and retention that one can effectively aim to respect and which, by the extent to which they are respected, make for better (systems of) beliefs than otherwise. 'Effectively' here does not require that one can guarantee success, but incorporates the ordinary idea of an ability to succeed which one can normally exercise.

This bland characterization covers a wide class of things one might view as uncontroversial doxastic norms, including each of *truth*, *knowledge*, *justification*, *coherence*, and the multi-faceted notion of *rationality*. Each of these, so we ordinarily think, are things the attainment of which, or compliance with which, is usually feasible by a well intentioned, normally competent human subject, and each is such that its attainment makes for a better overall doxastic accomplishment than otherwise. The blandness comes at a cost, however, in the evident point that the offered characterization allows an indefinite range of characteristics to qualify as doxastic norms which one does not think of as distinctively *doxastic*: for instance, survival-conduciveness, happiness-conduciveness, eternal bliss-conduciveness (Pascal)—all of these are characteristics whose possession opens a belief to commendation along some dimension of importance to us, and at which—with the possible exception of the last—we would normally think that we can effectively aim.

II

What is wanted is some further consideration to narrow the relevant class of normative characteristics to those that are in some way *properly* doxastic—that are somehow peculiar to the business of belief formation and management. An obvious proposal, in keeping with the minimalist approach, would simply be to exclude from consideration any characteristic Φ of beliefs which meets the two conditions noted but which can also meet those conditions with respect to types of action, or state, which are not beliefs, indeed are not even attitudinal, and yet still retain the intuitive normativity captured by conditions (i) and (ii) when so applied. Survival-conduciveness, for example, is a laudable feature in beliefs and may often be a feasible aim in the context of belief-management; but it is also a good thing in actions in general—fitting an airbag in a car, for example. By contrast, there is no clear sense in which the act of airbag installation can be said to amount to an item of knowledge, or to be true, or coherent; (though there are senses in which it can be justified, or rational). So we might add the following to the two clauses above:

- (iii) Φ is a characteristic that can be satisfied only by belief.

Yet plainly, that is little progress as it stands. Perhaps only beliefs can amount to knowledge. But propositions, statements, and lovers can be

true; courses of action can be justified; desires can be coherent; and decisions can be rational. The normative predicates in question are applicable to a wide class of things other than belief. It might be countered that, while that is so, they take on distinctive senses when applied to beliefs; and that in those senses, they apply *only* to beliefs. Even if that were true, however—I do not say it is not—the obvious reply would be that in that case, what we need to understand are what, generically, the specifically belief-appropriate characteristics expressed by the listed predicates have in common: what it is that makes these features proper to *belief*, and forces a different reference on the predicates concerned when applied to things other than belief. Either way, we need a more illuminating account.

III

The matter is complex, but there is a very natural general suggestion. It is that beliefs are distinguished among attitudinal states in general by their possession of a *telos*: believing is something one does with a view to capturing the truth—the fundamental aim of belief, as contrasted with supposition or mere entertaining, is to believe *truly*. If so, then one class of properly doxastic norms will be those compliance with which ensures or tends to promote the achievement of this fundamental aim, and/or noncompliance with which tends to frustrate it.

Each of the five characteristics listed above—truth, knowledgeability, justification, coherence, and rationality—can be argued to be a proper doxastic norm in the light of this simple proposal. The point is trivial for truth, of course, and for knowledgeability because of its factivity. It is less immediate for the other cases. For coherence, it may be suggested that incoherent belief systems, in so far as that is taken as implicating inconsistency, must contain some falsehoods; so if one is aiming at the truth, one should avoid incoherence. The argument is even less direct—indeed, less convincing—for justification and for rationality, but one can make a stab. Beliefs held without evidence, or for no reason, will be held for *causes* unconnected with the facts they are concerned with; so their truth, if they are true, will be liable to be just a matter of luck. Since if one is aiming at the truth, one should seek to fashion one's beliefs in ways that do not leave success in that aim open to mere chance, one should aim wherever possible to have justification and/or reasons for the things one believes.

