

Good and Bad Reasons to Reject Externalism

I: Introduction

The debate between internalism and externalism in epistemology concerns one of the traditional conditions for knowledge. Specifically, proponents of these theories seek to understand what confers justification on a belief.¹ In other words, what makes one's belief a good one to hold? A belief is justified if most of the relevant factors support its truth. However, a belief's being true does not render it justified, and a belief can be justified without being true. One's current evidence might compel them to justifiably hold a certain belief, while later, stronger evidence proves that the belief was false. As long as a belief is supported by one's current epistemic situation, justification is achieved. The relevant parts of one's current epistemic situation to a belief are called justifiers. Justifiers are our bases for believing a proposition, the reasons why we hold a given belief. Reasons that warrant justification must be good reasons. Good reasons, like sensory experience, evidence, and other justified beliefs, render a belief likely to be true.² A justified belief will usually come with a strong reason to hold it, and there is typically little reason to hold an unjustified belief. Philosophers have been divided on what counts as a good justifier.³ This paper will be relatively silent on the various perspectives on what constitutes a justifier. Rather, the interest of this paper is whether or not these justifiers must be readily available to a believer.

Much work in epistemology has shown that a justified believer may not always be able to say why their belief is justified. Must there always be an answer to the question *why do you believe*

¹ It is worth noting that the debate between internalism and externalism in epistemology is not confined only to justification. This distinction figures prominently in moral philosophy, the philosophy of mind, and semantics. The scope of this paper, however, is limited to internalism and externalism about justification.

² It is also easy to conjure up bad reasons—one could attempt to justify their beliefs on the basis of rash emotions, prejudice, or hearsay, for example.

³ For instance, evidentialists think a belief is justified so long as it is formed on the basis of good evidence. Many also argue that other beliefs we hold can legitimately serve as justifiers.

that? Internalists think there must be.⁴ Theories of justification are typically characterized as internalist if they hold that all justifiers are cognitively accessible to a person. One knows why their beliefs are justified. All justificatory reasons either are or can be internal to the believer's perspective, available upon reflection. As Alvin Plantinga writes, "the basic thrust of internalism in epistemology...is that the properties that confer warrant upon a belief are properties to which the believer has some special sort of epistemic access."⁵ William Alston portrays the internalist position as a constraint; it "will restrict justifiers to items that are *within* something, more specifically, within the subject."⁶

Externalism represents the rejection of this thesis. Defenders of externalism deny that the justifiers must be cognitively accessible. This paper presents an objection to the externalist account. Sections II and III will show that externalism, broadly construed, allows a person to be justified when they hold beliefs for the wrong reasons, and this indicates a significant problem with the theory. These sections will also serve as a jumping-off point for a more sustained critique of reliabilism, a specific and popular articulation of the externalist thesis, in Sections IV and V. Finally, Section VI will argue that reliabilism must still account for a "good reasons" evaluation of justification.

II: Motivating Externalism

Externalists hold that factors outside of the believer can serve as justifiers.⁷ It is not necessary for a believer to have an internal or cognitive grasp of the reasons that make her belief

⁴ Some prominent internalists are Laurence Bonjour, Richard Feldman, Earl Conee, and Roderick Chisholm. It is worth noting that there are at least two broad categories of internalism: mentalism and access internalism. This paper will not dwell on this distinction, as its focus is not to defend internalism, but reject externalism.

⁵ Plantinga, *Justification, Internalism, and Deontology*, 6.

⁶ Alston, *Internalism and Externalism in Epistemology*, 179.

⁷ Leading externalists are Alvin Goldman, D. M. Armstrong, Robert Nozick, and Alvin Plantinga. Not all versions of internalism and externalism are totally pure; some have also defended hybrid models.

justified. As John Greco puts it, “the epistemic status of a belief is *not* entirely determined by factors that are internal to the believer’s perspective.”⁸ In broad strokes, externalism seems intuitively suspect. How could one be justified in a belief if they do not know what it is that makes their belief justified? Yet, interestingly, the results of a 2009 PhilPapers Survey, which gathered information on the views accepted by professional philosophers on a number of important issues, reveals that 43% of respondents are externalists about justification, nearly double the support of the opposite camp.⁹

