

## COMMENTS AND CRITICISM

## AN INSUBSTANTIAL EXTERNALISM\*

In one of his recent articles published in this JOURNAL,<sup>1</sup> Alvin I. Goldman argues that since one must count epistemic rules among the factors that help to fix the justificational status of agents (generally called *J-factors*), not all J-factors are internalist, that is, intrinsic to the agent whose justificational status they help to fix.<sup>2</sup> After all, for an epistemic rule to count as a genuine J-factor, it must be objectively correct and, therefore, “independent of any and all minds.”<sup>3</sup> Consequently, it cannot be intrinsic to any particular epistemic agent. In this brief commentary, I will argue that Goldman’s argument misunderstands what it takes for epistemic justification to be internalist and, therefore, fails to guarantee his externalist conclusion. In particular, I want to demonstrate that Goldman’s argument trivializes the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic properties that lays at the basis of the internalist/externalist debate. I will show that, if sound, simple variations on Goldman’s argument could be used to prove the absurd conclusion that all properties are extrinsic. Now, since the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction is fundamental to debates in several areas of philosophy, not only the internalist/externalist debate in epistemology, I conclude that Goldman’s argument cannot be sound.

This commentary will proceed as follows. First, I will present Goldman’s argument against internalism from section VII of his aforementioned article. Then, I will explain how Goldman’s way of presenting the internalist/externalist debate in epistemology is related to the intrinsic/extrinsic debate in the metaphysics of properties. Finally, I will show how a simple variation on Goldman’s argument can be used to prove that, for any object *a* and any of its properties *P*, *a* is

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<sup>1</sup> Alvin I. Goldman, “Internalism, Externalism, and the Architecture of Justification,” this JOURNAL, CVI, 6 (June 2009): 309–38.

<sup>2</sup> The relevant extrinsic/intrinsic distinction here is not the “global” classification of properties, but the “local” classification of ways an individual may have a property. See I. L. Humberstone, “Intrinsic/Extrinsic,” *Synthese*, CVIII, 2 (August 1996): 205–67. Carrie Figdor, “Intrinsically/Extrinsically,” this JOURNAL, CV, 11 (November 2008): 691–718, prefers to use the terms “extrinsically” and “intrinsically,” so in this paper I will speak interchangeably of a property being intrinsic (extrinsic) to an object and the object having the property intrinsically (extrinsically).

<sup>3</sup> Goldman, *op. cit.*, p. 317.

extrinsically *P*. As an illustration, I will adapt Goldman's argument to derive the mistaken conclusion that the CD I am currently listening to is extrinsically round. Thus, Goldman's original argument will be proved unsound.

Goldman's original argument is best understood as a *reductio ad absurdum* against internalism. It starts by assuming that every justified doxastic state token is so in virtue of conditions (circumstances or causes) internal to the agent. From this assumption, Goldman derives the necessity of postulating an epistemic norm that links such conditions with the justification they are assumed to help explain. Finally, since this norm both helps explain why the agent is justified (and thus must count as one of its J-factors) and is external to the agent, Goldman concludes that not all J-factors are internal to the agent. Therefore, the internalist hypothesis is false. In fuller detail, Goldman's argument from section VII can be reconstructed like this:

