



An Internalist Externalism

Author(s): William P. Alston

Source: *Synthese*, Vol. 74, No. 3, Internalism (Mar., 1988), pp. 265-283

Published by: [Springer](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20116502>

Accessed: 30/01/2015 15:29

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Springer is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Synthese*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

AN INTERNALIST EXTERNALISM¹

1.

In this paper I will explain, and at least begin to defend, the particular blend of internalism and externalism in my view of epistemic justification. So far as I know, this is my own private blend;² many, I'm afraid, will not take that as a recommendation. Be that as it may, it's mine, and it's what I will set forth in this paper. I will first have to present the general contours of the position, as a basis for specifying the points at which we have an internalism-externalism issue. I won't have time to defend the general position, or even to present more than a sketch. Such defence as will be offered will be directed to the internalist and externalist features.

In a word, my view is that to be justified in believing that *p* is for that belief *to be based on an adequate ground*. To explain what I mean by this I will have to say something about the correlative terms 'based' on and 'ground' and about the *adequacy* of grounds.

The ground of a belief is what it is based on. The notion of *based on* is a difficult one. I am not aware that anyone has succeeded in giving an adequate and illuminating general explanation of it. It seems clear that some kind of causal dependence is involved, whether the belief is based on other beliefs or on experience. If my belief that it rained last night is based on my belief that the streets are wet, then I hold the former belief *because* I hold the latter belief; my holding the latter belief *explains* my holding the former. Similarly, if my belief that the streets are wet is based on their looking wet, I believe that they are wet *because* of the way they look, and their looking that way *explains* my believing that they are wet. And presumably these are relations of causal dependence. But, equally clearly, not just any kind of causal dependence will do. My belief that *p* is causally dependent on a certain physiological state of my brain, but the former is not based on the latter. How is *being based on* distinguished from other sorts of causal dependence? We have a clear answer to this question for cases of maximally explicit inference, where I come to believe that *p*

Synthese 74 (1988) 265–283.

© 1988 by Kluwer Academic Publishers.

because I see (or at least take it) that it is adequately supported by the fact that *q* (which I believe). And where the ground is experiential we can also come to believe that *p* because we take its truth to be adequately indicated by the experience from which it arises. In these cases the belief forming process is *guided* by our belief in the adequate support relation, and this marks them out as cases of a belief's being based on a ground, rather than just causally depending on something.³ A belief, however, may be based on other beliefs or on experiences, where no such guiding belief in support relations is in evidence.⁴ My belief that you are upset may be based on various aspects of the way you look and act without my consciously believing that these features provide adequate support for that belief; in a typical case of this sort I have no such belief simply because I am not consciously aware of which features these are; I do not consciously discriminate them. And even where I am more explicitly aware of the ground I may not consciously believe anything at all about support relations. It is very dubious that very small children, e.g., ever have such support beliefs; and yet surely a small child's belief that the kitten is sick can be based on her belief that the kitten is not running around as usual. But then what feature is common to all cases of a belief's being *based on* something and serves to distinguish this kind of causal dependence from other kinds? Here I will have to content myself with making a suggestion. Wherever it is clear that a belief is *based on* another belief or on an experience, the belief forming "process" or "mechanism" is *taking account* of that ground or features thereof, being *guided* by it, even if this does not involve the conscious utilisation of a belief in a support relation. To say that my belief that the streets are wet is based on the way they look is to say that in forming a belief about the condition of the streets I (or the belief forming "mechanism") am differentially sensitive to the way the streets look; the mechanism is so constituted that the belief formed about the streets will be some, possibly very complex, function of the visual experience input. Even where an explicit belief in a support relation is absent, the belief formation is the result of a *taking account* of features of the experience and forming the belief *in the light of* them, rather than just involving some sub-cognitive transaction.⁵ Much more could and should be said about this, but the foregoing will have to suffice for now. In any event, whether or not this suggestion is along the right line, I shall take it that we have an adequate working grasp of the notion of a belief's being

based on something, and that this suffices for the concerns of this paper.

In the foregoing I was speaking of the ground of a belief as playing a role in its formation. That is not the whole story. It is often pointed out that a belief may acquire a new basis after its initial acquisition. However the role of post-origination bases in justification is a complex matter, one not at all adequately dealt with in the epistemological literature. To keep things manageable for this short conspectus of my view, I shall restrict myself to bases on which a belief is originally formed. That means, in effect, that the discussion will be limited to what it takes for a belief to be justified at the moment of its acquisition.

