Critical Analysis of Chisholm's Internalism and Subjective-objective Justification of Beliefs

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Abstract

What is required for a belief to be justified? How are we justified in holding belief about external world? Contrary to externalism, the internalist foundationalism believes that, there are epistemic or intellectual duties or obligations to be fulfilled before one assent to justified propositional beliefs. The purpose of this paper is to criticize Chisholm's internalism. Though internalist theory is more plausible than its rivals, it is not sufficient for justification of beliefs, and needs some complementary account to be sufficient for a belief to be rationally justified. I will show that there are some problems in Chisholm's approach to justification of beliefs. Since the majority of our knowledge is knowledge by representaion, we need to have a connective bridge between subject and objects. From Sadra's philosophy, I will offer a connective bridge between subject and external object trough the mental form theory. By conforming to knowledge by presence we may have a straightforward account of justification of beliefs about the physical world, in particular sensory experience.

1. Introduction

There is nearly universal agreement that knowledge is justified true belief. But what is required for a belief to be justified? How are we justified in holding belief about external world? It is obvious that internalist foundationalism takes justification in the

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epistemic sense. From this point of view, there are epistemic or intellectual duties or obligations to be fulfilled before one assent to justified propositional beliefs. They suppose that we enjoy a kind of privileged access to our own states of consciousness. Accordingly, justification in internalist foundationalism is meant as subjective justification. In contrast, externalist foundationalism emphasises objective justification. They reject deontological internalism, and hold that we need no internal factors for a belief to be justified; but a belief would be epistemically justified if it is produced through a process that makes belief objectively likely to be true. Since Chisholm is the best contemporary paradigm of internalist epistemologist, I shall focus the discussion on Chisholm's internalism and will introduce briefly the subjective-objective justification of beliefs. The externalist justification will not be examined in this paper.

2. Chisholm and the Subjective Justification

Chisholm's central claim with respect to justification is a certain requirement, or responsibility, or duty, or obligation. Chisholm states the intellectual duty or obligation or requirement as one of *trying* to bring about a certain state of affairs. In *Theory of Knowledge*, he says:

Let us consider the concept of what might be called an intellectual requirement. We may assume that every person is subject to a purely intellectual requirement –that of trying his best to bring about it that, for every proposition *h* that he considers, he accepts *h* if and only if *h* is true. One might say that this is the person's responsibility or duty qua intellectual being … One way, then of re-expressing the locution "*p* is more reasonable than *q* for S at *t*" is this: "S is so situated at *t* that his intellectual requirement, his responsibility as an intellectual being, is better fulfilled by *p* than by *q* (6, p.14).

For him if S believes *q* rather than *p*, he is violating his intellectual responsibilities, so his intellectual obligation requires he believe *p* not *q*. Chisholm in following James, holds that there are two ways of looking at our duty in the matter of opinion, we must know truth, and we must avoid error. (For more details see: Ref. 5, pp. 40-53) He says:

Each person, then, is subject to two quite different requirements in connection with any proposition he considers: (1) he should try his best to bring it about that if that proposition is true then he believe it; and (2) he should try his best to bring it about that if that proposition is false then he not believe it. (Ibid., p.15)

It has to be added that one should not be *blameworthy*, because in some cases one may be blameworthy or properly subject to criticism in holding some false beliefs because of laziness, or carelessness, or inattention. So in these conditions, acting on the belief might not be the best way to fulfil the duty and obligation. Consequently, Chisholm concurs with the fundamental deontological attitude; he sees warrant or positive epistemic status as essentially connected with *deontological epistemic justification*. Chisholm's basic suggestion is that warrant or positive epistemic status is to be understood in terms of fulfilment of epistemic duty. Chisholm, like Locke and Descartes, holds that epistemic justification is *deontological* justification. It means that they are clearly thinking of *subjective* duty or obligation.

To understand deontological foundationalism we have to deal with the classical deontologism of Descartes and Locke. For Descartes (1590-1650) and Locke (1632-1704) the notion of duty and obligation plays a central role in their foundationalist epistemology. In fact, Locke was the first philosopher to defend the thesis that we are all responsible for our believing. From Descartes' point of view, there is a duty or obligation not to affirm a proposition unless it is produced with sufficient clarity and distinctness. In *Meditations* he says:

But if I abstain from giving my judgement on any thing when I do not perceive it with sufficient clearness and distinctness, it is plain that I act rightly…but if I determine to deny or affirm, I no longer make use as I should of my free will, and if I affirm what is not true, it is evident that I deceive myself." (10, vol. 1, p. 176.)