A number of arguments can be made in support of the externalist view and serve to make the theory more plausible. Perhaps the most compelling argument for externalism focuses on what seems intuitively to be a close connection between truth and justification. According to the externalist, for a belief to be justified means that it is objectively likely to be true. Yet, the objective truth-conduciveness of a belief – the likelihood that it will turn out to be true – is not in any way determined by a believer’s mental or internally accessible states. Instead,

[the] objective likelihood of a belief given a body of evidence is a matter of the strength of correlation in the actual world between the truth of the belief and the body of evidence. If one applies some liquid to a litmus paper and it turns red then the objective likelihood that the liquid is acidic is very high. But the strong correlation between red litmus paper and acidity is not reflectively accessible.¹⁰

Thus, if justification is as closely related to truth as the externalist suggests it is, not all justificatory reasons can be said to be internal to the believer.

Another appeal of the externalist account connects to the well-foundedness of a belief. We

⁸ Greco, *Justification Is Not Internal*, 325.

⁹ Chalmers, *Why Isn’t There More Progress in Philosophy?*, 8. More specifically, 43% of respondents identified themselves as externalists or leaned toward externalism, 26% favoured internalism, and remaining respondents were either unfamiliar with the issue, selected another option, or believe there is no answer.

¹⁰ Poston, *Internalism and Externalism in Epistemology*.

can distinguish between having good, accessible reasons to believe something and basing one's belief on those reasons. Comesaña defines well-foundedness in the following way: "the intuitive idea is that for a belief to be well-founded it has to not only fit the subject's evidence, but also be based on that evidence."¹¹ A belief is well-founded in that it is caused by good reasons. Well-foundedness could represent a problem for internalists since causal relations are not always cognitively accessible. Externalism, meanwhile, does not have to contend with this issue since its central thesis is that not every factor determining justification is internal. A good theory of justification must account for this causal relation, and it squares better with an externalist account.

III: Believing for the Wrong Reasons: Careful and Hasty

This section will formulate what seems to be a significant problem for the externalist account of justification and will borrow from Richard Feldman's '*Thievery*' example, which illustrates the appeal of the evidentialist view. Feldman's example describes a stolen painting and three characters: officers Careful and Hasty, and thief Filcher. He conveys the proceedings thus:

Someone has broken into Art's house and stolen a valuable painting. Officer Careful investigates the case and comes up with conclusive evidence that Filcher committed the crime. Careful finds the painting in Filcher's possession, finds Filcher's fingerprints at the scene of the crime, and so on. Careful comes to believe:

1. Filcher stole the painting.

Meanwhile, Hasty also hears about the theft. Hasty happens to live next door to Filcher and has had some unpleasant dealings with him. Hasty dislikes Filcher intensely and blames him for many bad things that happen. Hasty has some vague idea that Filcher works in the art business but has no specific knowledge about what he does. With nothing more to go on, Hasty also believes (1).¹²

The point of this example is to highlight the difference between a justified and an unjustified belief.

Why is it the case that Careful is justified in believing (1), and Hasty is not? Careful believes

¹¹ Comesaña, *A Well-Founded Solution to the Generality Problem*, 32-33. Well-foundedness here is tailored to the evidentialist account.

¹² Feldman, *Evidentialist Theories of Knowledge and Justification*, 39.

Filcher is the thief on the basis of his evidence supporting that conclusion. In other words, Careful's belief is justified because he holds it for good reasons, namely his evidence. Conversely, it is intuitively implausible to think that Hasty has good reasons for believing (1). Hasty's only grounds for believing Filcher stole the painting is his dislike for the man. This cannot constitute a good reason. So, our intuitions tell us that Hasty should not hold (1) since his belief in (1) is unjustified. We see here that it is possible to believe on the basis of *bad* reasons, and that doing so cannot confer justificatory status on a belief.

This example can serve as an objection to the externalist theory of justification. This is because the externalist would have to hold that Hasty's belief is, in fact, justified. If this is the case, it indicates something deeply problematic with the externalist thesis. But why must the externalist uphold this conclusion? The externalist would naturally agree that Hasty's belief is not justified by his dislike for Filcher; yet, he can still be justified if there are external factors that are justification-conferring. As the '*Thievery*' example indicates, these justificatory reasons do indeed exist. They are to be found in the large body of evidence on which Careful has based his belief. The very facts that Filcher's fingerprints are at the scene of the crime and Filcher is in possession of the missing painting make Hasty's belief justified for the externalist. These are justification-conferring reasons in that they render (1) objectively likely to be true, and the fact that they are not internally accessible to Hasty at the time of his belief-formation does not change that he is justified. This is the externalist picture: that one can be justified in a belief not formed on the basis of justificatory reasons, as long as those reasons exist. So, the externalist allows for a believer to be justified when they hold a belief for the wrong reasons.