In taking the justification of a belief to be determined by what it is based on, I am reflecting the subject-relative character of justification. I may be justified in believing that *p* while you are not. Indeed, justification is time as well as subject relative; I may be justified in believing that *p* at one time but not at another.⁶ Whether I am justified in believing that *p* is a matter of how I am situated vis-a-vis the content of that belief. In my view, that is cashed out in terms of what the subject was “going on” in supposing the proposition in question to be true, on what basis she supposed *p* to be the case.⁷

What sorts of things do subjects go on in holding beliefs? The examples given above suggest that the prime candidates are the subject's other beliefs and experiences; and I shall consider grounds to be restricted to items of those two categories. Though I will offer no a priori or transcendental argument for this, I will adopt the plausible supposition that where the input to a belief forming mechanism is properly thought of as *what the belief is based on*, it will be either a belief or an experience. But we must tread carefully here. Where a philosopher or a psychologist would say that *S*'s belief that it rained last night is based on *S*'s belief that the streets are wet, *S* would probably say, if he were aware of the basis of his belief, that his ground, basis, or reason for believing that it rained last night is the *fact* that the streets are wet. The ordinary way of talking about reasons specifies the (putative) fact believed as the reason rather than the belief.⁸ I think we can set up the matter either way. I choose to use ‘ground’ for the psychological input to the belief forming mechanism, i.e., the belief or experience, thus deviating from the most ordinary way of speaking of these matters.

I need to be more explicit about how grounds are specified in my account. I can best approach this by considering a difficulty raised by Marshall Swain in his comments on this paper at the Brown conference. Swain wrote as follows:

Suppose two subjects, Smith and Jones, who have the same evidence (grounds) for the belief that p , where the evidence consists of the proposition $p \vee (p \& q)$. Both subjects come to believe that p on this basis of the evidence (and no other evidence). In the case of Smith, the mechanism for generating the belief is an inference which instantiates a tendency to invalidly infer p from any sentence of the form ' $p \vee q$ '. In the case of Jones, the mechanism is an inference which is based on an internalized valid inference schema (of which several are possible). It seems clear to me that only Jones has a justified belief that p , even though they have the same grounds.

Such cases can be proliferated indefinitely. For an example involving experiential grounds, consider two persons, A and B , who come to believe that a collie is in the room on the basis of qualitatively identical visual experiences. But A recognizes the dog as a collie on the basis of distinctively collie features, whereas B would take any largish dog to be a collie. Again, it would seem that A is justified in his belief while B is not, even though they have the same grounds for a belief with the same propositional content.⁹ Swain takes it that such cases show that characteristics of the subject must be brought into the account in addition to what we have introduced.

However, I believe that unwanted applications like these can be excluded just by giving a sufficiently discriminating specification of grounds. As I am using the term, the "ground" for a belief is not what we might call the total concrete input to the belief forming mechanism, but rather those features of that input that are actually taken account of in forming the belief, in, so to say, "choosing" a propositional content for a belief. In Swain's case, the only feature of the belief input taken account of by Smith was that its propositional object was of the form ' $p \vee q$ '. No further features of the input were playing a role in that belief formation; no further features were "guiding" the operation of the belief forming mechanism, whereas in Jones' case the belief formation was guided by the fact that the input belief had a propositional content of the form ' $p \vee (p \vee q)$ '. In Smith's case any input of the ' $p \vee q$ ' form would have led to the same doxastic output, whereas for Jones many other inputs of that form would *not* have led to the formation of a belief that p . Thus, strictly speaking, the grounds were different. Similarly in the canine identification case, for

A the ground was the object's visually presenting certain features that are in fact distinctively collie-like, whereas for B the ground was the object's visually presenting itself as a largish dog.

We may sum this up by saying that the ground of a belief is made up of those features of the input to the formation of that belief that were actually taken account of in the belief formation. (Again, remember that our discussion is restricted to the bases of beliefs when formed.)

Not every grounded belief will be justified, but only one that has an *adequate* ground. To get at the appropriate criterion of adequacy, let's note that a belief's *being justified* is a favorable status vis-a-vis the basic aim of believing or, more generally, of cognition, viz., to believe truly rather than falsely. For a ground to be favorable relative to this aim it must be "truth conducive"; it must be sufficiently indicative of the truth of the belief it grounds. In other terms, the ground must be such that the *probability* of the belief's being true, given that ground, is very high. It is an objective probability that is in question here. The world is such that, at least in the kinds of situations in which we typically find ourselves, the ground is a reliable indication of the fact believed. In this paper I will not attempt to spell out the kind of objective probability being appealed to. So far as I am aware, no adequate conception of this sort of probability (or perhaps of any other sort) has been developed. Suffice it to say that I am thinking in terms of some kind of "tendency" conception of probability, where the lawful structure of the world is such that one state of affairs renders another more or less probable.