It sounds as though Descartes wants to identify foundational knowledge with infallible belief. He describes his criterion for believing something by two crucial terms, that is, clearness and distinction: "never to accept anything as true if I did not have evident knowledge of its truth: that is, carefully to avoid precipitate conclusions and preconceptions, and to include nothing more in my

judgements than what presented itself to my mind, so clearly and so distinctly that I had no occasion to doubt it." (Ibid., V.I, p.120)

In *Reason and Belief in God,* Plantinga points to this fact that Descartes believed in two bases for basicality: Self-evident and incorrigible beliefs. He says: "Descartes holds that the foundations of a rational noetic structure include one's own mental lip; for example, it seems to me that I see a tree. I seem to see something green. Propositions of this latter sort seem to enjoy a kind of immunity from error not enjoyed by those of the former. I could be mistaken in thinking I see a pink rat, but it is at the least very much harder to see that I could be mistaken in believing that I seem to see a pink rat. Then perhaps Descartes means to hold that a proposition is properly basic for S only if it is either self-evident or incorrigible for S." (19, p.58) Consequently, Descartes' view is a foundationalist view, since we get a set of basic beliefs or propositions which do not depend upon others for their legitimate acceptance, and we get a method to derive all other justifiable propositions from them.

Likewise, Locke contended the subjective duty or obligation in his works, but unlike Descartes, he distinguished between knowledge and belief and maintained that duty or obligation applies only to belief. He says:

Faith is nothing but a firm assent of the mind: which if it be regulated, as is our duty, cannot be afforded to anything, but upon good reason; and so cannot be opposite to it. He that believes, without having any reason for believing, may be in love with his own fancies; but neither seeks truth as he ought, nor pays the obedience due his maker, who would have him use those discerning faculties he has given him, to keep him out of mistake and error (16, IV, xvii, 24).

Accordingly, deontology and epistemic internalism are closely connected. Epistemic internalism is the view that we have special epistemic access to the epistemic status of our beliefs. The deontological view of epistemic justification, on the other hand, requires one's epistemic obligations and duties. Consequently, one is epistemically justified in believing *p* if and only if he believes on the basis of his duty. Thus one is blameworthy if one fails to do one's duty. In responding to the question 'what is required for a

belief to be justified' we need to deal with the definition of knowledge and its relation to justification.

3. Definition of Knowledge and the Gettier Problem

One of the most significant issues in an epistemological standpoint is the definition of knowledge and its relation to justification. According to the traditional definition of knowledge, three conditions must be obtained if a subject *S* knows that *P*. Subject *S* knows that *P*, if and only if (1) *P* is true, (2) *S* believes that *P* and (3) *S* is epistemically justified in believing *P*.

For the first time Edmund Gettier realised that the traditional definition of knowledge is thus inadequate. He was the first philosopher to see that some of the propositions that are justified for us are false. If it is possible for some propositions to be both justified and false, then, it is also possible for a person S to accept a true and justified proposition without thereby knowing that that proposition is true. Hence it would seem to be necessary to add a fourth condition to the traditional definition. He remarked on the problem in his paper entitled, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" first published in 1963 (12, PP. 121-123).

In *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits*, Russell gives two examples to show that the traditional definition of knowledge is inadequate, and says:

It is very easy to give examples of true beliefs that are not knowledge. There is the man who looks at a clock which is not going, though he thinks it is, and who happens to look at it the moment when it is right; this man acquires a true belief as to the time of day, but cannot be said to have knowledge. There is the man who believes, truly, that the last name of the Prime Minister in 1906 began with a B, but who believes this because he thinks that Balfour was Prime Minister then, whereas it was Campbell Bannerman (23, p.155).

According to the Gettier's example he says: "Let us note that *e* is a conjunction: (e1) Jones has at all times in the past owned a car and always a Ford; (e2) Jones keeps a Ford in his garage; (e3) Jones has offered Smith a ride while driving a Ford; (e4). . ." We have said that, in conjunction, this set of propositions makes evident the false proposition *f* that Jones owns a Ford. But, we may assume, no one of these conjuncts is sufficient by itself to make

evident for S that Jones owns a Ford. And, we may also assume, each of these conjuncts has a basis, which is not a basis for any false proposition. We may therefore, replace the traditional definition of knowledge by this: *h* is known by S = (1) h is accepted by S; (2) h is true; and (3) h is non-defectively evident for S. So being non-defectively evident is a necessary condition for knowledge. In *Theory of Knowledge*, Chisholm gives another example as follows:

A man takes there to be a sheep in the field and does so under conditions which are such that, when a man does thus take there to be a sheep in the field, then it is evident to him that there is a sheep in the field. The man, however, has mistaken a dog for a sheep and so what he sees is not a sheep at all. Nevertheless, unsuspected by the man, there is a sheep in another part of the field. Hence, the proposition that there is a sheep in the field will be one that is both true and evident and it will also be one that the man accepts. But the situation does not warrant our saying that the man knows that there is a sheep in the field (6, p. 105).