This simple proposal—the *truth-centered* proposal—suggests that original condition (i) should be replaced with a refinement:

- (i)* Φ 's satisfaction, or nonsatisfaction, by a belief opens that belief to justified commendation/censure respectively in relation to the specific objective of achievement of the truth and avoidance of error.

The proper norms of belief, according to the truth-centered proposal, are not merely characteristics whose satisfaction/nonsatisfaction opens a belief to commendation or criticism, but characteristics whose satisfaction/nonsatisfaction opens a belief to commendation or criticism in relation to the fundamental objectives of a system of belief.¹

IV

Arguably, however, an account of the properly doxastic norms incorporating just (i)* and (ii) undergenerates in a way that calls the adequacy of the truth-centered proposal into question. Consider an inquirer engaged in developing and organizing a system of belief just with the aim of maximizing truth and minimizing error (—so we set aside considerations of interest, relevance, and importance). Then clearly one class of norms which he should aim to respect are essentially those so far considered: those respecting which is sufficient, or necessary, or both, for the achievement of those aims. But in prioritizing the truth-centered norms—or better, the truth-centered way of thinking about them—one's focus already completely bypasses the role (or at least the possibility) of a range of norms whose province is not directly concerned with success or failure but which are prior to that—are essentially involved in running anything properly regarded as a system of belief at all. There is a parallel here with norms of agency. It is a norm of action that one should do what is in best accord with one's desires and interests, in the light of one's beliefs. Action that falls short of this standard is variously irrational or akratic. But it is also, necessarily, exceptional. The norm in question is not a norm of action merely in the sense that actions that violate it fail to accomplish the agent's ends and are open to criticism accordingly. Rather, it is a constitutive norm, compliance with which is necessary, in the round, if a performer is to count as a rational agent—as *acting*—at all.

In general, one should expect intentional practices to be subject to at least two fundamentally different categories of norm: *teleological* norms, identifying or connected with the achievement of the (fundamental) aims of the practice; and *constitutive* norms, which need to be observed (enough) by any practitioner who is to count as successfully engaging in the practice in the first place. So it is only to be expected

¹ Although the point has no application to single beliefs, there is of course a distinction, implicit in the lines of thought just sketched, between aiming at the truth and aiming to minimize error when it comes to the management of simultaneous beliefs. A worked out development of the truth-centered proposal would need to explore the resulting possible competition of priorities.

that belief-management itself, like action in general, will be subject not only to teleological norms, concerned with achieving truth and avoiding falsehood, but also to its own special constitutive norms—principles with which compliance is not merely necessary, or sufficient, in order to ensure that a system of belief achieves its characteristic purposes, but mandatory, in the round, if what is going on is to count as believing—as the very management of a system of belief.

Their distinction does not involve, of course, that one should expect the norms falling under these respective headings to divide into two discrete lists. There is no reason why the *telos* of a practice should not be constitutive of it. Plausibly, this is not in general so: arguably, one *can* play Chess, that is observe every norm constitutive of the activity of playing chess, without trying to checkmate one's opponent's King (one may play to encourage a learner, and for all that, one is playing Chess). But it is also plausible that one does not count as believing unless one in general exhibits a propensity to regulate one's beliefs by considerations that pertain to their achievement of the truth. It is to be expected that at least some of the norms of belief on our list will turn out to wear two faces, serving both as truth-conducive and belief-constitutive norms.

The immediate effect of this consideration, I suggest, is a pointer to a much more satisfying account of the status of the norms of coherence, justification, and rationality than the type of thought adverted to above. No doubt these norms are all truth-connected. But their more fundamental role is constitutive. It is, for example, not just that disciplining one's beliefs by evidence promotes—so we hope—their propensity to truth; it is that only a system of evidentially disciplined beliefs counts as a system of *belief*. And it is not just that disciplining one's belief by mutual coherence helps promote their avoidance of falsehood; it is that only a thinker who is concerned to strive for and maintain the coherence of his set of beliefs qualifies as engaged in belief. Beliefs are normatively individuated, distinguished by the conditions under which they ought to be held and the impacts they ought to have on one's other beliefs; and it is only to the extent that one aims to respect these normative constraints that one can manifest what it is that one believes and so present oneself as believing anything.