The ambiguity noted earlier as to what constitutes a ground has to be dealt with here as well. Suppose that the ground of my belief that *p* is my belief that *q*. In order that the former belief be justified is it required that the belief that *q* be a reliable indication of the truth of the belief that *p*, or is it required that the fact that *q* be a reliable indication? The latter is the ordinary way of thinking about the matter. If my belief that Jones is having a party is based on my belief that there are a lot of cars around his house, then just as I would ordinarily cite the *fact* that there are a lot of cars around his house as my reason for supposing that he is having a party, so I would think that my reason is an adequate one because the former *fact* is a reliable indication of the latter one. However the adequacy requirement could be set up in either way. To appreciate this let's first note that in either case the belief that *p* will be justified only if the grounding belief be

justified (a stronger requirement would be that the grounding belief constitute knowledge, but I won't go that far). Even if the fact that q is a highly reliable indication that p , that won't render my belief that p justified by virtue of being based on a belief that q unless I am justified in believing that q . An unjustified belief cannot transfer justification to another belief via the basis relation. But if I am justified in believing that q and if q is a reliable indication of p , then my belief that q will also be a (perhaps slightly less) reliable indication that p , provided a belief cannot be justified unless its ground renders it likely to be true. For in that case my having a justified belief that q renders it likely that q , which in turn renders it likely that p . And so if q is a strong indication of the truth of p , so is my belief that q (assuming that we don't lose too much of the strength of indication in the probabilistic relation between the justified belief that q and q). This being the case, I will simplify matters for purposes of this paper by taking the adequacy of a ground to depend on *its* being a sufficiently strong indication of the truth of the belief grounded.

2.

Now we are in a position to say what is internalist and what is externalist about this position, and to make a start, at least, in defending our choices. The view is internalist most basically, and most minimally, by virtue of the requirement that there be a ground of the belief. As we have made explicit, the ground must be a psychological state of the subject and hence "internal" to the subject in an important sense. Facts that obtain independently of the subject's psyche, however favorable to the truth of the belief in question, cannot be *grounds* of the belief in the required sense.

But this is only a weak form of internalism, one that would hardly be deemed worthy of the name by those who flaunt the label. There are, in fact, several constraints on justification that have gone under this title. In Alston (1986a) I distinguish two main forms: *Perspectival Internalism* (PI), according to which only what is within the subject's perspective in the sense of being something the subject knows or justifiably believes can serve to justify; and *Accessibility Internalism* (AI), according to which only that to which the subject has cognitive access in some specially strong form can be a justifier. However, it is now clear to me that I should have added at least one more version,

Consciousness Internalism (CI), according to which only those states of affairs of which the subject is actually conscious or aware can serve to justify.¹⁰

In 'Internalism and Externalism in Epistemology' I argued against PI, partly on the grounds that its only visible means of support is from an unacceptable deontological conception of justification that makes unrealistic assumptions about the voluntary control of belief, and partly on the grounds that it rules out the possibility of immediate justification by experience of such things as introspective and perceptual beliefs. CI has the crushing disability that one can never complete the formulation of a sufficient condition for justification. For suppose that we begin by taking condition *C* to be sufficient for the justification of *S*'s belief that *p*. But then we must add that *S* must be aware of *C* (i.e., the satisfaction of condition *C*) in order to be justified. Call this enriched condition *C*1. But then *C*1 is not enough by itself either; *S* must be aware of *C*1. So that must be added to yield a still richer condition, *C*2. And so on ad infinitum. Any thesis that implies that it is in principle impossible to complete a statement of conditions sufficient for justification is surely unacceptable.¹¹

I find AI to be much more promising. To be sure, many formulations are, I believe, much too strong to be defensible. Thus Carl Ginet's version is in terms of what he calls being "directly recognizable":

Every one of every set of facts about *S*'s position that minimally suffices to make *S*, at a given time, justified in being confident that *p* must be *directly recognizable* to *S* at that time. By 'directly recognizable' I mean this: if a certain fact obtains, then it is directly recognizable to *S* at a given time if and only if, provided that *S* at that time has the concept of that sort of fact, *S* needs at that time only to reflect clear-headedly on the question of whether or not that fact obtains in order to know that it does. (1975, p. 34)

But there are very plausible conditions for justification that are not directly recognizable in this sense. Consider, e.g., the familiar situation in which I recognize something or someone on the basis of subtle perceptual cues I am unable to specify, even on careful reflection. Here it seems correct to say that my belief that the person before me is John Jones is justified, if it is, by virtue of being based on a visual experience with such-and-such features, where the experience's having those features is crucial for its providing justification. But those features are not "directly recognizable" by me. Or again consider the familiar situation of a belief, e.g., that Republicans are unlikely to be

tough on big business, that is based on a wide diversity of evidence, most of which I cannot specify even after careful reflection. Ginet's form of AI is too stringent to be suited to our condition.¹²

However, I believe that it is possible to support a more moderate version of AI. To determine just what sort of accessibility is required I had better make explicit what I see as the source of the requirement. I find widely shared and strong intuitions in favor of some kind of accessibility requirement for justification. We expect that if there is something that justifies my belief that *p* I will be able to determine what it is. We find something incongruous, or conceptually impossible, in the notion of my being justified in believing that *p* while totally lacking any capacity to determine what is responsible for that justification. Thus when reliability theorists of justification maintain that any reliably formed belief is ipso facto justified, most of us balk. For since it is possible for a belief to be reliably formed without the subject's having any capacity to determine this, and, indeed, without there being anything accessible to the subject on which the belief is based – as when invariably correct beliefs about the future of the stock market seem to pop out of nowhere – it seems clear to many of us that reliable belief formation cannot be sufficient for justification.