Thus far, this paper has appealed mostly to intuition to suggest that Hasty is unjustified for believing on the basis of bad reasons. A more concrete articulation of why we ought to come to

this verdict can also be provided. It is likely that Hasty would believe (1) in any world that maintained his dislike for Filcher, since, in our world, he does not hold it for any reason outside of this dislike. So, we can imagine a world B in which the painting is still missing, yet there is no such evidence against Filcher. In this world, too, Hasty would likely believe that Filcher stole the painting on the basis of his emotions. Of course, no reasonable theory would hold that Hasty is justified in his belief in this world. The reasoning behind this conviction, however, is that Hasty holds this belief for the *wrong reasons*. He has no good reason for believing Filcher stole the painting. Moreover, these good reasons do not exist as external factors. In world B, Hasty believes in (1) for bad reasons, and this belief is neither true nor justified.

The point here is that, if we can blame Hasty in world B for believing for the wrong reasons, then that same problem should hold in our world. Hasty believes that Filcher stole the painting because he dislikes him, and he would hold this belief even if it were not true. Hasty's bad reasoning coupled with the fact that his belief does not have to be true for him to hold it should render Hasty unjustified and epistemically blameworthy. Yet, for the externalist, he is not. Thus, the externalist account of justification allows someone to both a) believe something for bad reasons and b) be justified in that belief. This position is both unintuitive, since justification seems to have some essential connection to believing for *good* reasons, and epistemically blameworthy, given the plausibility of the world B example. If this is the case, the externalist position must either be resolved or rejected.

IV: Narrowing the Scope: A Response from Reliabilism

As shown above, externalism in its most general form appears to face a major problem. The theory allows for poorly-reasoned beliefs to be justified, even though our intuition tells us they are unjustified. However, many would be quick to point out that no reasonable person would

hold this view. There are externalist *theories*, and externalism has many different iterations. While what was discussed above reveals a potential issue with the general sentiment of externalism, this paper has not shown that more well-defined or narrow versions of the externalist theory are also subject to the objection raised: that externalism allows beliefs formed on the basis of bad reasons. More clearly defined forms of externalism must therefore be addressed. Specific versions of the core thesis include the causal theory of knowledge and truth-tracking.¹³ But by far the most widely-held version of the externalist thesis is reliabilism. This is the version of externalism taken up in the remainder of this paper. Reliabilism is a version of externalism that is not readily undermined by this objection and not immediately subject to the claim that externalist theories of justification allow for justified beliefs formed on the basis of bad reasons.

Reliabilism is an externalist theory of justification, formulated concretely by Alvin Goldman, a leading epistemologist. His objective is to conceive of a theory of justification that does not use epistemic terms to define a justified belief because defining justification through other epistemic terms results in a non-substantive explanation. Goldman is thus committed to the constraint of reductivism, meaning that he cannot “invoke any unanalyzed epistemic terms such as ‘justification,’ ‘rationality,’ or ‘evidence.’”¹⁴ Goldman states that what causes us to view a belief as unjustified is the faultiness of the process by which it was formed. Because of this, it follows, according to Goldman, that good principles of justification will have causal requirements, and “conditions that fail to require appropriate causes of a belief don’t guarantee justifiedness.”¹⁵¹⁶

¹³ The former thesis, led by Alvin Goldman and D. M. Armstrong, says that *S* has knowledge if *S*’s belief that *p* is caused by the fact that makes *p* true. Robert Nozick’s notion of truth-tracking tells us that *S* has knowledge if *S* tends to believe *p* when it is true and not believe *p* when it is false. Like reliabilism, each of these theories is externalist. Addressing these forms of externalism is outside of the scope of this paper. One reason for this is that each of these theories is expressed in terms of knowledge more generally, rather than justification specifically.

¹⁴ Emelia Miller, *Towards a Reasons Account of Defeat*, 83.

¹⁵ Goldman, *What is Justified Belief?*, 338.

