

'A clairvoyant lacks knowledge, even if clairvoyance is reliable. A five-year old child, however, can know that the door is shut or that the television is on.' Discuss.

Met opmerkingen [OB1]: Very good essay.

In this essay, I will argue that a clairvoyant lacks knowledge and that a five-year old child can have knowledge. I will argue that a reliabilist version of externalism is not epistemically correct. Instead of focusing on the definition of knowledge, this essay will focus on the **justification** of a belief, which is widely regarded as necessary for knowledge. I will argue that a clairvoyant lacks the justification of their beliefs which renders the reliabilist requirement for knowledge not *sufficient*. Conversely, I will argue that a five-year old child can have justified beliefs, even if they are misled by an evil demon, which shows that the reliabilist requirement is not *necessary* for knowledge. I will first argue that a modified version of Bonjour's clairvoyance counterargument to externalism, which refines the example with a benevolent demon to make the intuition more compelling, shows that the reliabilist condition for the justification of a belief is not sufficient. Then, I will argue that the new evil demon problem, supported by Cohen's thought experiment, demonstrates that the justification of a belief remains the same across different worlds, thereby showing that the reliabilist condition is not necessary.

Externalism and Reliabilism

Externalism is the view that whether a belief is justified **or counts as knowledge** can depend on factors external to the subject's conscious awareness. This contrasts with internalism, which holds that justification must rely on factors accessible to the subject's reflection. Reliabilism is a form of externalism that argues a belief is justified **if** it is produced by a reliable cognitive process—one that tends to generate true beliefs (I will call this the reliabilist condition). For example, if one's vision reliably produces beliefs that are true, then beliefs formed through vision can be justified even if the subject cannot internally justify them. In this essay, I will argue that this reliabilist condition for the justification of a belief is neither sufficient nor necessary, as any successful analysis of knowledge must provide a definition that is both necessary and jointly sufficient (Ichikawa and Steup, 2024).

Met opmerkingen [MOU2]: Everyone already agrees, truth is external

Met opmerkingen [MOU3]: Not an if but an if and only if

Clairvoyance

Bonjour argues that reliabilism is not sufficient for a justification of a belief by giving the example of a clairvoyant:

"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, p. 62)

Is Norman’s belief that the president is in New York City justified? Bonjour tries to show that a belief formed through a reliable process (clairvoyance) can still lack justification. Bonjour thinks that for Norman’s belief to be justified, he needs more epistemic justification. If Norman does not have any evidence that his clairvoyance is a reliable process, his belief that the president is in New York City is not justified. This demonstrates that the reliabilist condition alone is not sufficient to justify a belief.

One could argue, however, that our intuition is wrong in this case. Firstly, it is incredibly difficult, if not impossible, to imagine that Norman would not have any evidence whatsoever for or against his belief. We have all sorts of evidence for or against the belief formation processes that we have. Secondly, there is a reason that Bonjour talks about clairvoyance: it is really hard to imagine. Bonjour, in his paper, first gives several other examples of cases which are more intuitive. Maybe he did this to prepare the reader to more easily accept his intuition about clairvoyance. However, we do not necessarily have the same intuitions about more realistic cases, such as perfect pitch or simple arithmetic. In the same way that beliefs just pop up in the mind of the clairvoyant. The sum of 2 and 3 simply comes to us effortlessly, without requiring deliberate reflection or reasoning. Possibly, clairvoyance is like basic arithmetic. Because it is so difficult to imagine what clairvoyance would be like for the clairvoyant, it is hard to judge whether it would be similar to how one knows that 2 plus 3 is 5. If clairvoyance would be like basic arithmetic, our intuition might disagree with Bonjour. Therefore, we probably should not completely trust our intuition in this case and maybe even, as Srinivasan argues, accept the clairvoyant justification for the belief (2020).

