

# Knowledge and Reality, Lecture 05

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## Review

## Internalism and Externalism

## Why Internalism

## Why Externalism

# Testimony

- We spent the last two classes on testimony, and in particular on when it is rational to believe something on the basis of testimony.

# Two Theories

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- Testimony is basic, and rationally believing testimony requires just an absence of reasons for doubt.
- Testimonial belief is inferential, and rationally believing testimony requires reason to think the speaker is telling the truth.

# Today

- What kind of thing is rationality?

# Terminology

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# Terminology

- The writers we'll look at move back and forth between talking about **rational** belief and **justified** belief.
- I'm not going to get into whether these are different, or what the differences might be.
- Treat them as the same, knowing that, as always, it might be more complicated than that.

Review

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Why Internalism

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# What Does Rationality Depend on?

Imagine that one person is rational, and another irrational.

- How must they differ?

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Imagine that one person is rational, and another irrational.

- How must they differ?
- Could they be internally alike?

# Internalism

Rationality is a function of what's internal to the person.

- Two people who are internally alike are either both rational, or both irrational.

# Internal?

What does 'internal' mean here? Two prominent options  
(which I'm stating but won't go into)

1. Physical, e.g., brain states, sense organs, etc.

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1. Physical, e.g., brain states, sense organs, etc.
2. Phenomenological, e.g., feelings, sensations, etc. This is sometimes called **access internalism**; rationality just depends on what the thinker has access to.

# How Does It Depend?

Again, two big theories, though these aren't exclusive or exhaustive.

1. Evidential; rationality is a matter of having beliefs based in the right way in evidence, which (on this view) is a special kind of internal state. Sometimes this is called foundationalism.



# How Does It Depend?

Again, two big theories, though these aren't exclusive or exhaustive.

1. Evidential; rationality is a matter of having beliefs based in the right way in evidence, which (on this view) is a special kind of internal state. Sometimes this is called foundationalism.
2. Coherence; rationality is a matter of internal states cohering.

# How Does It Depend?

We'll come back to this, because some of the objections to internalism target just one or the other theory.

# Externalism

Externalism is simply the denial of internalism.

- It says that sometimes internal duplicates differ in rationality.

# Strong Externalism

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- This is not a popular view, though the Srinivasan paper we'll read next comes very close to defending it.
- But external here typically means "not exclusively internal".

# Process Reliabilism

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- In general, rational beliefs are those that are produced by reliable processes.

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- In general, rational beliefs are those that are produced by reliable processes.
- But there is an exception; beliefs that fail some internalist test might be 'defeated', and not rational.

# Process Reliabilism

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- Indeed, I think some of the most important statements of it were from his time at UM.



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- Indeed, I think some of the most important statements of it were from his time at UM.
- Another important figure (who we'll read in a related context soon) is the Cuban-American philosopher Ernest Sosa.

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# Three Reasons

This is an enormous debate, but I'll pull out three reasons that I think are significant.

1. Anti-luck.

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1. Anti-luck.
2. Cases.
3. Evil Demons

# Anti-Luck

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- Saying something is rational is a way of saying that it's not a lucky guess, and if it's false, it's unlucky.
- External factors are basically matters of luck.
- So rationality should depend only on internal factors.



# Cases

Lawrence BonJour introduced the following kind of case.

- A person has (somehow) acquired clairvoyant powers.

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- A person has (somehow) acquired clairvoyant powers.
- They have these beliefs about distant parts of the world that just come to them.
- And these beliefs are true.

# Question

1. Is simply trusting this new clairvoyant sense rational for the person?

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2. If not, is this a problem for reliabilists.

# Evil Demon

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- E.g., you don't know you're not being deceived by an evil demon, so you don't know that you have hands.

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- E.g., you don't know you're not being deceived by an evil demon, so you don't know that you have hands.
- But here is gets used for a debate about rationality.

# Sympathy for the Devil (Victim)

Imagine a person who seems, from the inside, to be just like an actually rational person.

- But in fact they are the victim of an evil demon, so their beliefs are all false.



# Sympathy for the Devil (Victim)

Imagine a person who seems, from the inside, to be just like an actually rational person.

- But in fact they are the victim of an evil demon, so their beliefs are all false.
- Reliabilists say they are irrational, but they are intuitively rational.

# Question

What should reliabilists say about this case?

# Variant

Imagine two evil demon victims.

- A is, from the inside, a paradigm of rationality.

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Imagine two evil demon victims.

- A is, from the inside, a paradigm of rationality.
- B is, from the inside, a conspiracy theorist who leaps to conclusions, believes everything he's told, etc., etc.

# Question

Can reliabilists say something about the intuitive differences between A and B?

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# Three Arguments

Again, there are many, but I'll just look at these three.

1. Speckled hen

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2. Why care about rationality?



# Three Arguments

Again, there are many, but I'll just look at these three.

1. Speckled hen
2. Why care about rationality?
3. Involuntarism

# Speckled Hen



How many visible white speckles?

# Speckled Hen

- The right answer does just depend on your internal states.

# Speckled Hen

- The right answer does just depend on your internal states.
- But it seems that any number you came up with by just guessing would not be a rational belief.

# Speckled Hen

- The right answer does just depend on your internal states.
- But it seems that any number you came up with by just guessing would not be a rational belief.
- So rationality requires more than internal states, it requires a reliable connection to the world.

# Why Care?

Rationality should be something we care about.

- But if given a choice between being evidence-responsive, and being reliable, we should choose being reliable.

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- But if given a choice between being evidence-responsive, and being reliable, we should choose being reliable.
- And same for coherent versus reliable.

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# Why Care?

- Belief, in some sense, aims at the truth.
- Rationality means something like doing well in believing.
- So, being rational should mean something like doing well in getting to the truth.
- That means reliability.

# Why Care?

Are there hand-wavy moves on the previous slide that might not hold up to strict scrutiny? Yes!

# Voluntarism

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- Belief is involuntary.

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- We evaluate the voluntary parts of human behavior by whether they make sense, and the involuntary parts by whether they work.
- Belief is involuntary.
- So we should evaluate it by how well it works.

## Somewhat Concessive

- This argument concedes that if belief were voluntary, internalism would be plausible/correct.



## Somewhat Concessive

- This argument concedes that if belief were voluntary, internalism would be plausible/correct.
- But, it says, belief is involuntary.

# Evaluation

Whether someone has, say, a good or bad digestive system is not a strictly internal matter.

- Having a good digestive system just is being good at digesting common foods.

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- Having a good digestive system just is being good at digesting common foods.
- And what the common foods are is external.
- The involuntarists say belief is the same.

# Two Objections

1. Belief really is voluntary.

# Two Objections

1. Belief really is voluntary.
2. Enough things connected to belief are voluntary that we can use something like internalist criteria.

# For Next Time

We'll look at a very recent contribution to this debate, Amia Srinivasan's argument for externalism from cases involving oppression.