Why these intuitions? Why is some kind of accessibility required for justification? Is this just a basic constituent of the concept? Or can it be derived from other more basic components? I myself do not see any way to argue from other “parts” of the concept to this one. Hence I will not attempt to *prove* that accessibility is required for justification. But I believe that we can get some understanding of the presence of this accessibility requirement by considering the larger context out of which the concept of epistemic justification has developed and which gives it its distinctive importance. Thus I will attempt to *explain* the presence of the requirement.

First I want to call attention to a view of justification I do not accept. Suppose, with pragmatists like Peirce and Dewey and other contextualists, we focus on the *activity* of *justifying* beliefs to the exclusion of the *state* of *being justified* in holding a belief. The whole topic of epistemic justification will then be confined to the question of what it takes to successfully carry out the activity of justifying a belief, *showing* it to be something one is entitled to believe, establishing its credentials, responding to challenges to its legitimacy, and so on. But then the only considerations that can have any bearing on justification

(i.e., on the successful outcome of such an activity) are those that are cognitively accessible to the subject. For only those can be appealed to in order to justify the belief.

Now I have no temptation to restrict the topic of epistemic justification to the activity of justifying. Surely epistemology is concerned with the epistemic status of beliefs with respect to which no activity of justifying has been carried on. We want to know whether people are justified in holding normal perceptual beliefs, normal memory beliefs, beliefs in generalizations concerning how things generally go in the physical world, beliefs about the attitudes of other people, religious beliefs, and so on, even where, as is usually the case, such beliefs have not been subjected to an attempt to justify. It is quite arbitrary to ban such concerns from epistemology.

But though the activity of responding to challenges is not the whole story, I do believe that in a way it is fundamental to the concept of *being justified*. Why is it that we have this concept of *being justified in holding a belief* and why is it important to us? I suggest that the concept was developed, and got its hold on us, because of the practice of critical reflection on our beliefs, of challenging their credentials and responding to such challenges – in short the practice of attempting to *justify* beliefs. Suppose there were no such practice; suppose that no one ever challenges the credentials of anyone's beliefs; suppose that no one ever critically reflects on the grounds or basis of one's own beliefs. In that case would we be interested in determining whether one or another belief *is* justified? I think not. It is only because we participate in such activities, only because we are alive to their importance, that the question of whether someone is in a state of *being justified* in holding a belief is of live interest to us. I am not suggesting that being justified is a matter of engaging in, or successfully engaging in, the activity of justifying. I am not even affirming the less obviously false thesis that being justified in believing that *p* is a matter of *being able to* successfully justify the belief. Many persons are justified in many beliefs without possessing the intellectual or verbal skills to exhibit what justifies those beliefs. Thus the *fact* of being justified is not dependent on any particular actual or possible activity of justifying. What I am suggesting is that those facts of justification would not have the interest and importance for us that they do have if we were not party to a social practice of demanding justification and responding to such demands.

Now for the bearing of this on AI. I want to further suggest that this social practice has strongly influenced the development of the *concept* of being justified. What has emerged from this development is the concept of *what would have to be specified to carry out a successful justification of the belief*. Our conception of what a belief needs in the way of a basis in order to *be justified* is the conception of that the specification of which in answer to a challenge would suffice to answer that challenge. But then it is quite understandable that the concept should include the requirement that the justifier be accessible to the subject. For only what the subject can ascertain can be cited by that subject in response to a challenge. This, I believe, provides the explanation for the presence of the AI constraint on justification.

Now that we have a rationale for an AI constraint, let's see just what form of the constraint is dictated by that rationale. There are at least two matters to be decided: (a) what is required to be accessible; (b) what degree of accessibility is to be required.