- (1) A subject *S* is justified in holding doxastic attitude *D* towards proposition *p* at time *t* either internally or externally.
- (2) Assume that *S* is internally justified in holding doxastic attitude *D* towards proposition *p* at time *t*.
- (3) From (2), every factor involved in accounting for *S*'s being justified in holding doxastic attitude *D* towards proposition *p* at time *t* must be internal to such subject *S*.
- (4) Call *C* the set of conditions, circumstances, or causes that help explain why *S* is justified in holding doxastic attitude *D* towards proposition *p* at time *t*.
- (5) From (3) and (4), there has to be some objective strong connection between conditions *C* and *S*'s justification, in virtue of which the former helps explain the latter.
- (6) For this connection to be objective and explanatory, its validity cannot depend solely on *S*. There must be one or more correct epistemic J-rules that jointly permit a subject who is (or was) in *C* to form or retain attitude *D* towards *p* at *t*.
- (7) Thus, from (5) and (6), the correctness of the relevant J-rules must be external to *S*.
- (8) Furthermore, from (5), such J-rules must also be counted among the factors that help explain why *S* is justified in holding doxastic attitude *D* towards proposition *p* at time *t*.
- (9) From (7) and (8), there is an external factor that helps explain why *S* is justified in holding doxastic attitude *D* towards proposition *p* at time *t* that is not internal to *S*.
- (10) From (9), the negation of (3) follows; that is, not every factor that helps explain why *S* is justified in holding doxastic attitude *D* towards proposition *p* at time *t* is internal to *S*.
- (11) From (10), the negation of (2) follows; to wit, *S* is not internally justified in holding doxastic attitude *D* towards proposition *p* at time *t*.

- (12) Therefore, from (1) and (11), *S* is externally justified in holding doxastic attitude *D* towards proposition *p* at time *t*.

Goldman considers *accessibilism* and *mentalism* as the two main conceptions of what it means for an event, state of affairs, or condition to be internal. According to accessibilism, an event, condition, or state of affairs *J* is internal to an agent *S* if and only if it is “directly” accessible to *S* at the time it obtains. For mentalism, in contrast, a state of affairs, event, or condition *J* is internal to an agent *S* if and only if it is mental and nonfactive. In both cases, *J* is external if and only if it is not internal.

Notice that, on both the accessibilist and mentalist conceptions, whether an event, condition, or state of affairs *J* is internal or external to an agent *S* depends, amongst other things, on whether *J* is intrinsic or extrinsic to *S*. As a matter of fact, it is a necessary (and perhaps also sufficient) condition for *J* being internal to *S* in the epistemological sense that *J* be intrinsic to *S* in the metaphysical sense.<sup>4</sup> Nonfactive mental states are intrinsic to agents that are in them—that is, for any nonfactive mental state *M*, if an agent *S* is in *M*, then such agent is in *M* independently of any external factors. In other words, from an agent *S* being in a nonfactive mental state *M* one cannot infer anything about *S*'s external world. Also, extrinsic properties are not directly accessible to the agents that have them. This means that any event, condition, or state of affairs that is directly accessible to an epistemic agent must be intrinsic to him. In both cases, therefore, what is internal is also intrinsic.

This means that the debate between internalist and externalist theories of justification in epistemology—like many other philosophical debates—substantially depends on how we draw the line between intrinsic and extrinsic properties. Appeal to this basic distinction has also been used to distinguish between real and “merely Cambridge” change,<sup>5</sup> between the semantic and the pragmatic information conveyed by a linguistic utterance,<sup>6</sup> between intrinsic and extrinsic value,<sup>7</sup> and between narrow and wide mental content,<sup>8</sup> among other philosophically

<sup>4</sup>This means that *J* must either be an intrinsic property of *S* or supervene on intrinsic properties of *S*. See Brian Weatherson, “Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Properties,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2008 Edition), Edward N. Zalta, ed., URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/intrinsic-extrinsic/>>.

<sup>5</sup>P. T. Geach, *God and the Soul* (London, UK: Routledge, 1968).

<sup>6</sup>Isidora Stojanovic, “The Semantics/Pragmatics Distinction,” *Synthese*, CLXV, 3 (December 2008): 317–19.

<sup>7</sup>Michael J. Zimmerman, *The Nature of Intrinsic Value* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001).

<sup>8</sup>Tyler Burge, “Individualism and the Mental,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, IV, 1 (September 1979): 73–121.

significant distinctions.<sup>9</sup> The distinction has also served to explain the semantic properties of nouns,<sup>10</sup> give a nontrivial formulation of the Identity of Indiscernibles,<sup>11</sup> and make sense of scientific structuralism.<sup>12</sup> In other words, the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction has proved very fruitful in philosophy. Unfortunately, Goldman's argument trivializes it, and in doing so he trivializes the whole internalist/externalist debate in epistemology.