All this needs a more refined discussion. The thesis I hope to have made plausible is that one should expect that properly doxastic norms comprise at least two fundamentally different but nonexclusive kinds: those connected with the *telos* of attainment of the truth and the avoidance of error; and those a broad respect of which is constitutive of the management of a very system of belief. Although any given norm may wear both hats, we should be alert to the possibility that

some may not. And, although I have no space to explore the ramifications here, the distinction in turn has potential repercussions for the opposition between internalist and externalist construals of doxastic norms which provides our primary concern.

One potential corollary. I implicitly adverted above to Pascal's Wager. A distinction is often emphasized between properly *epistemic* norms of belief and merely "pragmatic" normative characteristics that a belief may have—like somehow serving the advantage of the believer. Then it is suggested that justification conferred by the possession of evidence is an epistemic norm *par excellence*; whereas justification (if any) conferred by the reasoning of Pascal's wager is a merely pragmatic matter.² The distinction needs no more than the resources of the truth-centered view and the two clauses, (1)* and (ii), above. But if what I have suggested is correct, it is not a distinction to get fixated by. One might extend the terminology of *epistemic* justification to include good standing in the light of any teleological or constitutive doxastic norm. But in any case, if one wishes to reserve it for the more narrowly evidential, what is left over includes much more than the merely "pragmatic."³

v

How best to characterize the opposing positions in the entrenched debates between so-called internalist and externalist conceptions of knowledge, and of justification, is a matter of controversy, and will occupy us in a moment. But it is clear, even from the sketchy remarks preceding, that those two debates are merely examples of a potentially much more extensive species: we should be ready to recognize many more norms of belief, both teleological and constitutive, than just knowledgeability and evidence; and with the respect to each of these norms, *ceteris paribus*, we should expect there to be scope, in principle, for an opposition between broadly internalist and broadly externalist accounts. An immediate potential bearing of this reflection is on

² I am not here endorsing the reasoning which, in folkloric presentations at least, overlooks the possibility of a Deity who punishes those who allow their patterns of belief-formation to be swayed by mere self-interest!

³ This point constitutes the beginnings of a reply to the objection of commentators such as Duncan Pritchard ("Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* and Contemporary Anti-Scepticism," in D. Moyal-Sharrock and W.H. Brenner, eds., *Readings of Wittgenstein's On Certainty* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 189–224), and Carrie Jenkins ("Entitlement and Rationality," *Synthese*, CLVII (2007): 25–45), that the notion of nonevidential warrant explored in my "Warrant for Nothing (and Foundations for Free)?" *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume*, LXXVIII, 1 (2004): 167–212, connects with doxastic justification only in a manner to be compared to the "justification" afforded by the reasoning of the Wager and thus provides material for a response to skepticism only in an uninteresting and uncontested sense. But I must defer elaboration of this rejoinder to another occasion.

the debates about skepticism. There is a widespread sense—though by no means universal—that skepticism, at least of the kinds that come down to us from Descartes and Hume, presupposes a broadly internalist outlook with respect to knowledge, or justified belief, and so might be effectively neutralized if suitable externalist conceptions can be sustained of these norms. Our discussion to this point already sounds a cautionary note about this. Even if it is true that knowledge, and/or justification, are best externally construed, and that traditional forms of skepticism about those notions presuppose otherwise, it is only to be expected that at least some of the available forms of skeptical paradox will assail other norms as well, some of which may be no less important, but also open to no plausible form of externalist construal. The discussion to follow makes some initial forays into the landscape suggested by these remarks.