As for (a), the most important distinction is between (1) the "justifier", i.e., the ground of the belief, and (2) its adequacy or justificatory efficacy: its "truth-conduciveness". I'm going to save adequacy for the next section and concentrate here on the justifier. But there are still choices. Should we say that in order for *S*'s belief that *p* to be justified by being based on a ground, *G*, *G* itself, that very individual ground, must be accessible to *S*? Or is it enough that *G* is the sort of thing that is typically accessible to normal human subjects? The latter, weaker requirement would allow a justifying ground in a particular case to be a belief that is not in fact accessible to the subject's consciousness, because of repression, a cognitive overload, or whatever, provided beliefs are in general the sort of thing to which subjects have cognitive access. The rationale offered above for AI would demand of every justifying ground that it itself be available for citation, but only that it be the *sort* of thing that is, in general, so available. We were not arguing that it is conceptually necessary, or even universally true, that a justifying ground can be cited in response to a challenge. We were only contending that the concept of being justified in believing that *p* (including the concept of a justifying ground for a belief) has been developed against the background of the practice of citing grounds in defence of assertions. This looser sort of relationship of justifying grounds to the activity of justifying supports at most the weaker requirement that a justifying

ground is the sort of thing that, in general or when nothing interferes, is available for citation by the subject. And it is just as well that only this weaker requirement is mandated, for, because of the considerations adduced in criticizing Ginet's form of AI, it seems that we must allow cases in which the basis of a belief is blocked from consciousness through some special features of that situation. Thus we are free to recognize cases of justification in which the complexity of the grounds or the rapidity of their appearance and disappearance renders the subject unable to store and retrieve them as she would have to in order to cite them in answer to a challenge.

Now for degree. Just *how* does a kind of state have to be generally accessible to its subject in order to be a candidate for a justifying ground? I have already argued that Ginet's version of AI is too demanding to be realistic. On the other hand, if we simply require that justifiers be the sorts of things that are knowable in principle by the subject, somehow or other, that is too weak. That would allow anything to count as a justifier that it is not *impossible* for the subject to come to know about. That would not even rule out neurophysiological states of the brain about which no one knows anything now. What is needed here is a concept of something like "fairly direct accessibility". In order that justifiers be generally available for presentation as the legitimizers of the belief, they must be fairly readily available to the subject through some mode of access much quicker than lengthy research, observation, or experimentation. It seems reasonable to follow Ginet's lead and suggest that to be a justifier an item must be the sort of thing that, in general, a subject can explicitly note the presence of just by sufficient reflection on his situation. However the amount and depth of reflection needed for this will vary in different cases. I want to avoid the claim that justifiers can always be spotted right away, just by raising the question. I don't know how to make this notion of "fairly direct accessibility" precise, and I suspect that it may be impossible to do so. Perhaps our concept of justification is not itself precise enough to require a precise degree of ease or rapidity of access. Let's just say that to be a justifier of a belief, its ground must be the sort of thing whose instances are fairly directly accessible to their subject on reflection.

I am going to just mention in passing another internalist feature of this position. Being based on an adequate ground is sufficient only for *prima facie* justification, justification that can be overridden by

sufficient reasons to the contrary from the subject's stock of knowledge and justified belief.¹³ Even if *S*'s belief that *p* is based on a ground that renders it highly probable that *p*, still if *S* knows, or justifiably believes, something that is strongly indicative of the falsity of *p*, or something that together with the ground fails to probabilify *p*, then that *prima facie* justification is overridden and *S* is not, *ultima facie*, justified in believing that *p*. Since the fate of *prima facie* justification is determined by what is in the subject's perspective on the world, rather than by the way the world is, this is an additional internalist factor, though as the last footnote makes explicit, not of the AI sort.

3.

So much for internalism. Now where is the externalism? To see where that comes in we must move from the accessibility of grounds, which we have just been discussing, to the accessibility of the adequacy of grounds. More generally, we will need to consider various sorts of internalist requirements for justification that have to do with the adequacy of grounds. The externalism of my position will consist in the rejection of all such requirements. The first distinction to be made between such requirements concerns whether the requirement is proffered as necessary or sufficient. I shall take them in that order.

Let's go back to the distinction between PI and AI. (We may ignore CI in this connection, since we are unlikely to find a plausible way of construing the notion of an "awareness" or "consciousness" of the *adequacy* of a ground.) A PI necessary condition in this area would presumably run as follows.

- (I) One is justified in believing that *p* only if one knows or is justified in believing that the ground of that belief is an adequate one.

Let's focus on the justified belief alternative. This requirement labors under the very considerable disadvantage of requiring an infinite hierarchy of justified beliefs in order to be justified in any belief. For the requirement will also apply to the higher level belief that the ground of the belief that *p* is adequate. (Call the propositional content of this higher level belief '*q*'.) To be justified in the belief that *q* one must be justified in believing that *its* ground is adequate. Call the

propositional object of this still higher level belief '*r*'. Then to be justified in believing that *r* one must be justified in the still higher level belief that the ground of one's belief that *r* is an adequate one . . . Since it seems clear that no human being is capable of possessing all at once an infinite hierarchy of beliefs, it is equally clear that this requirement allows no one to have any justified beliefs. And that should be a sufficient basis for rejecting it.

