PHI 332 – Second Writing Assignment

# Mr. Truetemp and Externalism

In the reading “A Critique of Externalism” by Kieth Lehrer, Lehrer presents a counterexample to External based on the example of a person called Mr. Truetemp. Mr Truetemp has had brain surgery done to him and during the surgery, the surgeon installed a device called a tempucomp installed in his brain. The Tempucomp is a thermometer that accurately measures the temperatures of the surrounding and reports it straight to his brain, giving Mr. Truetemp” correct belief about the current temperature. Mr Truetemp doesn’t know about the existence of this device and doesn’t understand why he is constantly thinking about the temperature neither does he know that is current belief about temperature is accurate. So, basically Truetemp’s belief about temperature are true and reliable, but Truetemp doesn’t know what causes them and whether they are true or not. Now if externalism was true then Truetemp would know the current temperature, however Truetemp doesn’t “know” the current temperature hence externalism is false.

Externalism in context of epistemic justification states that a belief is justified or counts as knowledge depending on it having certain relations to the external world, and that this relation might exist without me knowing it. According to Goldman “A person can have justified belief without knowing its justified”. The reason behind this is that externalism gives a strategy to deal with the Gettier Problem and one doesn’t need to know “basic beliefs” we can simply assume them to be justified. Externalism is a response to skepticism. As a result an Externalist for epistemic justification would say that Mr. Truetemp’s belief about knowledge is completely justified since it is related to the actual temperature and hence it counts as Knowledge even though if Mr. Truetemp doesn’t know why its try or what makes it true.

Lehrer says that if we assume externalism to be true, then knowledge is like a thermometer. It only reports the temperature but it doesn’t *know* the correct temperature. This way, given Truetemp’s example, Mr Truetemp doesn’t *know* the current temperature hence externalism is false. This shows that that belief formed by reliable process need not be knowledge. Lehrer says that it is only information and not knowledge.

Lehrer also makes another counter example which shows that a belief need not be caused by a reliable process to count as knowledge and he complains about how Realism assumes the cause of the belief to be justification.

I believe that Lehrer’s counter example does not disprove externalism. Lehrer says that if Externalism is true then Mr. Truetemp knows the current temperature. But based on Lehrer, Mr. Truetemp doesn’t know the temperature. However Lehrer doesn’t explain why Mr. Truetemp doesn’t know the temperature he simply states he doesn’t without any justification. Lehrer is an Internalist and externalism is the opposite of Externalism however, none of them prove the other one to be false. They both give arguments as to why one is more true than the other, but don’t necessarily prove the other to be completely false. Along with this, suppose I was Mr. Truetemp and had the tempucomp in my brain. Over time I would notice that the temperature I believe is actually true, and following this pattern I would be justified in believing that my belief is true and hence it is knowledge.

Another argument in favor of externalism is that if what justified our beliefs failed to get rid of the risk of error then it does not seem like knowledge would ever be attainable since it would seem as if our beliefs were not correct and would simply be a matter of good fortune