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Ultra-Strong Internalism and the Reliabilist Insight

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Abstract

When someone believes something that is *justified* for her, what part does the subject play in her state of being justified? I will answer this question by developing a strong internalist account of justification according to which the justification of a believing for a subject consists in her having grounds for her belief, and holding the belief in recognition of those grounds. But the internalist theory I defend incorporates key elements of reliabilism into its account. Using perception as a model for justification, I show how ordinary perceivers would appeal to external factors to support their perceptual beliefs, and normally suppose that their beliefs are reliably connected to the objects their beliefs are about. I find in this feature of our common justificatory practice a sufficient basis for positing an externalist condition on justification—namely that subjects are justified only if their beliefs *are* reliably connected to their objects.

When someone believes something that is *justified* for her, what part does the subject play in her state of being justified? I will answer this question by developing a strong internalist account of justification according to which the justification of a believing for a subject consists in her having grounds for her belief, and holding the belief in recognition of those grounds.

I.A. Ultra-Strong Internalism

I begin with an account of the internalist view of justification that I will work with in this discussion. I will develop my account within the context of William Alston's helpful distinction between two broad types of internalism that he calls "perspective internalism" and "access internalism," adapting and modifying Alston's definitions to meet the demands of my reconciling view.¹ Perspective internalism lays down a material condition for

what can justify a belief and asserts that only states of a subject, that is beliefs or experiences,² can be justifiers. Access internalism gives a formal condition on justification, whatever its source may be, namely that a belief is only justified for a subject if she grasps her grounds and recognizes them as justification-giving.³

The internalist view that I will defend combines features of perspective- and access-internalism, but with some important qualifications. First, while I will ultimately defend the perspectivist idea that the source of justification lies *within the subject*, viz., in her thinking and reasoning activity, I will also show how perspective internalism can accommodate a central claim of reliabilism, namely that external facts and circumstances that surround the belief and give rise to it figure prominently in its justification. The perspectivist insight is preserved by maintaining that these external factors can only confer justification in so far as subjects *rely on* them as grounds for their belief, and can utilize them as reasons for it if called upon to do so. Thus the external facts that ground a belief are linked to the subject's perspective via the subject's recognition of them and her ability to participate in the social practice of asking for and giving reasons.

The access-requirement as I formulated it has two parts: it requires, first, that subjects must in some way grasp what grounds their belief; and second, that they must recognize their justifying grounds *as grounds*. In order to achieve this, subjects must have the necessary justificatory concepts and be capable of applying them whenever they justifiably believe something. Internalists have tended to view the access-requirement, in both its parts, as a wholly dispositional affair, where the subject's grasping and recognizing refer to what the subject can do, or would do, in circumstances of asking for and giving justifications. When these requirements are so understood, I will call the view that they define Strong Internalism. This dispositional account of justification goes a long way toward capturing the fundamental intuition of internalism, namely that whenever a belief is justified for a subject, the subject has grounds that are *her own grounds*, the grounds on which she *bases* her belief. However I will argue that Strong Internalism does not fully capture this intuition; to do so it will be necessary to give an even stronger interpretation of the access-requirement, which requires of a subject whose believing is justified that at the time she (occurrently) believes something, she *actively* grasps her justifying grounds as grounds; and this implies that she is doing some second-order thinking about her belief and its grounds concurrently with the original belief, and that the belief is tokened by the subject in recognition of its authority. I will call the view that is defined by this stronger interpretation of the access-requirement Ultra-Strong Internalism.

In the remainder of this discussion, my task will be, first, to refine and defend the ultra-strong internalist position, and then to show how one of the central claims of reliabilism can be incorporated into it. To accomplish these goals, I will be drawing on some recent views expressed by William Alston and Robert Brandom, both of whom in different ways have attempted to combine internalist and externalist elements into their theories of justification.

I.B. Reliabilism

The reliabilist account of justification that I will employ in this discussion is drawn mainly from Alvin Goldman's seminal discussion of justification in "What is Justified Belief?" On this view, a belief is justified for a subject if it is produced in the subject by a reliable belief-forming process, where reliability consists in the tendency of a process to produce beliefs that are true rather than false. Goldman gives perception as an example of a reliable belief-generating process, and considers a particular perceptual belief:

Suppose Jones believes he has just seen a mountain-goat. Our assessment of the belief's justifiedness is determined by whether he caught a brief glimpse of the creature at a great distance, or whether he had a good look at the thing only 30 yards away. His belief in the latter sort of case is (*ceteris paribus*) more justified than in the former sort of case. . . . The difference between the two cases seems to be this. Visual beliefs formed from brief and hasty scanning, or where the perceptual object is a long distance off, tend to be wrong more often than visual beliefs formed from detailed and leisurely scanning, or where the object is in reasonable proximity.⁴

Goldman further alludes to "the problem of the 'extent' of belief-forming processes," viz., the fact that "the causal ancestry of beliefs often includes events outside the organism." Regarding perceptual processes (viewed as functional operations), the problem is that "it isn't clear whether inputs should include states of the environment, such as the distance of the stimulus from the cognizer, or only events within or on the surface of the organism." Goldman decides "with some hesitation" to "restrict the extent of belief-forming processes to "cognitive" events, i.e., events within the organism's nervous system." He does this because "justifiedness seems to be a function of how a cognizer deals with his environmental input, i.e., with the goodness or badness of the operations that register and transform the stimulation that reaches him." Thus, on this view, the justifiedness of a belief has to do with whether the belief results from a reliable *cognitive* process or set of processes, where these cognitive operations are construed as "internal to the organism" — starting with the subject's responses to input-stimulations of the sense receptors and culminating in the output-belief.⁵