Knowledge is a kind of true belief. But hardly anyone thinks that all true belief is knowledge.⁴ Internalist conceptions of knowledge regard it, broadly, as true belief with certain additional, “internally” certifiable features. That one has an “account,” in the sense of the *Theaetetus*, is presumably an internally certifiable matter in the relevant sense, and “true belief with an account” is thus the archetypical internalist proposal. Note that the good standing of the debate between internalist and externalist conceptions does not presuppose the analysability of knowledge. One can hold that there are necessary or sufficient conditions for knowledge without knowing that there are any nontrivial necessary and sufficient ones. I shall take a condition to be internally certifiable in the germane sense if its satisfaction consists in circumstances which may be ascertained using just resources of a priori reflection, deductive inference, and ordinary psychological self-knowledge—the ordinary knowledge that each of us has, at least according to commonsense intentional psychology, of our own beliefs, desires, experiences, appearances, and passions. So internalist conceptions of knowledge, broadly understood, have it that it is a kind of true belief disciplined by norms whose satisfaction—other than, in general, the norm of truth itself, of course—may be verified using the resources just noted. Externalist conceptions, by contrast, waive the restriction, allowing that the additional knowledge-making (or unmaking) characteristics may be such that their satisfaction demands additional epistemic capabilities, or even perhaps may not be verifiable at all.

⁴ An exception is Crispin Sartwell, “Why Knowledge Is Merely True Belief,” this JOURNAL, LXXXIX, 4 (April 1992): 167–80.

Evidently this form of distinction straightforwardly generalizes to norms in general. We can propose, for an arbitrary norm Φ over any given activity, that:

Φ is internal iff its satisfaction consists in circumstances whose obtaining can be verified by a priori reflection, reasoning, and routine self-knowledge; and is external otherwise.⁵

However, that proposal contrasts with a more relaxed conception, which may be formulated as follows:

Φ is internal if, whatever the nature of the circumstances in which its satisfaction consists, one may effectively control the pursuit of it by means which rely only on a priori reflection, reasoning, and routine self-knowledge.

While I do not suggest that the second formulation corresponds exactly to anything anyone has ever understood by the broad heading of “internalism,” the distinction between the two formulations focuses on an important point. A common motivation for internalism about epistemic norms in roughly the sense gestured at by the first formulation is the thought that the pursuit of the satisfaction of such norms—and indeed, perhaps, rule-following in general—must in the end be something that we can police on the internal stage, as it were: that if I am to follow a rule that mandates, say, a certain course of action when certain conditions obtain, all I can—“in the end”—do is to make sure I respond appropriately when *it seems to me* that those conditions obtain. There may, or may not, be an important insight gestured at by this train of thought.⁶ My present point is that even if there is, all it mandates is a conception of epistemic norms as internal in the *second* of the two senses noted. It may be that, in setting oneself to comply with the norm of carrying an umbrella only if the sky is cloudy, one cannot do better in the end than to suit one’s behavior to one’s subjective impression of the state of the sky; but it hardly follows that the presence of a cloudy sky is something that can be verified by a priori reflection, reasoning, and routine self-knowledge. If there is a good motivation to regard some epistemic norms internalistically in something like the sense gestured at by the first formulation, it is not provided by the general thought that, in order to be able to follow any rule, the difference

⁵ Just to emphasize again: knowledge is not, of course, on anyone’s account, a *purely* internal norm in this sense. Epistemic internalism has to do with the nature of the normative characteristics that distinguish knowledgeable beliefs from merely true ones.

⁶ For a subtle discussion of the issues, see Ralph Wedgwood, “Internalism Explained,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, LXV (2002): 349–69.

between circumstances in which it is satisfied and circumstances in which it is not has to be capable of some kind of impact on phenomenal consciousness.

VI

Are traditional forms of skepticism about knowledge and justification dependent on internalist construal of those notions? And can they be effectively finessed by falling back on externalist surrogates—or less tendentiously, by the reflection that those notions were, all along, properly understood externalistically?

To fix ideas, consider perhaps the simplest form of knowledge-skeptical paradox, exploiting just the closure of knowledge across (known) entailment, and the apparent possibility of certain subjectively normal-seeming but perceptually utterly dysfunctional scenarios whose obtaining would be inconsistent with the truth of most of what we take to be our present body of empirical knowledge. The scenario in question could be that of systematic deception concerning all things material by a Cartesian Evil Demon, or the twentieth century fantasy of envatment of one's disembodied brain by an evil scientist. Let *SH* be any such scenario and *P* be any proposition which one standardly takes oneself to know by means reliant on perception, and whose truth is inconsistent with *SH*. (*P* might be, for example, the proposition that one has two hands.) The resulting skeptical paradox could hardly be simpler. It proceeds by reflecting that it is not known that *SH* does not obtain, but that it is known that if *P* is true, *SH* does not obtain; hence it is not known that *P*. Since *P* is parametric for any proposition whose truth is incompatible with *SH*—a range which encompasses almost everything we ordinarily regard as our routine perceptual knowledge—we should conclude that we in fact have hardly any of that knowledge.