Chisholm, in accordance with foundationalist approach, considers two further concepts: the concept of one proposition being a basis for another, and the conception of one proposition being such that it confers evidence upon another. So he says: *e* is self-presenting for S, and necessarily, if *e* is self-presenting for S, then *h* is evident for S. Then he distinguishes between those self-presenting propositions, which make some falsehood evident for S, and those self-presenting propositions, which do not. He contends that by reference to this distinction we may be able to repair the traditional definition of knowledge. Chisholm singles out a class of propositions, which he calls "non-defectively evident." If a proposition is thus non-defectively evident for S, then it has a self-presenting basis, which makes no falsehood evident for S.

4. The Evidence and the Criteria of Adequate Evidence

Chisholm remarked being non-defectively evident is as necessary condition for knowledge. So we need to know what it is for something to be evident. What is the evident? He held that the evidence of perceptual belief is based on inference from

appearance. Chisholm accepted Hume's argument that inductive inference based on an empirical correlation between appearances and reality would be circular argumentation and, therefore, unacceptable. This is the challenge that Chisholm dealt with in his epistemological works. Chisholm strongly holds that some of our perceptual beliefs about material objects are justified without reasoning from appearances.

Chisholm confronted the question of 'what makes perceptual beliefs evident'. In other words, what is the exact connection between evaluation and evidence? If we explore Chisholm's works we find out that he has offered two different answers in his works. His response to the question in *Perceiving* was that to have adequate evidence for believing something is to be analysed in terms of the worth of believing it. Thus a person S has adequate evidence for believing that *p* if and only if *p* is more worthy of S's belief than the denial of *p*. (2, p. 5) In analysis of adequate evidence, Chisholm maintains that the term evidence can be analysed in terms of a comparative epistemic term.

In *Perceiving*, Chisholm defines knowledge as true belief plus adequate evidence, S knows that *p* is true if and only if S accepts that *p*, *p* is true and S has adequate evidence for *p*. (Ibid. p. 16) But the important point here is that our epistemic options concerning *p* are not restricted to believing *p* and believing the denial of *p*, for there is also the option of neither believing *p* nor believing the denial of *p*, which Chisholm called withholding *p*. In *Theory of Knowledge*, Chisholm moved on from the notion of being more worthy than another to the attitude of being more reasonable than another. But it seems that this change cannot solve the problem concerning the lack of restriction mentioned above. There are various levels of reasonableness. Indeed, even if it is more reasonable to accept that *p* than to accept the denial of *p*, we have not yet reached the level of reasonableness that corresponds to the evident. Chisholm posed the highest level of reasonableness in his *Theory of Knowledge* 1st edition as:

P is evident for S provided that it is more reasonable for S to believe that p than to withhold p and there is no q such that it is more reasonable for S to believe that q than to believe that p (4, p. 22).

In his 3rd edition of *Theory of Knowledge*, Chisholm has said the goal of acceptance is to accept what it is reasonable to accept and to avoid accepting what is unreasonable to accept. But the crucial question here is how do we have adequate evidence for *h*? Strictly speaking, what is the criterion of being adequate evidence? Chisholm suggests three marks for a proposition *h* to be adequately evident: (1) A state or condition of S which is epistemically neutral, without using any epistemic terms like 'know', or 'perceive', or 'evidence'. (2) Some state or condition of S, which is such that S could not make any mistake. (3) A state or condition such that in which S has adequate evidence for *h*.

5. The Self-presenting Propositions

What justification do I have for thinking I know that this is something that is true? Chisholm contended that perceptions, experience, or observations cannot be said to be evident. In responding to the question, 'what is my justification for thinking I know that Mr. Smith is here?', if one says, "I see that he is here", we can still ask what justifies you in counting the perception as evident that Mr. Smith is here. One may say my present experience. But the experience itself cannot be said to be evident. We also may ask what justifies you in counting experience as evident. Chisholm suggested self-presenting propositions as directly evident.

If seeming to have a headache is a state of affairs that is self-presenting for S at the present moment, then S does now seem to have a headache and, moreover, it is evident to him that he seems to have a headache (6, p. 23).