The reliabilist's approach then differs importantly from the internalist's in locating the *source* of justification in the reliable belief-producing mechanisms within the subject. What confers justification on a belief is, first, the fact that it is a product of a certain belief-forming process, and second, the fact that it is *reliably* produced in the subject by this process, viz., that it is a member of a class of (actual and possible) beliefs that are mostly true. Although Goldman restricts the justification-making factors to the cognitive operations occurring within the organism, it would be possible to lift this restriction and allow factors outside the organism (such as the distance between the stimulus-object and the cognizer) to play the same justificatory role as the cognitive operations inside the organism, while still remaining in the spirit of Goldman's view. The reliabilist view that I will work with allows this extension of the belief-forming process, and Goldman's idea that justifiedness should be linked to the subject's cognitive responses to information from the environment will be

accounted for within my reconciling view by means of the access requirement that subjects must grasp that their beliefs are reliably connected to objects in the world.

Secondly, reliabilism differs from internalism in not requiring that the subject have access to the reliable belief-producing mechanisms and external factors that are justification-making. The subject does not even have to have the ability to evaluate her own belief as to whether she has sufficient grounds. All that the subject contributes to her justified state is the production of the belief as the outcome of a reliable mechanism. We (reliabilist epistemologists) may then ascertain whether the subject's belief is reliable and attribute justification on this basis. So, if the reliabilist is ever in a position to attribute justification to the subject, then he must be able to assess someone else's belief and determine that it is formed in a way that is successful and tends to be true. Later in the discussion, I will argue that ordinary subjects are capable of assessing their own beliefs in the same way that the attributor of reliability does, and that in normal perception, subjects do recognize that their beliefs are reliably formed and so are likely to be true.

II. Alston's Hybrid View

Alston isolates a concept of justification that makes central the idea of the "truth conduciveness" of a belief, and that fits nicely with Goldman's reliabilist account of justification. To be *justified in believing p* is "to believe that p in a 'truth conducive' way. It is for one's belief to have been formed in such a way or on such a basis that one is thereby likely to be believing correctly."⁶ He then combines this sense of justification with a different internalist sense to produce a hybrid internalist-externalist view of justification. According to this view, a belief is only justified if it is based on an *adequate ground*, where the notion of adequacy is understood in terms of its actually being truth conducive; and this in turn is spelled out in terms of probability relations, that is, the factual probability that a belief that is formed on that ground is true.⁷ This is how Alston incorporates externalism into his view, since the subject need not have any beliefs about these factual probabilities, and hence about the adequacy of her grounds. Even the notion of the subject's *basing* her belief on some ground is treated by Alston as an externalist condition for justification (and knowledge) requiring only that the subject, or some "belief-forming mechanism" in the subject, "is differentially sensitive to" this ground whether or not the subject is aware of it as the basis of her belief.⁸ As it happens, Alston is thinking of the subject's *experience* as the ground of her belief—the example he uses is the experience of how the streets look as the ground for the belief that the streets are wet, but he is quite clear that a belief may be based on a process which is wholly beyond the subject's grasp.

Alston's main objections to the internalist's accessibility requirement are, first, that we often think that ordinary subjects are justified in their beliefs even when they have no reasons, or cannot give any reasons, for them. But Alston is here, I believe, tying *having reasons* too closely to being able to *formulate reasons* for one's belief. It is plausible to think that one could believe or grasp something subconsciously, and rely on it as a ground, even if one may need coaching or counseling to bring it into conscious thought. I will argue later that this is what happens in normal perception.

Alston's second objection is that ordinary subjects can be justified even when they have no conception at all of what justifies them, much less what would constitute an adequate justification. Working on the assumption that human knowers have only a limited capacity for higher-order thinking about the justification of their beliefs, Alston is led to sever the subject's grounds from what lies within her cognitive grasp with the result that the evidence a subject has (and can give) for her belief becomes secondary and inessential to her justification. He proposes a weak access requirement (and this is the internalist side of his hybrid theory) that a subject, to be justified, only needs to have grounds that are "fairly readily available" to her; that is, the subject can access the sorts of factors that ground her belief without "lengthy research, observation, or experimentation."⁹ Although Alston allows that it is only because humans have challenged each other's beliefs and demanded reasons for them that we even have a concept of justification for belief in the first place, still he holds that subjects can know and be justified even if they have never actively engaged in the practice of asking for, and giving reasons for, their beliefs.

I think that Alston is mistaken in prying apart a subject's justifying grounds for believing from what is within the subject's cognitive grasp. He is allowing that subjects may be justified by factors that they do not have the conceptual resources to apprehend. And this seems contrary to our ordinary ideas of a subject's *having grounds* for an occurrent belief and *basing* her belief on those grounds, both of which normally imply that the subject is in some sense aware of those grounds and is relying on them when she is believing. Any information the subject is "sensitive to," but which falls entirely outside the subject's ken, has nothing to do with the subject's being justified. In the first instance, it can only enter into the subject's justification (I will argue) in so far as she cognitively grasps it, and can come to see consciously, either by her own effort or with tutoring, that this was the ground she was relying on at the time she formed her belief.¹⁰ Thus Alston's hybrid view lacks coherence in failing to integrate the internalist and externalist requirements on justification. His weak access requirement allows that the subject's grounds and linkage to a belief may be fundamentally bifurcated. We will see in the next section how the two requirements are, in practice, integrated in normal perception in the sort of justificatory grounds that subjects rely upon and appeal to in defending their perceptual beliefs.