¹⁶ Reliabilism shares this appeal to causation with other defenses of externalism.

Now, we must figure out which kinds of causes generally confer justification. By reviewing faulty processes of belief-formation – whose outputs would be considered unjustified – Goldman deduces that each shares the feature of unreliability. These would include such processes as hunches, guesswork, and wishful thinking. Unreliable here means that these processes typically result in error, or do not lead to true beliefs. Conversely, the belief-forming processes we generally take as justification-conferring – such as introspection or memory – share reliability as a feature. Reliability can be understood as the tendency to yield from a process true, rather than false, beliefs. From this line of reasoning, Goldman produces the reliabilist principle of justification: “[i]f S’s believing p at t results from a reliable cognitive belief-forming process (or set of processes), then S’s belief in p at t is justified.”¹⁷ Thus, for Goldman, a well-formed belief is a justified one, and, as a theory of doxastic justification, it incorporates the idea of well-foundedness into the notion of justification.¹⁸¹⁹

This picture of reliabilism clearly differentiates itself from the general theory of externalism, because reliabilism has different requirements for justification. Reliabilism is a variety of externalism because the justifier – being reliably-caused – is not something internal or apparently accessible to the believer. This is because being reliably-caused is a matter of a belief being formed through a process that is truth-conducive. Truth-conduciveness is not something readily accessible or internal to a believer. As Laurence Bonjour puts it, for reliabilists the

...main requirement for justification is roughly that the belief be produced in a way or via a process that makes it objectively likely that the belief is true. What makes such a view externalist is the absence of any requirement that the person for whom the belief is justified have any sort of cognitive access to the relation of reliability in question. Lacking such access, such a person will in general have no reason for thinking that the belief is true or likely to be true, but will, on such an account, none the less be epistemically justified in

¹⁷ Goldman *What is Justified Belief?*, 340.

¹⁸ Comesaña, *A Well-Founded Solution to the Generality Problem*, 31.

¹⁹ Doxastic here means justification pertaining to belief, as opposed to justification about action, for instance.

accepting it.²⁰

Justification is a matter of, or can involve, external factors for the reliabilist. For example, perhaps one thinks they have bad eyesight; in reality, their vision is fine and can reliably lead them to form true beliefs. The reliability of one's belief-forming process is therefore external to their perspective. Thus, reliabilism represents a version of externalism with stricter and more detailed requirements.

It may now begin to be clear why this objection does not yet work against reliabilism. As has been established above, in the '*Thievery*' example, Hasty's belief in (1) is unjustified. The general externalist position must uphold the position that Hasty is, in fact, justified, which indicates a significant problem with the theory. Reliabilism, however, escapes this conclusion. This is because the external factor which confers justification is a matter of using a reliable belief-forming process. Hasty does not use such a process in the forming of his belief in (1). Instead, Hasty employs what Goldman would likely consider an *unreliable* belief-forming process, rendering his belief unjustified. Hasty's belief is caused by his emotional attitude toward Filcher, namely, his dislike. Of course, forming beliefs on the basis of hatred cannot reliably produce true beliefs. So, the reliabilist must dismiss Hasty's belief as unjustified. Because of this, it appears that the initial formulation of the objection can only work against generalized, loosely-defined externalism.

V: Reformulating the Objection

Perhaps this type of objection can be reformulated in such a way that undermines the reliabilist position and determines whether or not they too must allow beliefs adopted for the wrong reasons to be justified. Consider the following example:

Magic 8-Ball: Susie has some condition that makes it very difficult for her to form beliefs

²⁰ BonJour, *Recent Work on the Internalism-Externalism Controversy*, 365.

or make decisions all on her own. So she chooses not to exhaust her mental labour on normal, everyday beliefs. Luckily, she has a Magic 8-Ball to help her in her belief-forming processes. Moreover, this Magic 8-ball typically produces the right results. Susie asks, “Will my home team win tomorrow?” Her Magic 8-Ball answers, “Yes,” and, sure enough, they do. If Susie asks whether $2 + 2 = 5$, the ball usually gives the correct answer. Because of this tendency, Susie forms many of her beliefs using the Magic 8-Ball.