To show this, I will present and motivate a general argument schema that, if sound, would allow us to show, for any property of any object, that it is extrinsic. Now, for the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction to do the philosophical work it is expected to, it cannot be conceptually true that all properties are extrinsic. Otherwise, the distinction would be vacuous and could do no substantial philosophical work. Thus, any argument that fits the aforementioned schema must be unsound. Since Goldman's argument is exactly of this form, it must also be unsound.

Since extrinsic properties depend on external factors, objects may acquire or lose any of them without losing or acquiring any intrinsic properties. In particular, if an object *a* has a nonvacuous property *P* extrinsically,<sup>13</sup> it must be possible for *a* to become not-*P* without losing any of its intrinsic properties. Therefore, to show that a property *P* is intrinsic to an object *a*, it is enough to find a subset of *a*'s intrinsic properties that together entail and help explain why *a* is *P*.<sup>14</sup> Despite the *prima facie* soundness of this method, one may feel tempted to use a counter-argument like the following to show that, despite being entailed by internalist properties, *P* is still extrinsic to *a*:

- (1) If *a* is *P*, then *a* is *P* either intrinsically or extrinsically.
- (2) Assume that *a* is *P* intrinsically.
- (3) From (2), every factor involved in accounting for *a*'s being *P* must also be intrinsic to *a*.
- (4) Call *C* every such factor involved in *a*'s being *P*.

<sup>9</sup> See Weatherston, *op. cit.*, and Humberstone, *op. cit.*, for other applications.

<sup>10</sup> Franck Lebas and Pierre Cadiot, "La Constitution Extrinsèque du Référent: Présentation," *Langages*, CL, 2 (2003): 3–8.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Forrest, "The Identity of Indiscernibles," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2009 Edition), Edward N. Zalta, ed., URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2009/entries/identity-indiscernible/>>.

<sup>12</sup> J. Ladyman, "What Is Structural Realism?" *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part A*, xxix, 3 (September 1998): 409–24.

<sup>13</sup> I am calling a property "vacuous" if it is necessarily possessed by any entity. For example, I vacuously have the property of *being such that 3+4=7*. For these properties, the internalist argument I am about to present is unsound. A property is nonvacuous if it is not vacuous.

<sup>14</sup> See Figdor, *op. cit.*

- (5) From (3) and (4), there has to be some objective and nomologically strong connection between *C* and *P* in virtue of which *C* helps explain why *a* is *P*.<sup>15</sup>
- (6) For the connection between *C* and *P* to have the necessary explanatory power, it must generalize to other cases beyond *a*. It is not enough that *Ca* implies *Pa*; it is also necessary that for any *x*, if *Cx* then *Px*, and that the truth of this later generalization be independent of *a* itself.
- (7) Thus, from (5) and (6), the objective and nomological connection between *C* and *P* must be external to *a*.
- (8) Furthermore, from (3) and (4), this connection between *C* and *P* is also a factor that helps explain why *a* is *P*.
- (9) From (7) and (8), there is a factor that helps explain why *a* is *P* that is not intrinsic to *a*.
- (10) From (9), not (3). Not every factor that helps explain why *a* is *P* is intrinsic to *a*.
- (11) From (10), not (2). *P* is not an intrinsic property of *a*.
- (12) Therefore, from (1) and (11), *P* is an extrinsic property of *a*.

Notice that Goldman's argument perfectly fits this schema. Furthermore, notice that any argument of this form is an *a priori* conceptual *reductio* with no substantial premise of its own; it depends on nothing particular about *a* or *P*, so it can be applied to show of any object and any property<sup>16</sup> that the property is external to the object. In this sense, it trivializes the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction. If it were sound, it could be used to show that, for example, the round shape of the CD I am currently listening to is extrinsic to the CD, even though shape is a paradigmatically intrinsic property:<sup>17</sup>

- (1) My CD is round, so *round* is either an intrinsic or an extrinsic property of my CD.