More formally, let *W* express one's possession of any form of warrant for belief which is closed under (recognized) logical consequence; and let *P* be any proposition which is perceptually warranted if warranted at all. Then the structure of the paradox is:

Premise (1) $\sim W \sim SH$

Premise (2) $W[P \Rightarrow \sim SH]$

$\therefore \sim WP$ (from 1 and 2, by closure of '*W*' and routine logic)

Where is the (alleged) presupposition of internalism in this? There is surely no fault to be found with premise (2) in any case, whatever one's view of knowledge or other relevant notions of warrant. On externalist views of knowledge that emphasize what has come to be known as *sensitivity*—the condition, endorsed by Fred Dretske and

Robert Nozick,⁷ that a belief is knowledgeable only if, were it not true, it would not be held—the prospects also look bleak for faulting premise (1). For were *SH* to be true, one would still believe that it was not. But familiarly these famous views provide another recourse: that of rejecting closure, since it may happen that for suitable *P* and *Q*, *P* entails *Q* and is truly believed with sensitivity, although the (actually) true belief that *Q* would persist in circumstances where *Q* was false. I have nothing to add here to the prevailing opinion that it leans towards a *reductio* of sensitivity-prioritizing views that they bring closure into question in this kind of way.

If there is a presupposition of internalism then, it had better be with premise (1). In fact, the situation is complex. The driving thought behind premise (1) is simply that *SH* has been so selected as to ensure that the case where it obtains is subjectively indistinguishable from the case where it does not—it is all the same on the inside, as it were. In order for that to yield premise (1), we need to take it that whatever notion of warrant we have assigned to '*W*', it at least supervenes on subjective state—so that one has warrant for any given proposition in both, if in either, of any pair of subjectively indistinguishable situations. Internalism will underwrite that much. But the supervenience by itself does not enforce premise (1); it merely entails that, with respect to the question of warrant for the supposition that *SH* does not obtain, one must describe the two subjectively indistinguishable situations, where it respectively does and does not obtain, in the same way—that description could be to the effect that there *is* warrant to discount *SH*, for all that has so far been said.

VII

There are various possible lines of thought to motivate premise (1), but I shall not pursue the matter here.⁸ If internalism actually enforced the premise, that would be extremely striking. But the most that is realistically to be expected is a case of some less conclusive kind. Our interest is accordingly in whether externalism can *pre-empt* any such case—whether it undercuts any motive for premise (1). In essence, we need externalist argument for

(*) $\sim W[\sim W \sim SH]$

—the contention that premise (1) is unwarranted. What can be offered?

⁷ Loci classici: Dretske, "Epistemic Operators," this JOURNAL, LXVII, 24 (December 24, 1970): 1007–23; Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1981), chapter 3.

⁸ See for example the discussion of the "Proper Execution Principle" in my "Skepticism and Dreaming: Imploding the Demon," *Mind*, c (1991): 87–116.

With sensitivity set aside, there are two standard externalist proposals about knowledge and justification. One is *reliability*: a belief counts as knowledgeable, or justified, only if it is the product of the exercise of a reliable method of belief-formation. In order for this to amount to a definite proposal, something needs to be said, of course, about how reliable, reliable in which circumstances, and on what range of matters, and so on. But the considerations to follow will not depend on our addressing the most felicitous formulation of reliabilism. The second standard externalist proposal is *safety*: where, roughly, a belief is safe just in case it is not merely actually true but true in all “nearby worlds”—would still be true, that is, if things were different in any not-too-outlandish way, any way they might “easily have been” different. Again, we need not trouble over the detail of the best formulation. Either of these proposals promises fairly straightforward *prima facie* support for (*).