III. Grounds for Perceptual Belief

Suppose that I form the spontaneous perceptual belief (*spb*)

1. that there is a cup on the table in front of me, and that at the time that I token this belief, I also believe these other things:
2. I am awake.
3. My eyes are in good working order.
4. I am wearing my glasses.
5. The cup is in reasonable proximity.
6. The lighting conditions are adequate for seeing this cup.
7. The circumstances that surround me are favorable for seeing this cup.

8. There is nothing abnormal or contrived about the conditions in which I am viewing this cup.¹¹

It is plausible to think that my original belief, that there is a cup there, gets some of its justificatory support from each of these other beliefs, and therefore depends for its justification on those beliefs.¹² In fact, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 are themselves perceptual beliefs, or involve perceptual beliefs, that I form concurrently with *spb1*. But the point I wish to make is not simply that when I see that there is a cup before me I am also perceiving the physical circumstances in which my seeing is occurring, which of course I am, but that I am relying upon some of these perceived facts *as grounds* for my belief about the cup. Thus I apprehend the lighting conditions and I also recognize that they are *adequate for seeing the cup*. This recognition involves higher-order evaluative thinking: my belief that the lighting is *adequate* (for seeing the cup) involves not only the belief that the cup is sufficiently illuminated to see it, but also the belief that its being so illuminated gives me a ground for thinking that I am indeed seeing a cup there, *viz.*, that the content of my belief is true.

That subjects rely on their beliefs about conditions in this way is shown by their readiness to offer grounds for their belief if challenged. If asked about my reasons for thinking that I saw a cup there, I might offer (as a partial ground) that the lights were on. What I appeal to is (my recollection of) the fact that the lighting was adequate for seeing the cup.¹³

What I am suggesting is, first, that even in ordinary perception, subjects have some idea of what justifies their belief; and further that they often appeal to *external* facts and circumstances as grounds for thinking that what they take themselves to be seeing is actually there. That is, they offer as grounds *these very facts* pertaining to the external situation in which their belief is formed. Subjects must of course apprehend these facts in order to possess them and offer them as their grounds, but what justifies their belief for them is the fact that they are in such conditions, and not their internal state of *believing* that they are in such conditions. Compare how it is with offering legal evidence. In a court of law, when a prosecutor presents the evidence on the basis of which she seeks to convict, she does not appeal to her believings as such, but describes certain putative facts and happenings: the defendant said this and did that. Her evidence consists of these facts. But of course, it remains true that in so far as the relevant facts constitute grounds for her belief that the defendant is guilty, they are the content of beliefs that she has about those facts. If this observation is correct, then, it should be noted that what we actually do when we give reasons seems to conflict with perspective internalism in that we often appeal to external facts, and not beliefs about those facts, as grounds for our perceptual beliefs.

Further, I think that the perceptual example discussed above is best construed in terms of the ultra-strong requirement that subjects grasp their grounds at the time they form spontaneous perceptual beliefs, and that this grasping cannot be understood wholly dispositionally in terms of how they would respond at a later time if they were to be challenged. I have already indicated that it is plausible to think that subjects apprehend surrounding conditions of perceiving even in good or normal conditions, and not only when a question or doubt arises about whether conditions are (were) favorable for seeing. They do not begin to be cognizant of conditions only when they become unfavorable enough to make it doubtful whether they see; what changes as conditions worsen is that

they begin to attend to them consciously. For example, as my eyesight has gradually weakened over the years, I have lost some confidence in my ability to see correctly, and this is shown by the fact that I look twice and more carefully in situations where it matters, e.g., when I change lanes while driving. I believe that in those situations, my perceptual beliefs are not as reliable as they are in other more propitious circumstances. But even when I shift back into those propitious circumstances (settle into my new lane), I am relying on the belief that my eyesight is good enough to tell how things are by looking at them.

Another reason for adopting the ultra-strong interpretation of these cases is that ordinary perceivers exhibit a confidence about their perceptual beliefs that reflects not simply an attitude of strong conviction, but one of being on good grounds, of being an authority about these things. It is as if their perceptual beliefs were accompanied by the judgment "I am authoritative about this." Compare how it is with someone who holds a high office such as the U.S. president. It is plausible to think that everything the president says and does, at least in the public domain, is said and done in recognition of the authority he possesses as chief executive of the land. The president is (or should be) always mindful at some level that his words and deeds carry this special authority. Certainly a large part of this recognition can be explained dispositionally in terms of how he would react to questions and challenges that might arise, and what he is committing himself to in terms of future conduct—but not all of it. The president must be aware at all times that he speaks and acts as the president, and if his conduct is questioned, he cannot make the excuse that he temporarily forgot he was president or what it meant to be the president. I am suggesting that ordinary *perceivers* exhibit a similar sense of their own authority about perceptual matters when they make perceptual claims.