Therefore, seeming to have a headache is self-presenting and evident. But one may ask how do you know that seeming to have a headache is self-presenting and evident? More exactly, how is a self-presenting proposition certain and incorrigible? We may divide evident propositions into two categories: directly evident propositions and indirectly evident propositions. A priori propositions which are not known on the basis of any other propositions, as Leibniz called them the *'first light'*, and Aristotle called them *'primary premises'*. These propositions are evident, as soon as the terms are understood. The traditional term for these propositions, which are incapable of proof, is *axiom*. Those propositions that are known but are not directly evident may be

said to be indirectly evident. Whatever we know about other people, and about the past, is indirectly evident. They might be justified by reference to what is directly evident.

6. Subjective- Objective Justification of Beliefs

From deontological internalism's point of view, we have a subjective duty whereby our beliefs could be justified, so justification is a subjective justification. An internalist philosopher holds that one ought to start with presentational knowledge of one's own conscious states, because this kind of knowledge would be immediate and incorrigible, and then one can go on to make inference about the external realities. But how can we be confident that what we know is indeed the objective realities? How can human beings access the external world and its facts? In responding to the question, we need to make some qualification for the theory of subjective justification of beliefs. To clarify the necessity of some qualification for the theory of subjective justification let us consider the sceptical debate here concerning physical objects.

Sceptical philosophers contended that not only do we have no immediate knowledge of external objects, but also we are not justified in our knowledge of physical objects. Hume believed that "All perceptions of the human mind resolve themselves into two distinct kinds, which I call impressions and ideas". By "impression" he means "all our sensations, passions, and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul". By "ideas" he means "the faint images of these in thinking and reasoning". (15, Book I, Part I, Sec I.) Hume contended that all our ideas are copied from impressions and nothing can exist in the mind without impressions. So, all of our knowledge must be based on reasoning from our impressions and ideas. Then he concludes his sceptical position by arguing that no such reasoning is available to support our claim to know physical objects. He would have held that I may believe there is a computer before my eyes but my belief cannot be justified.

In contrast, some philosophers like Reid denied Hume's position on the impressions. In An *Inquiry into the Human Mind* and his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (21, II, Ch. 5, pp.258-260), Reid remarked that there is no evidence for the view that all objects of my knowledge are ideas of my mind. He held that our

perceptual belief and knowledge of physical objects are immediate knowledge, not based on reasoning from our knowledge of impressions and ideas. We know immediately without reasoning that physical objects exist. However, Reid held that our perceptual beliefs of physical objects are suggested by our sensations. The question here is how do we know whether the suggestions of sensations are to be justified? What can we do with the problem of false appearance? For external objects are not always precisely what they appear to be. Due to this problem, some critical realists denied that we immediately perceive physical objects. They remarked that what we immediately perceive is some appearance. (See: Ref. 17, and also Chisholm's account of the Critical Realists in *Philosophy*, pp. 314-315) They contended that the physical objects are not identified with their appearance. Appearances are subjective rather than objective, because they depend upon the state of the subject. By this assertion they wanted to avoid the problem of false appearance.

But it seems that there is another important challenge from realists, because if we reject the immediate premise, how can we be justified to remain as realists? Lovejoy claimed that the appearance of physical objects contain a *message* about the existence of them, and perception means taking this message (like Reid's suggestion). One may still ask how we can be justified in accepting the suggestions or the messages of sensations or appearances. If there were no reply to the question, Hume's scepticism would not be refuted.

7. The Connective Bridge between Subject and Object in Sadra's Philosophy

It would be said that we have immediate perceptual knowledge of physical objects, because our senses suggest this knowledge to us. Since perceptual beliefs are evident in themselves; they do not need any further justification. Our knowledge of physical objects is by presence; there is no mediation between us as subjects and the external objects as object. This knowledge has self-presenting justification; thus it is directly self-evident. In responding to the scepticism, we say that in the tradition of Islamic philosophy, particularly Sadra's philosophy, knowledge is divided into two

kinds: immediate knowledge and mediated knowledge, or more accurately, knowledge by presence and knowledge by representation. Indeed, knowledge by presence plays a great role in Sadra's epistemology. For him, the perception of the reality of being would not be possible except through direct observation and presence. He remarked "… knowledge of [the reality] is either by presentational observation (*mushahada huduri*) or by reasoning to it through its effects and implications, but then it is not apprehended except weakly" (24, Vol. 3, p. 297).