This example hinges on the intuition that Susie is unjustified in her beliefs formed through the Magic 8-Ball. Despite being short on alternatives due to her condition, by basing her beliefs on what the Magic 8-Ball tells her, Susie believes for the wrong reasons. Trusting a response-producing plastic toy cannot constitute believing for good reasons. Perhaps this is because there is no apparent necessary connection between the beliefs produced by the Magic 8-Ball and the truth of those beliefs. We could chalk it up to a matter of luck, so Susie appears to be unjustified in her beliefs formed on the basis of the Magic 8-Ball.

It is possible that this example would not persuade a reliabilist. Perhaps they would concede that Susie’s belief is justified because the Magic 8-Ball does, after all, yield generally true, reliably-caused beliefs. As shown above, reliability is a test of truth-conduciveness, and a process is reliable if it tends to yield true beliefs rather than false beliefs. This is the case with Susie’s Magic 8-Ball; its answers typically allow Susie to form true rather than false beliefs. The Magic 8-Ball is thus a reliable belief-forming mechanism. Because she forms her beliefs using this process, Susie’s Magic 8-Ball beliefs could be said to be justified for the reliabilist, and someone like Goldman might not take issue with this example. The aim here, however, is to produce an objection that is compelling both for the internalist and the externalist.

It might be more likely for the reliabilist to agree that Susie is unjustified and remain consistent with an externalist account of justification. This example bears similarity to Bonjour’s famous 1980 Norman case, which he uses to draw attention to major issues with externalism. Let’s

consider Goldman's response to the following case:

Norman, under certain conditions that usually obtain, is a completely reliable clairvoyant with respect to certain kinds of subject matter. He possesses no evidence or reasons of any kind for or against the general possibility of such a cognitive power, or for or against the thesis that he possesses it. One day Norman comes to believe that the President is in New York City, though he has no evidence either for or against his belief. In fact the belief is true and results from his clairvoyant power, under circumstances in which it is completely reliable.²¹

This example leverages our intuition that Norman is unjustified because he lacks good reasons for his beliefs. He simply believes that the President is in New York City. While it is the case that Norman's belief is the result of a reliable belief-forming process, he is unaware of the reliability of his clairvoyant power and ignorant of the fact that he possesses it at all. As Ted Poston puts it, "where the subject lacks any internally accessible reason for thinking the belief is true it seems irrational for the subject to maintain that belief. Rationality requires good reasons."²² Unlike Susie, who has credence in her Magic 8-Ball because it produces generally true beliefs, Norman has no reason at all to hold the beliefs he does and thus appears unjustified.

The reliabilist move here is to dismiss the relativity of reliability in possible worlds. This is Goldman's move in his 1993 response to the Norman case. Goldman argues that, while one could perhaps say that a reliabilist would hold Norman to be justified, this is because his clairvoyance is a reliable belief-forming process in that *one possible world*. He writes, "to the philosopher, it seems both natural and inevitable to take hypothetical cases seriously, and if necessary to restrict one's conclusions about them to specified 'possible worlds.'"²³ Yet justification, for Goldman, pertains to what is *actually* reliable. While clairvoyance might be reliable in the possible world BonJour imagines, this ability is not *objectively* likely to yield true

²¹ BonJour, *Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge*, 62.

²² Poston, *Internalism and Externalism in Epistemology*.

²³ Goldman, *Epistemic Folkways and Scientific Epistemology*, 280.

beliefs. Goldman, therefore, asks, “[w]hat is the relevant domain for judging the reliability of a process?”²⁴ His answer is that, because clairvoyance is generally unreliable, the reliabilist does not have to hold Norman’s belief to be justified. The reliabilist could give a similar response to the Susie example. Objectively speaking, a Magic 8-Ball does not yield generally true beliefs, and this is what matters for the objective truth-conduciveness of a belief-forming mechanism. The idea that one could imagine a possible world in which Magic 8-Balls or clairvoyance are reliable does not therefore hold much weight. So, we must see if there is another way the reliabilist succumbs to a good-reasons objection.

VI: A Good-Reasons Account of Defeat

The Magic 8-Ball example can be modified in an effort to persuade the reliabilist. Let us say that Susie still bases her beliefs on what the Magic 8-Ball tells her, trusting that it will generally not lead her astray. Let us say, further, that another person, Tim, feels compassion for Susie’s condition and the objective unlikelihood that she will be able to acquire true beliefs. Because of this, Tim makes a concerted effort to actualize Susie’s Magic 8-Ball beliefs. He makes every effort to organize the actual state of affairs in such a way as to render Susie’s beliefs true. If Susie forms the belief that her home team will win tomorrow’s game, Tim, through some means, makes it happen. Thus, Susie trusts that her Magic 8-Ball gives her true beliefs and so endorses it as her belief-forming mechanism, when, unbeknownst to her, Tim is the factor ensuring her beliefs correspond to an actual state of affairs.²⁵

²⁴ Ibid., 280.