IV. Brandom and the Reliabilist Insight

Robert Brandom lays stress on another dimension of what is required for justification in a recent paper, "Insights and Blindspots of Reliabilism."¹⁴ Brandom defends what he calls the "founding insight" of reliabilism that "giving an account" of one's belief, or offering reasons for it, is not the only way to show that the belief is justified; it is not the only way to show that a belief, if true, is not true merely by accident. "For that it suffices to show that the belief is of a kind that could, under the prevailing circumstances have been expected or predicted to be true."¹⁵ Thus another way to show that a belief is justified, and is knowledge, is to show that it is reliable. But the subject need not be aware that she is reliable in order to be justified; she may even think she is unreliable. Brandom gives the (rather contrived) example of a pottery expert who has a history of making correct identifications of a kind of pottery in the field, but who doubts her own reliability in making these claims. Her colleagues, however, knowing that she is an expert and that she usually gets it right, disregard her doubts and attribute knowledge to her. Thus Brandom thinks that reliability has earned its "place alongside reasons in certifying beliefs as knowledge."¹⁶

But while Brandom acknowledges what he takes to be legitimate uses of the reliability sense of justification, it is clear that the reason-giving sense of justification is more basic in his theory of knowledge. Let me focus on one way in which Brandom tries to show that the reliabilist's account of knowledge involves giving reasons for a conclusion. He brings

this out by asking what is the reliabilist *doing* when he attributes knowledge to someone? and answers that, first, he is attributing belief to the subject; secondly, he attributes entitlement to the subject; and thirdly, he judges that the belief is true, which means, according to Brandom's pragmatic view of knowledge, that he (the reliabilist) endorses the belief, viz., that he accepts the proposition together with what it implies, and rejects what is incompatible with it, and thus takes up a stance or position in the game of giving reasons.¹⁷

So in attributing reliability, the reliabilist is himself endorsing what Brandom calls a "reliability inference" from the attribution to another of a commitment to a belief to his own undertaking of a commitment to the content of that same belief. The reliability inference then is from one conduct (attributing) to another (undertaking). Whether one accepts Brandom's pragmatic analysis of truth-judgments in terms of conducts, his basic claim seems plausible—that the attribution of reliability carries with it a commitment to a proposition and a readiness to use it and its logical consequences in the game of asking for and giving reasons. Specifically, the reliabilist-attributor is in a position to defend the truth of someone's claim by offering the reason that the other's claim is reliable.

I think Brandom succeeds in showing that the reliabilist's criterion of justification (and knowledge) is pragmatically dependent upon the reason-giving criterion. That is, the reliabilist cannot apply or attribute knowledge in his sense without himself recognizing that some things can rightfully be inferred from others. Brandom has shifted attention away from the process of reliable belief-formation to the reliabilist's assessment of that process as reliable, and he is pointing out that such an assessment is an essential ingredient in the attribution of knowledge. Thus he concludes that "concern with reliability is not opposed to concern with what is a reason for what, but actually a crucially important species of it."¹⁸ What he would like the reliabilist to see is that ordinary people in ordinary contexts make these very assessments of reliability and of truth-likelihood, and on that basis attribute knowledge. They do this when they challenge someone's belief, or defend their own, or defer to the authority of another—in contexts in which they are trying to determine who has knowledge.

The strong internalist can agree with Brandom's emphasis on the importance of the assessment of a claim as an aspect of the attribution of entitlement and knowledge. But Brandom doesn't go far enough, and in particular, he underestimates the subject's role in acquiring justification. He sees that for a subject to have entitlement, *someone* has to make the reliability inference, someone must take the claim to be true on the basis of its reliability, but in allowing that this someone may be the assessor-attributor and not the subject, he ends up grounding a person's knowledge in the reasons possessed by someone else. What he fails to see is that when subjects make claims, they are self-assessors, and they recognize the authority and reliability of their own beliefs.

Consider the pottery expert, who has the ability to identify reliably a piece of Toltec pottery in the field, but is suspicious of any beliefs that are formed in this way and always insists on further testing before committing herself (fully) to the belief. Her colleagues, however, endorse her field identifications on the basis of her reliable record. And moreover, Brandom maintains, "[i]t seems reasonable for them to say, in some case where she turned out to be right, that although she insisted on confirmatory evidence for her belief,

in fact she *already knew* that the fragment in question was Toltec, even before bringing her microscope and reagents into play."¹⁹

But we may well wonder: was the expert justified in her initial belief that the piece was Toltec, even while she insisted on confirmatory evidence? And if her colleagues would attribute knowledge and entitlement to her, is it plausible that the attribution would be based solely on her reliable record, as Brandom thinks? I think Brandom has missed the mark on each of these points, and I will attempt to show this by looking more closely at his example. First, we need to clarify the sense in which the expert does not believe herself to be reliable. Brandom formulates her doubt in this way:

she regards beliefs formed in this way [on the spot field identifications] with great suspicion; she is not willing to put much weight on them, and in particular is not willing to risk her professional reputation on convictions with this sort of provenance. Before reporting to colleagues, or publishing conclusions that rest on evidence . . . she always does microscopic and chemical analyses that give her solid inferential evidence for the classification. That is, she does not take herself to be a reliable noninferential reporter of [Toltec potsherds].²⁰

Thus the expert is not fully confident about her initial belief—which she nevertheless continues to hold. (The expert must in this example *believe* that the piece is Toltec or she would fail to meet the belief-condition for justification and knowledge.) But what does she think about her own reliable record? Presumably she remembers her past successes and so believes that she is a reliable identifier of Toltec pieces at least in the sense of having gotten it right most of the time. In what sense then does she not believe she is reliable? In this sense: “to take the expert to be reliable just is to take it that the inference from her being disposed to call something ‘Toltec’ to its being Toltec is a good one.”²¹ So the expert is not willing to infer from her noninferential believing that the piece is Toltec (even in conjunction with her successful record) to the conclusion that it *is* Toltec. Her belief is tentative or provisional pending the obtaining of further confirmatory evidence. We may infer then that the expert has quite rigorous standards for (scientific) knowledge, but also that her attitude is not wholly unreasonable given her professional standing in the field of archeology.