The story with AI is somewhat different. First we have to decide on what is to count as "accessibility to the adequacy of the ground". The most obvious suggestion would be that accessibility consists in the capacity of the subject to come into the state required by the PI requirement, viz., being justified in believing that the ground of the target belief that *p* is adequate. We can then add the specification of the required degree and mode of accessibility. This will give us the following.

- (II) *S* is justified in believing that *p* only if *S* is capable, fairly readily on the basis of reflection, to acquire a justified belief that the ground of *S*'s belief that *p* is an adequate one.

Clearly (II), unlike (I), does not imply that *S* has an infinite hierarchy of justified beliefs. For (II) does not require that *S* actually have a justified higher level belief for each belief in the hierarchy, but only that, for each justified belief she actually has, it is possible for her to acquire, by a certain route, an appropriately related justified higher level belief. To be sure, this does imply that *S* has, as we might say, an infinite hierarchy of possibilities for the acquisition of justified beliefs. But it is not at all clear that this is impossible, in the way it is clearly impossible for one of us to have an infinite hierarchy of actually justified beliefs. Thus I will have to find some other reason for rejecting (II).

That reason can be found by turning from possibility to actuality. Though it may well be within the limits of human capacity, it is by no means always the case that the subject of a justified belief is capable of determining the adequacy of his ground, just by careful reflection on the matter, or, indeed, in any other way. For one thing, many subjects are not at the level of conceptual sophistication to even raise the question of adequacy of ground, much less determine an answer by reflection. One thinks here of small children and, I fear, many adults as well. The maximally unsophisticated human perceiver is surely

often justified in believing that what he sees to be the case is the case, even though he is in no position to even raise a question about the adequacy of his grounds. But even if capable of raising the question, he may not be able to arrive at a justified answer. Our judgment on this will depend on what requirements we lay down for the justification of beliefs. As I made explicit at the outset of this essay, it seems clear to me that epistemic justification is essentially truth-conducive. That means that no conditions are sufficient for the justification of the belief in adequacy unless those conditions imply that the belief is at least likely to be true. Thus to become justified in a belief in the adequacy of grounds one would have to have evidence that makes it likely that a belief like that is or would be sufficiently often true when based on a ground like that, at least in the sorts of situations in which we typically find ourselves; and one would have to base the belief in adequacy on that evidence. And many, or most, subjects are just not up to this. Consider, e.g., all the things we believe on authority. If we have been trained properly we generally recognize the marks of competence in an area, and when we believe the pronouncements of one who exhibits those marks we are believing on adequate grounds, proceeding aright in our belief formation, and so epistemically justified. But how many of us can, on reflection, come up with adequate evidence on which to base the belief that a given putative authority is to be relied on? Very few of us. (II) would imply that we are rarely justified in believing on authority, even when we are utilising what we have been trained to recognize as marks of authority, marks that are indeed reliable indications of expertise.

A weaker AI condition on adequacy of grounds would be the following.

- (III) *S* is justified in believing that *p* only if *S* has adequate grounds for a judgment that the grounds for *S*'s belief that *p* are adequate.

This is weaker than (II) because it does not require that *S* actually be able to acquire a justified belief about adequacy, whether just on reflection or otherwise. It only requires that she "have" the grounds (evidence, experiences, or whatever) that would serve to justify such a belief if that belief were based on those grounds. A subject could conceivably satisfy (III) even if she lacked the conceptual equipment to formulate the issue of adequacy. Nevertheless, the considerations I

have advanced make it dubious that even this condition is met by all or most justified believers. Do I have the evidence it would take to adequately support a belief that my present perceptual grounds for believing that there is a maple tree near my study window are adequate? I very much doubt it. Even if we can overcome problems of circularity (relying on other perceptual beliefs to support the claim that this perceptual ground is adequate), as I believe we can,¹⁴ it seems very dubious that we store enough observational evidence to constitute adequate evidence for the thesis that normal sensory experience is an adequate ground for our beliefs about the physical environment. No doubt our experience reinforces our tendency to believe this, but that is another matter. For these and other reasons, I very much doubt that all or most justified believers satisfy (III).

We must, of course, be alive to the point that our AI principle concerning the presence of the ground did not require that the ground be fairly directly accessible to the subject in each case, but only that it be the sort of thing that is typically so accessible. This suggests a weakening of (I)–(III) so that the requirement is not that so-and-so be true in each case, but only that it be generally or normally the case. But if the above contentions are sound, these weaker principles would be excluded also. For I have argued that it is not even generally or typically the case that, taking (II) as our example, one who has a justified belief that *p* is capable of arriving fairly readily at a justified belief that the ground of his belief that *p* is an adequate one.

What about an internalist *sufficient* condition for this “adequacy of ground” component of justification? Here again we will have both PI and AI versions. Let’s say that the PI version takes it as sufficient for the justification of *S*’s belief that *p* that:

- (IV) *S*’s belief that *p* is based on an accessible ground that *S* is justified in supposing to be adequate.