²⁵ It has been brought to my attention that thought-experiments which depict scenarios that are highly unlikely to obtain in the real world may not be useful for argumentation. Important points may be made both in favour of and against thought-experiments which depict absurd situations, but engaging with this debate is not within the scope of this paper. This paper will treat thought-experiments as a method of helping the reader to focus on important issues within a theory. Extreme, even unlikely, scenarios allow us to see more clearly issues within a theory that are less

It seems safe to assume that both an internalist and externalist would hold Susie's belief-forming process here to be non-justification-conferring; it is not the Magic 8-Ball that leads her to true beliefs. Yet, despite the absurdity of the situation, Susie's trust in the Magic 8-Ball *as* a reliable belief-forming mechanism does seem justified. Despite her condition, the sheer force of the evidence supporting that conclusion could allow her to form the belief that the Magic 8-Ball is reliable. After all, it is not impossible for Susie to form any beliefs whatsoever; rather, it is simply increasingly difficult, so she opts not to form her everyday beliefs on her own. Susie has good reason to think that the Magic 8-Ball reliably produces true beliefs, since, from her perspective, each of the beliefs she adopts through its use turns out to be true. The truth of the beliefs gained through the Magic 8-Ball serves to justify the belief that the toy is a reliable belief-forming mechanism. Yet it is Tim that makes the beliefs true after Susie has formed them, so knowledge of Tim's involvement would serve as evidence to the contrary, but Susie does not have this knowledge. Justification is determined by one's current epistemic situation, and knowledge of Tim's involvement is not a part of Susie's. Her current evidence justifies the belief that the Magic 8-Ball is a reliable belief-forming mechanism.

This could be perceived as a contradiction to the first point in this section – namely, that her beliefs formed on the basis of the Magic 8-Ball are intuitively unjustified. Here we must draw a distinction between the Magic 8-Ball beliefs themselves and the belief *that* the Magic 8-Ball allows for a reliable belief-forming process. What this paper suggests is that the latter is justified,

clear in more normal cases; they set up an argument in an engaging way. For instance, trolley problems, while far-fetched, must be taken seriously in ethics. However, some retain serious concerns about the admissibility of unlikely thought-experiments into argumentation. But we can also imagine a similar case to Susie's that would certainly obtain in the real world: a child thinks his Christmas wishlist is a reliable belief-forming mechanism. He forms the belief that he will receive a bike this year because what he writes on the list materializes. We know it is the boy's parents who ensure a bike is under the tree on Christmas day, but the boy believes it is the list that causes his gifts to appear, and therefore causes true beliefs about his gifts.

while the former are not. Susie's credence in the Magic 8-Ball is appropriate because she has good reason for it – the beliefs it produces always miraculously turn out to be true! For Susie, this fact is what causes her to accept the beliefs the Magic 8-Ball gives her. Yet we can see that, from an objective standpoint, her Magic 8-Ball beliefs are ultimately unjustified due to Tim's involvement. Susie's beliefs do not accurately conform to an actual state of affairs, as she sees it, but rather the world is forced to conform to her beliefs. So, her belief-forming mechanism is not reliable in the way she thinks it is, and therefore her beliefs, too, are not justified. We can assert this position while also maintaining that Susie, due to her lack of knowledge of Tim's role, is justified in thinking the Magic 8-Ball yields reliably true beliefs.

