

INTERNALISM AND THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF TESTIMONY

STEPHEN WRIGHT
UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

1. THE ARGUMENT

Internalists think that:

An individual's justification for her belief is just a matter of the reasons for her belief that she is aware of.

Applied to testimony:

A listener's justification for her belief in a speaker's testimony is just a matter of reasons for thinking that the speaker's testimony is true that the listener is aware of.

I'll suggest that there's more to the epistemology of testimony than internalist theories can allow. So internalism is false.

A consequence of internalism is the following:

If two listeners are alike with respect to reasons for thinking that a speaker's testimony is true, then their beliefs are alike with respect to justification.

This is false. Or so I argue.

2. TWO CASES

DOCTOR: One day Vic discovers a rash on his arm and goes to visit his doctor Bob. Vic has various good reasons for thinking Bob is a competent doctor and a sincere testifier. Bob correctly tells Vic that the rash on his arm means he has condition α . Bob correctly tells Vic that he has condition α because, whilst the rash on Vic's arm looks similar to a rash associated with condition β . Bob can tell that the rash on Vic's arm is the one associated with α rather than the one associated with condition β .

DOCTOR*: One day Vic* discovers a rash on his arm and goes to visit his doctor Bob*. Vic* has just as many and varied good reasons for thinking Bob* is a competent doctor and a sincere

testifier as Vic (in DOCTOR) has for thinking Bob is a competent doctor and a sincere testifier. Bob* tells Vic* that the rash on his arm means that he has condition α . Like Bob's diagnosis of Vic, Bob*'s diagnosis of Vic* is correct. Unlike Bob, however, Bob* is unable to distinguish between the rash associated with condition α and the rash associated with condition β . This is because Bob* has a more limited experience and range of expertise than Bob and as a result is unaware of condition β .

3. THE ARGUMENT

- (1) Vic and Vic* are different epistemically.
- (2) Vic and Vic* are alike internally.

Therefore

- (3) Internalism (about testimony) is false.

4. ARE THEY DIFFERENT EPISTEMICALLY?

- The cases look like an argument *for* internalism. Specifically, the *New Evil Demon Argument*.
- The idea is that I and my envatted counterpart are alike internally, not alike externally and alike with respect to justification.
- But this intuition can be neutralised by thinking about *Goldman's* barn facsimiles.
- When Henry finds out about the barn facsimiles, he doesn't think that he used to know (have justification) but now doesn't. He thinks that he finds out how he was all along.

5. ARE THEY ALIKE INTERNALLY?

- 2 things might make an internal difference: false beliefs and misleading evidence.
- The false belief strategy suffers from a dilemma.
- Either the belief is too narrow to be plausible, or it's too broad to be false.
- The misleading evidence involves smuggling non-internalist goods.
- Also, the New Evil Demon-style internalist needs to think that they *are* alike internally.