First, let $WP = P$ is *safely* (hence truly) believed. Consider the intuitive operator, *it is not to be ruled out that*.... Presumably it is at least not to be ruled out that the skeptical hypothesis is false—that $\sim SH$. But if it is false, then—since its truth would require such extensive and radical adjustments to the actual scheme of things—it could not easily have been true. So it is not ruled out that someone who believes that SH is false does so safely. Hence it is not ruled out that $W\sim SH$. So provided *it is not ruled out that* P may be taken to entail $\sim W\sim P$, we have that

$$\sim W\sim[W\sim SH]$$

which, rebracketing, is exactly what was sought:

$$(*) \sim W[\sim W\sim SH]$$

Now let $WP = P$ is *reliably* (truly) believed. And let P be any proposition concerning the external material environment, which we would ordinarily take to be part of our perceptual knowledge and which is inconsistent with SH . Presumably it is at least not to be ruled out that P is, as a matter of fact, reliably (truly) believed. Suppose that is actually so. If $\sim SH$ is then believed on the basis of its entailment by P , this too will be a reliable true belief. Hence, again, it is not ruled out that $W\sim SH$. If *it is not ruled out that* P may be taken to entail $\sim W\sim P$, then we have that

$$\sim W\sim[W\sim SH]$$

which, after rebracketing, is—again—exactly what was sought.

VIII

Making a case for (*) is, however, insufficient to defuse the skeptical threat—at least once it is remembered that it is hardly less uncomfortable

to be saddled with the conclusion that our claims to warrant are unwarranted than with the conclusion that they are actually false. The problem is that (*)—that there is no warrant for the original premise (1)—is quite consistent with

$$(1)^+ \sim W \sim [\sim W \sim SH] ;$$

namely, that there is no warrant to *deny* original premise (1). Now as the reader will speedily appreciate, ' $\sim W \sim$ ' obeys closure if ' W ' does. But from $(1)^+$ together with premise (2) as before,

$$W: [P \Rightarrow \sim SH],$$

we may infer

$$\sim W \sim [\sim WP]$$

and thence

$$\sim WWP.$$

And this is still a paradoxical result. If ' W ' expresses knowledge, for example, it in effect says—given the constraints on ' P '—that we have no knowledge that we have any perceptual knowledge. It is all the same, as far as any cognitive achievement of ours is concerned, whether our perceptual faculties have afforded us any knowledge or not. If externalism were content to acknowledge the correctness of this second-order genre of skepticism, it would be a somewhat Pyrrhic victory to have blocked off its first-order counterpart. Externalism needs to be able not merely to reject premise (1)—that is, argue cogently for (*)—but also to reject

$$(1)^+ \sim W \sim [\sim W \sim SH]$$

For otherwise, the "second-order" paradox remains unaddressed.

Yet intuitively, it may seem that $(1)^+$ should actually be *acceptable* to the externalist. His basic thought about (*) was that it holds because, for all we—or "the Skeptic"—can show to the contrary, it *may be* that we can reliably, or safely—hence warrantably—believe $\sim SH$. What settles whether $W \sim SH$ is, precisely, *external* to us and our thoughts and reflections. But if so, then surely he has also to grant that this external settlement may go *against* $W \sim SH$? The externalist should grant that it may be that $\sim W \sim SH$: that, as things happen to stand, there is no safely, or reliably believing that SH is false. That is a possibility we cannot warrantably discount—and that is enough, seemingly, for premise $(1)^+$. So what progress? The safety- or reliability-based strategy for finding fault with original premise (1) seems to play straight into the hands of second-order skepticism.

IX

I think this point is basically correct. But, at least for those with well-developed externalist sympathies, it may provoke a suspicion of equivocation. How exactly are we meant to understand the *outer* occurrence of ‘ $\sim W$ ’ in (1)⁺ if that premise is to be compelling? Suppose that it too is to be externalistically understood. Well then, if an external—safety- or reliability-dependent—construal of ‘ W ’ in

Premise (1) $\sim W \sim [SH]$

successfully undermines the skeptical case for it, (whatever in detail that case may be) by justifying (1)* in the ways we reviewed, why won’t a similar construal undermine any case for (1)⁺ in turn? Indeed, whenever any skeptical paradox works with our alleged inability warrantably to discount some epistemologically mischief-making supposition, A , why will there not *always* be an externalist riposte to the effect that, since matters external to us will determine whether or not $W \sim [A]$, the Skeptic is in no position to affirm $\sim W \sim [A]$?