To avoid reliance on controversial intuitions, I propose a different counterexample which is a combination of the clairvoyant counterexample from Bonjour and the benevolent demon counterexample from Goldman (1979). Imagine that there is a benevolent demon who arranges things in such a way that beliefs formed by wishful thinking are reliably true. Percy, who has no clairvoyant powers, forms the belief, through wishful thinking, that the president is in New York City. The benevolent demon then makes it so that the president is actually in New York City. Is Percy’s belief that the president is in New York City justified? I think that our intuition is more clearly ‘no’ in this case. The difference between this counterexample and Bonjour’s clairvoyance scenario is that we usually do not think that wishful thinking is a reliable process. Whereas it is possible that clairvoyance is similar to basic arithmetic or perfect pitch, that is not the case for wishful thinking. Therefore, for the clairvoyance scenario it is easier to maintain that clairvoyance is actually a reliable process. If our intuition tells us that 2 plus 3 is

indeed 5, or that the statement "the president is in New York City" is true, it is still possible to have these beliefs not justified. If the process of belief formation is merely wishful thinking, and if we intuitively regard wishful thinking as not being a justifying belief formation process, then the beliefs formed in this way are not justified. Even if a benevolent demon intervenes to ensure that these beliefs are reliably true, they remain intuitively unjustified. This shows that the reliabilist condition is not sufficient to justify a belief.

Met opmerkingen [MOU4]: This is like the thermostat example.

Met opmerkingen [MOU5]: Maybe you are going to far, would this not lead to scepticism? Internalism would maybe struggle to confirm that '2+3=5' is knowledge.

New Evil Demon

To show that the reliabilist condition is also not necessary for the justification of a belief, consider the following two worlds, w_1 and w_2 . In both the worlds, a five-year old child, Max, has exactly the same experiences and goes through exactly the same reasoning processes. As a result, Max forms the same beliefs in both worlds. However, an evil demon ensures that Max's experiences are misleading in w_1 . In w_2 , all Max's experiences are true. Proponents on the counterexample argue that Max in w_1 and w_2 is the same with respect to the justification of his beliefs (as explained in Goldman and Beddor, 2021). Even though Max is different externally in w_1 and w_2 , he is the same with respect to justification. Even though Max's experiences in w_1 are not very reliable – the evil demon makes them wrong – his beliefs are just as justified as the beliefs of Max in w_2 . It seems like the justification is not dependant on the external state of affairs but on the internal state. Max beliefs are, even in w_1 , justified. Consequently, the reliabilist condition is also not necessary for the justification of a belief.

Met opmerkingen [MOU6]: Give a thought experiment of why the justification might be denied

One could argue, however, Max in w_1 and w_2 is not the same with respect to the justification of his beliefs. Although, intuitively, they are the same because Max has exactly the same experiences and belief formation processes in both worlds, it is defendable to deny this claim. Therefore, to support this proposition, consider the following scenario. Two people, A and B, both live in w_1 , the evil demon world. "A, who is a good reasoner, i.e., reasons in accordance with the canons of inductive inference, and B, who engages in confused reasoning, wishful thinking, reliance on emotional attachments, guesswork, etc." (Cohen, 1984, p. 283). According to reliabilism, the beliefs of A and B are both unjustified as they are formed through unreliable processes. Intuitively, however, are the beliefs of A not *more* epistemically justified. Under the reliabilist approach, the beliefs of A and B would be equally justified but, clearly, there is a difference between them with regards to justification. Internally, they are different. This seems to suggest that the justification is dependent on the internal reasoning rather than the external state of affairs. This supports the idea that Max's beliefs are equally justified in w_1 and w_2 .

Met opmerkingen [MOU7]: It might help to give an example of a belief

In conclusion, I have argued that a reliabilist account of externalism fails because it does not provide a definition of justification that is both necessary and sufficient. A clairvoyant, at least under the modified version with the benevolent demon, lacks knowledge. The benevolent demon case demonstrates that a belief can be formed through a reliable process and still lack justification, undermining the sufficiency of the reliabilist condition. Conversely, the five-year old child can, even if it is deceived by an evil demon, have knowledge that, for instance, the door is shut or the television is on. The new evil demon case, supported by Cohen's thought experiment, shows that a belief can be justified even when it is formed through an unreliable process, challenging the necessity of reliabilism. Since any successful theory of knowledge must establish conditions that are both necessary and jointly sufficient, reliabilism ultimately fails as an adequate account of justification.

Bibliography

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