This division goes back to the analysis of the notion of knowledge. The notion of knowledge requires at least two elements: a subject and an object. Knowledge by presence can be attained without any mediation between subject and object, the object is present for the subject immediately. By contrast, knowledge by representation needs mediation to make a connection between subject and object that is called *mental form*. In other words, knowledge by representation is where the concept and form of the object is present before the subject, like knowledge of external objects, such as tree, sky, car, human etc. In *al-Shawahed al-Ruboobiyyah*, Sadra maintained that God created the human soul in such a way that it is able to create the forms of objects in his mind, because the human soul is from the omnipotent God. These forms, accordingly, present the reality of external objects. (25, pp. 76-78) Knowledge by presence is where the existential reality of the object is present for the subject, as with knowledge of the self or the mental status of the self. Accordingly, to know the existence of the self we need no representation of the self such as doubt, feeling, or knowledge of others; rather we are aware of the existence of the self immediately through knowledge by presence without any mediation. Sadra also argues:

Were it the case that I, through my own action, whether it is intellectual or physical, could become aware of myself, it would be as if I should bring forth from myself evidence to bear witness to myself. It would obviously be a vicious circle in which the knowledge of my action functions as a cause of my knowledge of myself which is itself already implied in, and serves as the cause of the knowledge of my own action (24, Journey I, Vol. 3, p. 3).

Now we say that if there is no mediation between subject and object it is a case of knowledge by presence. If a person knows his

existence, or feels sad, there is no mediation between subject and object, and in fact, they are united. His existence or sadness is evident and incorrigible for him as long as he considers it. If S feels he is sad, it is impossible he is mistaken that he is sad. In fact, there is no scope for doubting that he is sad. The lack of mediation between subject and object guarantees its epistemic value.

It seems that by conforming to knowledge by presence we may have a straightforward account of justification of beliefs about the physical world, in particular sensory experience. There is no mediation between the subject and immediate sensory experiences. We are aware of sensory experience immediately. So we have knowledge of immediate sensory experience by presence. Consequently, as it can be seen, the problem in the internalist approach to justification of beliefs could be solved by means of this approach. Therefore, through knowledge by presence we can justify the certainty and incorrigibility of self-presenting propositions, because we know them immediately, without any mediation.

8. Knowledge by Presence and the Compatibility of Internalism and Externalism

There is no doubt that we have immediate knowledge of physical objects by presence, and we also perceive some truths without attention to the external world and they are self-presenting, justified and need not any further inference to be justified. However, one last point should be noted here. The division of epistemological theories, regarding justification of beliefs, into two main kinds: internalism and externalism, has dominated the last three decades in epistemology. It is commonly held that these two kinds of epistemological approach cannot coexist. However, there is not any incompatibility between internalism and externalism. There are some epistemologists who maintain that they can coexist in a theory of knowledge. This theory proposes a theory of justification, which contains both internalist and externalist requirements. A belief is justified if it is based upon some adequate grounds, that is, personal and social contexts. On the other hand, they hold that a justified belief must be a psychological state of experience accessible to both the subject and other normal human

beings. The accessibility requirement in this point of view clearly indicates the internalist dimension of this epistemological approach.

From this point of view, two elements are significant regarding the justification of belief; a psychological belief-forming mechanism in human beings and appropriate circumstances. There are various belief-forming mechanisms in humankind, and on the other hand, we human beings are capable of governing our assent. These two phenomena of human nature are significant in terms of rationality of beliefs, and should be considered carefully. Talking only about the abstract relations among propositions is insufficient to understand knowledge and rationality. We also need to look at the psychological mechanism regarding belief formation.

9. Conclusion

Consequently, as we have seen there are some problems in Chisholm's approach to justification of beliefs, which could be solved by means of the new approach. Firstly, Chisholm's approach deals only with subjective justification, but there is another sort of justification, namely objective justification. Obviously, a kind of justification does not guarantee a link between our subjective states and the truth about external realities. I have argued that not only is there not any incompatibility between internalism and externalism, but also we need externalism as a complementary account for subjective justification. From an internalist point of view, one ought to start with presentational knowledge of ones own conscious states, because this kind of knowledge would be immediate and incorrigible. Secondly, since the majority of our knowledge is knowledge by representation, we need to have a good connective bridge between subject and external objects. In Chisholm's approach it has not been offered such a link, but I owned the mental form theory of Sadra's philosophy as a connective bridge between subject and object. This knowledge has self-presenting justification; thus it is directly self-evident. Therefore, with conforming to knowledge by presence; we may have a straightforward account of justification of beliefs about the physical world, in particular sensory experience. There is no mediation between the subject and immediate sensory experiences. We are aware of sensory experience immediately. Consequently,

through knowledge by presence we can justify the certainty and incorrigibility of self-presenting propositions, because we know them immediately without any mediation.

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