The AI version can be construed as taking the sufficient condition (in addition to the belief’s having an accessible ground) to consist in the appropriate sort of possibility of *S*’s satisfying (IV). More explicitly:

- (V) *S*’s belief that *p* is based on an accessible ground such that *S* can fairly readily come to have a justified belief that this ground is an adequate one.

Since the PI condition is stronger, it will suffice to show that it is not strong enough.¹⁵

The crucial question here is whether (IV) insures truth conducivity, which we saw at the beginning of the paper to be an essential feature of epistemic justification. And this boils down to the question of whether *S*'s being justified in supposing the ground of his belief in *p* to be adequate guarantees that the belief that *p* is likely to be true. This depends on both the concept of adequacy and the concept of justification used in (IV). If (IV) employs a non-truth-indicative concept of adequacy, the game is up right away. Suppose, e.g., that an adequate ground for a belief that *p* is one on which a confident belief of this sort is customarily based. In that case likelihood of truth is not ensured even by the ground's *being* adequate, much less by *S*'s being justified in supposing it to be adequate. Let's take it, then, that our PI internalist is using our concept of a ground's *being* adequate; his difference from us is simply that where we require for justification that the ground *be* adequate, he takes it sufficient that *S* be justified in supposing it to be adequate. But then we must ask what concept of justification he is using. If he were using our concept of justification in (IV), the satisfaction of that condition would imply that *p* is likely to be true. For if *S* is justified in believing the ground to be adequate, on our concept of justification, then the belief that the ground is adequate is thereby likely to be true; and so, if there is not too much leakage in the double probabilification, the likelihood that the ground of the belief that *p* is adequate implies in turn that it is likely that *p*. But this would mean that our internalist opponent avoids our concept of justification (requiring actual adequacy of ground) at the first level only to embrace it at the second and, presumably, at all higher levels. The only effect of this is that the implication of truth-conducivity at the first level is somewhat weaker than on our view; since whereas we flat-out require adequacy at the first level, his view only requires the likelihood of adequacy. But this difference lacks motivation, and in any event it certainly doesn't give his view a distinctively *internalist* cast in contrast to ours, since he uses our concept of justification at all higher levels. Hence if our opponent is to be more than a paper internalist, he will have to be using some non-truth-conducive conception of justification at the higher levels;¹⁶ and in that case the fact that *S* is justified in believing that the ground of his belief that *p* is

adequate has no tendency to imply that the ground *is* adequate, and hence no tendency to imply that *p* is (likely to be) true. And therefore (IV) cannot be sufficient for epistemic justification.

Thus it would seem that internalist conditions concerning adequacy are neither necessary nor sufficient for justification. And so the view here being defended is resolutely and uncompromisingly externalist, so far as adequacy of grounds is concerned. In order for my belief that *p*, which is based on ground *G*, to be justified, it is quite sufficient, as well as necessary, that *G* be sufficiently indicative of the truth of *p*. It is in no way required that I know anything, or be justified in believing anything, about this relationship. No doubt, we sometimes do have justified beliefs about the adequacy of our grounds, and that is certainly a good thing. But that is icing on the cake.

4.

In this paper I have proposed an account of the *prima facie* epistemic justification of beliefs according to which that amounts to a belief's having an adequate ground. The justification will be *ultima facie* provided there are not sufficient overrides from within the subject's knowledge and justified belief. I have given reasons for placing a (rather weak) AI constraint on something's being a ground that could justify a belief, but I have resisted attempts to put any internalist constraint on what constitutes the adequacy of a ground. There I have insisted that it is both necessary and sufficient that the world be such that the ground be "sufficiently indicative of the truth" of the belief, both necessary and sufficient that this actually be the case, and neither necessary nor sufficient that the subject have any cognitive grasp of this fact. Thus my position has definite affinities with reliabilism, especially with that variant thereof sometimes called a "reliable indication" view, as contrasted with a "reliable process" view.¹⁷ But it differs from a pure reliabilism by holding that the justification of a belief requires that the belief be based on a "ground" that satisfies an AI constraint, as well as by letting the subject's perspective on the world determine whether overriding occurs.¹⁸ Beliefs that, so far as the subject can tell, just pop into his head out of nowhere would not be counted as justified on this position. I do hold that mere reliable belief production, suitably construed, is sufficient for knowledge, but that is another story.

NOTES

¹ An earlier version of this paper was delivered at a Conference on Epistemic Justification, honoring Roderick Chisholm, at Brown University in November, 1986. I am grateful to the participants in that conference for many penetrating remarks, and especially to my commentator, Marshall Swain.

² The position does, however, bear a marked family resemblance to that put forward in Swain (1981).

³ For an elaborate development of this idea, along with much else relevant to the notion of believing for a reason, see Audi (1986).