The expert’s colleagues, however, “having followed her work over the years, have noticed that she is in fact a reliable distinguisher of one sort of pottery from the other.” They think “[h]er off-the-cuff inclinations to call something Toltec . . . can be trusted”;²² that is, they are willing to infer (without reservation) that the fragment in question is Toltec. And what’s more, they even attribute knowledge (and entitlement) to *her*, ignoring her methodological doubts.

Perhaps the expert’s colleagues are justified in ignoring her doubts, which do seem excessive—at least with regard to her belief that the piece is Toltec.²³ But is it plausible that they would base their positive assessment of her report solely on her past successes and not also on the fact that she is an authority in the field of Central American pottery who has brought her accumulated knowledge and experience to bear in making this identification? Admittedly her reputation as a pottery expert is tied to her history of making correct identifications, but not to that alone, and it seems reasonable that her colleagues’ positive

evaluation depends on their recognition that this report, as well as past ones, has been a product of her knowledge and expertise.

Finally, the claim that the colleagues would attribute knowledge and entitlement to the expert is strained. Here is an alternative ending to the story—one which is consistent with the internalist's idea that subjects, to be justified, must apprehend their grounds. The expert's peers think that her suspicions are excessive and that she ought to fully accept her own judgment just as they do; for, after all, she knows that she is an authority in her field and that her field identifications have tended to be true. These things should weigh more heavily with her, even if they do not. Nonetheless, her colleagues grant her entitlement to her belief *by a kind of professional courtesy*, crediting her with the evidence that is available to her but which she judges to be insufficient. In doing so, they are not ignoring her state of mind and the grounds that are available to her, but rather overruling her doubts about the adequacy of those grounds. But the knowledge (and justificatory status) they grant her falls short of being the real thing and will remain deficient until she has found a way to discharge her doubts and has come to see that her belief is grounded.

V. Reliability Is a Ground for Perceptual Belief

Brandom has enabled us to see how the reliability of a belief can be (part of) a subject's grounds for her belief. We have already seen that ordinary subjects recognize that a perceptual belief is justified when it occurs in conditions that are favorable for seeing, and this is tantamount to the recognition that the belief is reliably connected to its object in those conditions. This in turn requires that subjects are relating their current belief to similar past beliefs through memory. And this does seem to be what happens in ordinary perceptual cases: subjects grasp that they have performed reliably in the past and so are likely to be getting it right in the present. Perceivers usually find themselves in familiar settings, similar enough to past ones that they can rely on the perceptual capacities they have already formed in the long process of learning how things are by using their senses. They recognize that similar perceptual experiences-cum-beliefs²⁴ in the past, in similar circumstances, were invariably correct; and this is, in part, the basis on which they advance their current claim. This sort of ground is strongly indicated by the way in which perceivers might back up their perceptual claims:

“What is your reason for thinking there's a cup there?”

“I can tell a cup when I see one.”

The response alludes to the fact that the subject has correctly identified cups in the past. Hence implicit in it is a commitment to the following pattern of (inferential) reasoning—that I am claiming accompanies the subject's spontaneous perceptual belief:

In the past, when I have had perceptual beliefs like this one, in conditions like these, they have tended to be true.

So, this perceptual belief is probably true.²⁵

The subject need not recall any *particular* cup experiences to know that she is good at recognizing cups. It is enough that she recalls having had some experiences like the one she is having, in which she has correctly identified that kind of object.²⁶

Finally, and most importantly for our reconciling view, the subject is appealing to certain *external* facts about her reliable past record. Her defense presupposes that she has gotten it right in the past, and she bases her claim on these very facts. My view acknowledges this externalist presumption of our perceptual practice by requiring that subjects are only justified in their empirical beliefs if their beliefs *have been* successfully connected to their objects on past occasions.

In the ways that I have described, ordinary perceivers recognize that they have good grounds and so are experts when it comes to seeing ordinary objects. Admittedly, in many cases, the *specific* grounds a subject has may be merely potential grounds in the sense that the subject does not apprehend these elements *as grounds* for her belief, but could recover them and offer them as grounds if called upon to do so. Our ultra-strong internalism requires only that the subject must concurrently believe that she is in conditions that are favorable for seeing and so has authority. She may be resting on her laurels, knowing full well that she is good at making these sorts of judgments and so doesn't need to pay attention to the particular matters that justify her as such. Subjects can get away with this if they know the sort of grounds that would be relevant, and would be able to produce those grounds if challenged to do so. They know the sorts of factors that could defeat their claims and how to defend against them.