What I think has not been generally grasped with any clarity is that this whole strategy of externalist counter to skepticism is unstable. Reconsider:

(*) $\sim W[\sim W \sim SH]$

—the denial that there is warrant for the first premise of the original simple paradox. Above we rehearsed impressive-seeming cases based on reliability and safety respectively for the acceptance of (*). But reflect that in order to be in position to affirm (*) on those grounds, we must take ourselves to be in position to affirm

(**) $\sim W[SH]$

For if SH holds, then $\sim SH$ can be neither reliably nor safely—nor, ergo, warrantably—believed. But when the occurrence of ‘ W ’ in (**) is externally construed in its turn, it requires that SH itself can be neither safely nor reliably believed. And the externalist has no better assurance of *that* than “the Skeptic” had that $\sim SH$ could be neither safely nor reliably believed, at the point when motivation was to be provided for premise (1) of the original paradox.

Here are the essential moves in the dialectic. Skepticism proposes

(1) $\sim W \sim SH$

on the basis of the possible subjective indistinguishability of scenarios where SH obtains and what we like to think of as Normality. The Externalist counters that, for his preferred reading of ‘ W ’, (1) is unwarranted, which is to affirm

(*) $\sim W[\sim W \sim SH]$,

on the ground that the point about subjective indistinguishability is in no tension with the truth of $W \sim SH$ so long as ' W ' is appropriately externally construed. We then observed that a commitment to (*) is a commitment to

(**) $\sim W[SH]$,

when ' W ' is appropriately externally construed, since SH then entails $\sim W \sim SH$; but that in fact the original externalist reasons for refusing (1) seem to go over just as well into reasons for *refusing* (**), the commitment to (*) notwithstanding. In the present setting, it ought to depend on the external circumstances whether or not SH may be believed with warrant. The externalist is committed to regarding (**), externally construed, as just as inappropriate, and for the very same reasons, as the skeptical premise that we cannot warrantably suppose that SH does not obtain. On the contrary, we *may*, she should allow, warrantably suppose that SH does obtain—if, for example, the belief that it does is, alas, safe: is true in all relevantly nearby worlds.⁹

At this point it appears, then, that externalism actually provides *no* coherent motive for (*), so no coherent motive for repudiating the original skeptical premise (1). The appearance to the contrary was just an illusion, induced by failing to pursue the implications of a thoroughgoing externalist construal of the relevant epistemic operator sufficiently far.

X

Yet this does not seem right. Surely the externalist *does* have a good motive for something like (*). The thought seems perfectly coherent, indeed compelling, that the standard kind of skeptical case provides no ground to discount the scenario where my belief that I am not a brain in a vat, say, is a safe belief, or a reliably generated true belief. In that case, if safety, or reliability, suffices for warrant, what is left open is exactly that $W \sim SH$ may be true. What gives rise to the trouble just elicited is the construal of this "left openness" as an instance of ' $\sim W \sim$ ' where the very same sense of ' W '—the *same* notion of warrant—is involved. It is when that is in turn construed along externalist—safety or reliability—lines that the externalist point plunges into aporia. A simple moral suggests itself: in order to express its, as far as it goes, perfectly good objection to the simple skeptical argument, externalism needs recourse to a notion of warrant for a belief, or assertion, which is not itself to be externally construed.

⁹ To be sure, that is not a belief we actually—most of us—have. But the issue here is the *possibility* of warrantably holding it.

I think the moral is correct. But it is certainly not immediate. It is clear that the externalist cannot avoid the aporia so long as he tries to give expression to the lack of warrant he claims there is for the skeptical premise in terms of the *same* notion of warrant that, he wants to maintain, we may yet have for discounting the skeptical scenario. So the outer 'W' in (*) has to express a *different* notion of warrant to the inner one. But why does it have to differ by being internalist?