<sup>15</sup> Throughout the paper I rely on some version of the nomological deductive model of explanation, for it is the account of explanation used by Goldman in his article. There may be other ways *C* may help explain why *a* is *P* that do not involve appealing to a general connection between *C* and *P*. For example, *C* may help give a singular causal explanation of why *a* is *P*. Yet nothing substantial depends on the precise nature of their connection. The argument would work just as well for any strong explanatory, explicatory, conceptual, causal, or metaphysical connection. On the limitations of the nomological deductive method, see James Woodward, "Scientific Explanation," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2009 Edition), Edward N. Zalta, ed., URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2009/entries/scientific-explanation/>>.

<sup>16</sup> Goldman, *op. cit.*, speaks as if this were true only of normative concepts. However, as I have cast it here, no mention or requirement of *P* being a normative property is involved.

<sup>17</sup> To be more precise, shape is intrinsic to most middle-sized material objects, and my CD certainly has its round shape intrinsically. See Figdor, *op. cit.*; Weatherston, *op. cit.*; Humberstone, *op. cit.*; and Brian Ellis, *The Philosophy of Nature: A Guide to the New Essentialism* (Ithaca: McGill-Queen's, 2002), pp. 51–54.

- (2) Assume that my CD is intrinsically round.
- (3) From (2), every factor involved in accounting for my CD's being round must also be intrinsic to my CD.
- (4) Presumably, the round shape of my CD can be accounted for by appealing to the fact that all points at its edge are equidistant from its center.
- (5) From (3) and (4), there has to be some objective and nomological connection between the fact that the edge points of an object are equidistant from its center and the property of being round. Otherwise, the fact that all points at my CD's edge are equidistant from its center could not help explain why my CD is round.
- (6) The connection between having edge points equidistant from a central point and the property of being round has explanatory power because it is an objective relation that generalizes to any round object. It is an objective truth that any object whose edge points are equidistant from its center is round.
- (7) Thus, from (5) and (6), the objective and general connection between having edge points equidistant from a central point and being round cannot be intrinsic to my CD.
- (8) Furthermore, from (3) and (4), this connection helps explain why my CD is round.
- (9) From (7) and (8), there is at least one factor that helps explain why my CD is round that is not intrinsic to my CD.
- (10) From (9), it follows that not (3); that is, not every factor that helps explain why my CD is round is intrinsic to my CD.
- (11) From (10), not (2); that is, my CD is not intrinsically round.
- (12) Therefore, from (1) and (11), my CD is extrinsically round.

This clearly shows that any argument that fits the schema presented in our previous section cannot be sound. In particular, it shows that Goldman's first argument against internalism in section VII of "Internalism, Externalism, and the Architecture of Justification" is unsound, since it is of this form. Thus, it also trivializes the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction upon which the internalist/externalist debate is based. *Quod erat demonstrandum.*

The purpose of this short commentary was to show that one of Goldman's arguments in "Internalism, Externalism, and the Architecture of Justification" is unsound. This goal has been achieved. However, I do not want to conclude without expressing some preliminary thoughts about the underlying mistake in Goldman's argument. In his view, determining why a subject is justified also implies determining why certain criteria explain why a subject is justified. Since, according to Goldman's account, the second of these questions cannot be answered without appealing to objective, external factors, it follows that the first question cannot be answered in an internalist way either.

Goldman recognizes that internalists may want to block this last conclusion by insisting that these later external factors should not count as genuine J-factors. However, he has also challenged the internalist to provide a principled, not *ad hoc* reason to make such a distinction. In this brief commentary, I have hinted at a reason to which an internalist may be able to appeal in order to justify her reply to Goldman: if we accept Goldman's understanding of J-rules and its concomitantly broad notion of J-factors, we could construct unsound arguments. On the other hand, if we draw the line where the internalist has insisted, we keep the intuition that all it takes for internalism to be correct is that whether or not an agent is justified in believing some proposition supervenes on the intrinsic properties of the agent.

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