VI. Experiential Grounds

So far in this discussion, I have been emphasizing the way in which subjects may appeal to external circumstances and to their own reliability as grounds for their claims. But I do not wish to deny that subjects also appeal to their own internal *experiences* as grounds. In fact some internalists hold that what justifies a claim lies wholly in features of the subject's experience, such as how it *looks* to her, rather than in any objective features of the situation, present or past. On this view, the ultimate grounds on which perceptual facts are based are facts that would be expressed by, e.g., "it looks to me as if a cup is before me." But even if ordinary subjects do sometimes appeal to how it looks to them as a basis for a perceptual claim, it is not at all clear that in doing so they are referring *solely* to their experiences as experiences. It is a mistake, I believe, to set apart the look of something from the situation in which it has that look. Looks are normally attached to external things and circumstances. And typically in the context of having and giving reasons for perceptual claims, a subject's appeal to her experience, to how it looks, is firmly embedded in the context of an objective situation to which the subject is responding. For example, I pointed out above that in perceptual cases subjects realize that their perceptual beliefs (or experiences-cum-beliefs) resemble past beliefs that were reliably connected to their objects *in similar sorts of circumstances*. Or consider that one might support a perceptual claim that the tree is farther away than the house by mentioning that the house is obscuring part of the tree *in his visual field*, referring here to objects in the immediate environment as they appear from his vantage

point. If the subject is more sophisticated, he may say that the *image* of the house is occluding the *image* of the tree in his visual field, referring now to a pair of mental items in an inner space detached from the tree and the house. But even this reference to mental images retains its objective import because, in the normal case, it is assumed that the house-image is an image *of the house*, viz., represents the house, and is produced in the subject by the house.

Ordinary subjects rarely, if ever, refer to their visual experiences qua visual experiences, with all of their objective import removed, in justificatory contexts. The appeal to experience as such to back up an ordinary perceptual claim usually indicates some philosophical training, and is far more sophisticated than an appeal to objective features of the subject's situation, such as the fact that one is not wearing his glasses. Subjects may give *reports* of their experiences in unusual circumstances, such as when they are in the optician's chair, or when they see a strong after-image, or otherwise have reason to believe that their experience is delusory. But even in these sorts of situations, typically, the subject is aware that things are not as they appear because of some unusual circumstance in the physical situation. Subjects who have a concept of how something looks realize that it can look other than it actually *is*, and that things look different in different contexts because the conditions in which they are perceived are different.

These points lend support to the idea that subjects' appeals to subjective facts about how it looks to them presuppose and depend on a prior knowledge of how things are and what it is to *see* objects in the external world.²⁷ However, all that I am claiming is that when subjects appeal to internal facts, these facts are usually situated, for the subject, in an external setting; they rarely if ever ground their perceptual claims in subjective factors alone. But whether they do or not, all I need for my present argument is that subjects do often ground their perceptual claims in the *external* facts and circumstances surrounding their experience, and in their own reliability.

VII. The Source of Authority

What finally is the *source* of the justification of beliefs? What in the end does the justifying? Does justification "flow" from internal sources, viz., the subject's thinking and reasoning? or from external sources, viz., reliable causes and belief-forming processes? The reconciling view I have defended combines both internal and external features in its account of justification. It is externalist, first, in so far as it locates the justifying grounds of belief in factors that lie outside the subject's perspective in the environment and in the causal processes that produce the belief, and in the subject's successful past performances. We have seen that perceiving subjects often appeal to situational factors as grounds for their beliefs. Thus our common justifying practices indicate that it is these sorts of external facts that *are* what justify us and therefore are a source of justification. And if external facts can be justifiers, then perspective internalism is wrong in maintaining that only beliefs (and their contents) can justify other beliefs.²⁸

Secondly, the view is externalist in asserting a link between justification and truth. To be justified, a belief must be of a kind that *is reliably connected* to the object it purports to be about. Subjects who make perceptual claims recognize their own reliability and hence that

they have performed reliably on similar occasions in the past. Their present justification presupposes and is built on past successes. My reconciling view acknowledges the objective import of the subject's grounds and its implication that subjects are capable of knowing things about the world they live in and rely on some of what they know as grounds for their beliefs.

The recognition that external factors enter into our justifications is a recognition that empirical knowledge depends on factors that are independent of subjects' beliefs and their justifications—factors that would be as they are even if subjects had no idea at all of justification. It is an acknowledgment that the world is “cooperating” with us in our knowledge of it. Our beliefs must actually *be* of a sort that are truth-conducive if they are justified. But once this is admitted, then it dawns on us that there are many factors that connect us to the world about which we (ordinary perceivers) know little or nothing, and the door is open, it seems, for reliabilists to identify any part of the complicated causal chain that leads to the formation of belief as what gives us justification. A gap threatens to open between the grounds that subjects rely on and the grounds that actually justify them. How wide is this potential gulf?