This gap can be closed. Suppose it were different but still external. Then the distinction between situations where we had this kind of external warrant for a belief and cases where we did not would not supervene on differences available to a priori reasoning, reflection, and ordinary self-knowledge. Yet, if the externalist is to press his original objection to the simple skeptical argument, he needs to be in position to affirm the version of (*) that results when the inner and outer references to warrant are interpreted appropriately differently:

(*)' $\sim W [\sim W \sim SH]$

And if 'W' still expresses some kind of externalist warrant, the obvious question is going to concern how the externalist is in any better position to justify (*)' than he was with respect to (*). If the distinction between cases where (*)' is true and cases where it is not turns on features that are not available to a priori reasoning, reflection, and ordinary self-knowledge, what is the externalist case for (*)', and why is it not as presumptuous as the abortive case for original (*)?

We should conclude that the proper formulation of and case for the basic externalist objection to the kind of traditional skeptical routine of which the paradox we have focused on provides the simplest example, demands recourse to an internalist notion of warrant. The basic externalist point boils down to this: that it cannot be certified by *internalist* means that we do not, for example, know that we are not brains in vats—not if knowledge is appropriately externally construed. Accordingly, a thoroughgoing epistemic externalism—one which construes *all* belief-mandating norms externally—is incapable of delivering one of the supposed principal advantages of externalism: the safeguarding of the idea that we may be just as knowledgeable as we ordinarily take ourselves to be. Rather, in order to safeguard this idea, a pluralistic view is needed: one that runs internal and external belief-mandating norms simultaneously.

XI

These reflections do not yet, of course, constitute a demonstration either of the good standing or the importance of any internalist notion of warrant. Rather they unpack certain of the commitments of an

externalist who wants to respond to the skeptical paradox—and so to that extent takes skepticism seriously—in the way we have been scouting. That response, we have seen, is a commitment to the good standing of an internalist notion. But what about its importance? Might it be open to the externalist to take the view that while there is indeed scope for perfectly coherent internalist notions of warrant, it is externalist warrant that is of primary significance for the management of belief and practical deliberation—that little of value depends on the possession, or lack thereof, of internalist warrant for belief?

It is not. Consider: what does externalism want to follow from the truth of (*)'—from the lack of **Warrant**, so to put it, for the skeptical premise? If this reflection is to disarm the paradox, it has to be something which lets us pay it *no further attention* in good intellectual conscience—something which disarms its key premise's claims to credibility. We are, the implication has to be, in no position to claim—to assert or believe—that premise (1) is true. For if this is not implied, nothing has been said to disarm the (putative) plausibility of the premise.

The commitment of the externalist way with the simple paradox is thus to a notion of warrant which is internal and which determines which statements we should consider ourselves in position to claim to be true. If, as many contemporary theorists suppose, it is knowledge of a statement that constitutes its assertibility, then to have **Warrant** for a statement is thus to be in position to claim that one knows it (and if something else confers assertibility, it is to be in position to claim that one has that.)

XII

It is perhaps superfluous to highlight the sting in the tail. We have seen that to the extent that we take the basic externalist response to the paradox to be coherent and well motivated, we commit ourselves to a notion of warrant which—whatever the detail of its best characterization—is not itself open to externalist construal and relates to what it takes to *be in position to claim* that one knows or is otherwise mandated in a certain belief. What to say, then, about a formulation of the original paradox in terms of this very notion:

- Premise (1) $\sim W \sim SH$
 Premise (2) $W [P \Rightarrow \sim SH]$
 $\therefore \sim WP?$

As before '*P*' is schematic for any proposition which we would customarily regard as known perceptually, and *SH* is any scenario in which we are subjectively undetectably perceptually disabled. But now the internalist character of the operator will sustain premise (1) against

externalist rebuttal; and premise (2) is unexceptionable as before. So the conclusion—assuming closure for **Warrant**—is that we are in no position to claim any of the knowledge, or whatever it is that mandates belief, that we normally regard as the product of our perceptual faculties. This is, essentially, a variant on the second-order skepticism touched on earlier. It is hardly less at odds with our epistemic self-conception, or easier to tolerate, than the conclusion of the simple paradox. But it emerges, ironically, out of the very resources required to enable externalist—reliability- and safety-based—conceptions of warrant to address the latter in the intended manner.

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