What if Susie was to become aware of Tim's project? Any rational person would agree that her previously justified belief that the Magic 8-Ball was a reliable belief-forming mechanism is defeated. This paper will argue that, by invoking the concept of epistemic defeat, we can show how reliabilists must appeal to a good-reasons evaluation of justification. The defeasibility of a belief refers to its ability to lose positive epistemic status. *S*'s belief in *P* may at one point be justified and lose its justification later on. A defeater is what causes a belief to lose its justificatory status. The standard reliabilist account of defeat comes from Goldman. It can be stated thus: “The Alternative Reliable Process Account of Defeat (ARP): *S*'s belief that *P* is defeated at *t* if there's some reliable or conditionally reliable process available to *S* at *t* which, if it had been used by *S* in addition to the process actually used, would have resulted in *S*'s not believing that *p*.”²⁶

As Emilia Miller points out, ARP is capable of resolving intuitive cases of defeat, but has many exceptions, signaling that this account of defeat is insufficient. She writes that the reliabilist

²⁶ Miller, *Towards a Reasons Account of Defeat*, 84. See also Goldman, *What Is Justified Belief?*, 102.

is committed to the following claim: “Psychological Realism: An account of defeat is psychologically realistic if it does not place implausible or unfulfillable cognitive demands on epistemic agents.”²⁷ One can conceive of cases that illustrate the ineffectiveness of the reliabilist account of defeat. One such case is the most recent articulation of the Magic 8-Ball example in this paper. While knowledge of Tim’s involvement arguably defeats the belief in the reliability of the Magic 8-Ball, ARP cannot account for such a defeater. This is because it is not psychologically realistic for Susie to use another reliable belief-forming mechanism, due to her condition. So, the reliabilist must either reject one of the hallmarks of their view or the account of defeat is insufficient. Because it is unlikely that the reliabilist would give up the former, they must be able to appeal to a different account of defeat.

A reasons account of defeat – in which a belief’s defeasibility is triggered when there are reasons to assent to its negation – seems to be a good alternative. Knowledge of Tim’s involvement undercuts Susie’s belief in the reliability of the Magic 8-Ball and gives her reason to reject her prior belief. Once she becomes aware of Tim’s involvement, she ought to abandon the belief that the Magic 8-Ball is a reliable belief-forming mechanism. Susie’s belief in the reliability of her Magic 8-Ball is defeated because she no longer has good reason to believe it. Here, good reasons could be construed as evidence, since she no longer has evidence to support her belief. Also note that, if ARP would work in the Susie example, it would also be due to an implicit acceptance of a good-reasons analysis. The presence of another reliable belief-forming mechanism that would have yielded a different result seems to involve the notion of good reason. Susie ought to reject her prior belief because she no longer has good reason, due to the presence of another reliable

²⁷ Ibid., 83.

belief-forming mechanism that would have yielded an opposing belief as its product.

This account of defeat, however, does not square well with the reliabilist's commitment to reductivism, or the necessity of involving non-epistemic terms. Evidence is an epistemic term, and a good-reasons analysis of the justification of a belief invokes it. Thus, the reliabilist is placed in an odd position. It is easy to conceive of cases where ARP fails due to one of reliabilism's central commitments, and the obvious alternative does not demonstrate compatibility with reductivism. Since any reasonable epistemic theory must account for defeasibility, we must either reject reliabilism in its current articulation – i.e. as committed to both reductivism and psychological realism – or rearticulate the theory in order to accommodate good reasons in epistemic evaluation. Justification in this case would not be purely external.

VII: Conclusion

Many criticisms have been raised against either side of the debate between internalism and externalism about justification. The aim of this paper was to highlight a worry that has not been the focus of much attention in the literature thus far and should perhaps be paid greater attention. It has argued against the externalist theory of justification by showing how both its core commitments and most significant articulation allow beliefs formed for the wrong reasons to be justified. First, this paper explained the general externalist position, then showed how externalism, when expressed broadly, must hold that beliefs that seem to be unjustified are, in fact, justified. A significant line of response was then addressed: that more clearly defined articulations of the externalist thesis can avoid this objection. This paper considered the most popular externalist articulation, reliabilism, and the possible response that, in the '*Thievery*' example, Hasty does not satisfy the appropriate causal requirements for belief-formation and is thus unjustified. The

objection was then reformulated using the Magic 8-Ball example. While it is not clear that reliabilism allows beliefs based on bad reasons to be justified, it must account for an agent's having good reasons as a factor in epistemic justification – an internalist consideration. Because of this, even a clearly defined externalist theory of justification like reliabilism falls apart when it is committed to being wholly external. The obvious rejoinder from the externalist to the initial objection therefore fails.²⁸

²⁸ This is not to say the case has been made against *all* externalist theories of justification. More work must be done to examine other more specific articulations of the externalist thesis like the ones clarified in an earlier footnote.

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