It is the strong access requirement that preserves the coincidence²⁹ of internal and external justifying factors by requiring that subjects must have some grasp of whatever justifies them in order to be justified. What justifies a belief must be something the subject is relying upon as a ground, and thus understands to be the sort of thing that can be offered as a ground for her belief. Thus external factors have to be taken up by subjects and incorporated into their perspectives in order to function as justifiers. Taken alone, and apart from the human activity of giving reasons, these external factors remain “mere facts” and merely potential justifiers. In this way, the access requirement safeguards the essential link between external grounds and the subject's perspective, and also assures that there will be no gap between external and internal criteria of justification.³⁰

It is then the practical abilities involved in having and giving justifications that finally confer justification on belief. And thus it is more appropriate to say that justification flows from subjects and their justifying practices to beliefs and the reliable-causal connections that undergird them, rather than springing originally from those underlying facts. But both factors play an essential role in the justification of belief: reliable empirical connections enter into justification as the “matter” on which our justifying practices are built, and apart from which those practices would lack substance and connection to truth. On the other hand, as we have seen, reliable processes do not confer justification on belief unless they are apprehended by subjects who can utilize them as grounds for their beliefs. And so, what justifies a belief on the view I have defended is finally an amalgam of natural facts together with the reflective activity of subjects who apprehend those facts and bring them into the realm of having and giving justifications.

Endnotes

I wish to thank colleagues Phil Hugly and Al Casullo for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. I would also like to thank Richard Feldman and William Talbott for careful criticisms of this paper at the APA Pacific Division meetings in Berkeley, Calif., 1999.

1. William P. Alston, "Internalism and Externalism in Epistemology," *Philosophical Topics* 14, no. 1 (1986): 179–221. Reprinted in Alston, *Epistemic Justification: Essays in the Theory of Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 185–226.
2. I will not consider in this discussion the possibility that experience alone can justify belief, a view Alston accepts. However, in section 6, I will show how appeals to one's experience, in perceptual cases, can be part of one's grounds.
3. As Wilfrid Sellars put it in the *locus classicus* of access internalism (using the vocabulary of his verbal behaviorist approach to the mind): "to be the expression of knowledge, a report must not only have authority, this authority must in some sense be recognized by the person whose report it is." "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," *Science, Perception and Reality* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 168 (italics omitted).
4. Goldman, "What Is Justified Belief?" in *Justification and Knowledge*, ed. George Pappas (Dordrecht and Boston: Reidel) 1979, p. 12 (italics omitted).
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.
6. "Internalism and Externalism in Epistemology," p. 193. Alston distinguishes an externalist (truth-conducivity) *concept* of justification from an internalist concept. In what follows, I will argue against the idea that we employ two distinct concepts of justification in ordinary contexts. Alston's truth-conducive concept identifies an aspect of a subject's justification that can be included in the internalist's account.
7. On this, see M. Steup, *An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996), pp. 79–84.
8. "An Internalist Externalism," *Synthese*, 74 (1988): 265–83. Reprinted in Alston, *Epistemic Justification: Essays in the Theory of Knowledge*, pp. 227–45, citation from p. 229.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 238.
10. Granted, if in the tutoring process a subject only learns about what can ground her belief rather than find it in her own cognitive awareness, then that was not *her* ground, the ground her belief was based on, (although it may have been a cause of her belief). I can only draw a very imprecise line between these two possibilities through the examples that I will discuss. What I insist on however, against Alston, is that such a line must be drawn in an adequate account of justification.
11. I will ignore the question of whether these supporting beliefs are distinct beliefs (with distinct contents) or whether some of the contents can be subsumed under others.
12. Here I side with the coherentist theory of justification as against the foundationalist theory in holding that spontaneous perceptual beliefs are justified—at least in part—by other beliefs and are not self-justifying. It should be noted that I am only committing myself to the idea that perceivers have as grounds only a relatively limited set of beliefs, some of which I have elicited. There is of course the question of what justifies these other supporting beliefs, and how the internalist can avoid a regress of justifications. In this paper, I leave open the question of how the regress problem is to be resolved (if indeed it can be), since I am concerned with the more restricted question of how an internalist theory can accommodate reliabilist claims. I have tried to answer this difficult question within the context of a defense of a coherence theory of justification in "On Having Reasons for Perceptual Beliefs: A Sellarsian Perspective," *Journal of Philosophical Research* XVI (1990–91): 107–23, especially pp. 116–18.
13. In an important paper, "Epistemic Competence and Contextualist Epistemology: Why Contextualism Is Not Just the Poor Person's Coherentism," *Journal of Philosophy* XCI (December 1994), Donald Henderson argues that in normal cases it is unlikely that perceptual subjects have access

to the sorts of external grounding conditions that I have pointed to. Although a subject's perceptual system may be "sensitive to" this sort of information and "rely on" it in its processing, "there is no reason to think that such information is available in an articulable form as would be required for the availability of [coherentist-justificatory] argumentation" (p. 642 and fn. 20).

But the sort of example Henderson constructs to reinforce his argument fails to give it much support. He constructs a case of perceptual belief in which you are driving down a six-lane highway and you catch a glimpse of an accident that occurs on your left. (To simplify a bit) you form the cognitively spontaneous belief that a bluish car "intersected the course of" a reddish van "several lanes of traffic to your left. As you reflect later on what you saw, you realize that the mishap occurred during the early morning hours "when light levels are changing rapidly," and you become uncertain about whether you had sufficient light. "Your uncertainty regarding light levels is a matter of not having 'really noticed', rather than having forgotten" (p. 643).