⁴ Audi in the article referred to in the previous note alleges that there are such "connecting beliefs", as he calls them, in every case of "believing for a reason" (what I am calling beliefs based on other beliefs). However I do not find his arguments for this compelling.

⁵ It may be contended that where such "taking account" is involved, this amounts to the subject's having and using a belief in a support relation. And perhaps this is right, for a minimal, low-level grade of belief possession and use. However one could "have" and "use" the belief in this way without the belief's being available for conscious entertainment, assertion, or use in inference.

⁶ For simplicity of exposition I shall omit temporal qualifiers from my formulations, but they are to be understood. Thus, a tacit 'at *t*' qualifies 'S is justified in believing that *p*'.

⁷ Admittedly there are other ways of cashing out this general idea of subject-relativity, e.g., by making justification hang on what the subject "had to go on" by way of support, rather than on what the subject actually went on, but I won't have time to go into those alternatives.

⁸ With experiential grounds we do not have the same problem, for, at least as I am thinking of it, an experiential ground is not, *qua* experiential ground, a propositional attitude, or set thereof, like a belief, so that here there is no propositional or factive object to serve as a ground rather than the experience itself. One who does take experiences to be essentially propositional attitudes will find the same problem as with doxastic grounds.

⁹ This is similar to problem cases involving perceptual discrimination introduced in Goldman (1976).

¹⁰ For an example of CI see Moser (1985), p. 174.

¹¹ The proponent of CI might seek to avoid this consequence by construing the awareness requirement not as part of the condition for justification but as a constraint on what can be a sufficient condition for justification. Indeed this is the way Moser (1985) formulates it on p. 174 "...we should require that one have some kind of awareness of the justifying conditions of one's given-beliefs". The suggestion is that the awareness does not itself form part of the justifying conditions. But I take this to be a shuffling evasion. If the awareness of condition *C* is required for justification, then it is an essential part of a sufficient condition for justification, whatever the theorist chooses to call it.

¹² I might also add that AI is typically supported by inconclusive arguments from an unacceptable deontological conception of justification. For details see Alston (1986a).

¹³ More generally, the points made in this paper specifically concern prima facie justification. For example the accessibility constraint on grounds does not apply to the subject's perspective as a whole, from which overrides emerge. Or, to put the point

more modestly, nothing I say in this paper gives any support to the idea that in order for something the subject knows or justifiably believes to override a prima facie justification that something has to be fairly readily accessible to the subject.

¹⁴ See Alston (1986b) for a defence of this view.

¹⁵ Note that if the condition is asserted only as sufficient and not also as necessary, no infinite hierarchy can be shown to follow even from the PI version. Since the claim is compatible with there being other sufficient conditions of justification, it does not imply that one can be justified in believing that *p* only if one has an infinite hierarchy of justified beliefs. But, of course, if other sufficient conditions are countenanced the position would lose its distinctively internalist clout.

¹⁶ We have not ruled out the possibility that our opponent is using, in (IV), some truth-conducive concept of justification other than ours, e.g., a straight reliability concept according to which it is sufficient for the justification of a belief that it have been acquired in some reliable way. But if that's what he's doing, he turns out to be even less internalist than if he had used our concept.

¹⁷ To be sure, in explaining early on in the paper the way in which I pick out grounds, I appealed to features of the *process* of belief formation. (I am indebted to Hilary Kornblith and Alvin Goldman for calling this to my attention.) Nevertheless, reliability enters into my formulation of what is necessary and sufficient for justification by way of the truth indicativeness of the ground, rather than by way of the reliability of any belief forming process.

¹⁸ I would suggest that much of the plausibility of some prominent attacks on externalism in general and reliabilism in particular stems from a failure to distinguish externalism with respect to the ground and with respect to its adequacy. See, e.g., Bonjour (1985), Ch. 3, and Richard Foley (1985), pp. 188–202.

REFERENCES

- Alston, W. P.: 1986a, 'Internalism and Externalism in Epistemology', *Philosophical Topics* **XIV**, 79–221.
- Alston, W. P.: 1986b, 'Epistemic Circularity', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* **XLVII**, 1–30.
- Audi, Robert: 1986, 'Belief, Reason, and Inference', *Philosophical Topics* **XIV**, 27–65.
- Bonjour, Laurence: 1985, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- Foley, Richard: 1985, 'What's Wrong With Reliabilism?', *The Monist* **68**, 188–202.
- Ginet, Carl: 1975, *Knowledge, Perception, and Memory*, D. Reidel, Dordrecht.
- Goldman, Alvin I.: 1976, 'Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge', *Journal of Philosophy* **73**, 771–91.
- Moser, Paul K.: 1985, *Empirical Justification*, D. Reidel, Dordrecht.
- Swain, Marshall: 1981, *Reasons and Knowledge*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York.

Department of Philosophy
Syracuse University
Syracuse, NY 13210
U.S.A.