But we may still ask what beliefs may have been formed at the time of the initial perception that may have functioned as grounds for the subject. In particular, did the subject have any perceptual awareness of the lighting levels? Henderson stipulates that "you did not at the time entertain an articulate belief regarding the light level" (p. 643). But nothing about this case rules out the possibility, or even makes it unlikely, that you were subconsciously entertaining such a belief, which you could later upon reflection give some expression to. Admittedly, you were not (consciously) noticing the light level, but when you perceived the incident you took yourself to be seeing it and to have sufficient light to see in some detail what happened. And in a case like this, where you might be called as a witness to the incident, it might well happen that you later come to think that conditions were not as good as you thought they were at the time, and so become uncertain about your claim: "It seemed to me at the time that I had enough light to tell what happened, but now I am not so sure."

However, I agree with Henderson's main assertion that requirements laid down by epistemological theorists regarding evidence must be tractable, viz., capable of being implemented in our cognitive systems. And if Henderson is right that the connectionist model "provides the best account of the human perceptual competence" (p. 642), then the requirements of any theory of justification should be realizable in such a system. But the view I am defending can satisfy this sort of empirical constraint since all that it requires is that in the normal case, when a system generates a cognitively spontaneous perceptual belief, it also generates concurrent beliefs about the conditions surrounding the putative object, together with a general meta-belief that beliefs formed in these sorts of circumstances are likely to be true. The latter belief is, of course, linked to memories of past perceptions. But there is no reason to think that this information could not be retrieved "quickly and automatically" in "discrete, belief-sized bits." And so Henderson hasn't succeeded in showing that the sorts of grounds I have appealed to in this discussion are not available to the subject for use in justificatory argumentation.

14. "Insights and Blindspots of Reliabilism," *The Monist* 81 (1998): 371–92.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 371–72.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 381. Brandom does not attempt to separate a reliabilist sense of *knowledge* from his reliabilist sense of *justification*. Whenever knowledge is attributed to a subject, justification is implied.

But it has been argued, by both externalists and internalists, that there is another sense of *knowledge* that has nothing to do with justification. A subject's belief is an instance of knowledge in this sense if, minimally, it is truth-conducive. The kind of example that supports this idea of knowledge is the individual who can inexplicably predict the results of horse races; he knows simply because he repeatedly gets it right.

If there is a weaker sense of knowledge that does not entail being justified, I would argue that this is not the sort of knowledge that we humans normally attribute to each other even in perceptual contexts. However, in this paper I am considering only reliabilist accounts of knowing that are also accounts of having justification.

In *Virtues of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Linda Zagzebski points out some of the problems associated with the reliabilist's tendency to take perceptual states that are formed "without significant contribution from the intellect" as "paradigms of rationality or justifiability" (pp. 277–83).

17. *Ibid.*, p. 388.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 390.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 372 (my italics).
20. *Ibid.*, p. 372.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 375.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 372.
23. But we, who are making an assessment of the assessors' grounds, should not forget that it is possible that the expert's doubts are not excessive, and that it is the colleagues who are mistaken in attributing justification.
24. I use this phrase to indicate that a perceptual believing that there is a cup there, qua mental state, differs from a nonperceptual believing that there is a cup there in having an experiential or sensory component.
25. Note that the conclusion of the reasoning is not *there's a cup there*, but the higher-order belief: my perceptual belief that there's a cup there is likely to be true, which includes the original *spb* as a component. Thus the original noninferential belief is not the conclusion of an inference, but it nevertheless gets support from the justificatory argument. For a more formal rendering of this justificatory argument, see my "On Having Reasons for Perceptual Beliefs: A Sellarsian Perspective," especially pp. 109–11, and Wilfrid Sellars' account of perceptual justification on which mine is based in "The Structure of Knowledge, Lecture III: Epistemic Principles" in *Action, Knowledge, and Reality: Critical Studies in Honor of Wilfrid Sellars*, ed. H. N. Castaneda (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1975).
26. One can know that one has tasted this flavor before, or that this shade of red is familiar to one, without recalling any particular occasion on which one sensed those qualities.
27. A lot more would have to be said to adequately support the idea that facts of the form "*x* looks *r* to *S*" are derivative from the more fundamental fact of the form "*S* sees (and knows) that *x* is *r*," and that knowledge of the first sort of fact presupposes knowledge of the second. See Sellars' defense of this position in "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," *ibid.*, pp. 140–47; and in "Phenomenalism," also in *Science, Perception, and Reality*, pp. 76–84.
28. It may be appropriate to acknowledge at this point what should by now be obvious, that my reconciling theory of justification is couched in a framework of *physical realism*, and further accepts the fundamental claim of *direct realism* that in perception subjects are capable of having direct (noninferential) knowledge of physical objects and their sensible properties. (I have tried to show how a subject's noninferential beliefs must be based on adequate grounds if they are to count as knowledge.) This commitment to knowledge of the physical world also carries with it the assumption that skeptical challenges can be met.
29. I have borrowed this felicitous term from Linda Zagzebski's excellent discussion of knowledge in *Virtues of the Mind*, p. 331. Zagzebski's arguments against exclusivist forms of internalism and externalism are particularly insightful, as is the section "Harmonizing Internalist and Externalist

- Aspects of Knowing," pp. 329–34. My view of justification is consonant with her virtue-based theory to the extent that I have emphasized the essential role in justification of *one* intellectual virtue, viz., the subject's reflective consideration of the grounds she has for her belief.
30. The same point can be applied to mental (psychological) facts; the fact that a belief stands in some empirical relation to some other belief or sensation or causal process does not confer any justification on it, except in so far as that fact or relation is apprehended by the subject and brought within the sphere of her justifying activity.