

# THE SEMANTIC CONSTRAINT ON EPISTEMIC INTERNALISM

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The debate over internalism and externalism has become an aggressive and perennial debate in epistemology. Within a larger debate there are many sub-categorical debates since there are various types of internalism and externalism. Furthermore, the concern regarding internalism and externalism has also broken beyond epistemology into other philosophical fields. One such debate is semantic internalism versus semantic externalism.

In this essay, I will argue that the semantic internalism/externalism debate has significant implications for the internalism/externalism debate in epistemology. I will begin by defining internalism and externalism in epistemology and survey the arguments against internalism. I will also explore the ways in which language is the means by which we access knowledge. Having argued that knowledge is accessed by language, I will go on to argue that we must recognize an additional constraint on epistemic internalism, namely, that in order to satisfy the criteria for justification one must additionally have access and awareness to the grounds of the meaning of language. While this argument is not necessarily a defeater for internalism itself, the additional semantic constraint makes the conditions for justification and knowledge even more restrictive, so much so that most people fail to satisfy these conditions. This then requires a broad skepticism about knowledge and the possibility of justification or requires one to move in an externalist direction in both semantics and epistemology.

## Internalism Defined

With the dawn of the Gettier problem, the view that justified beliefs can be had apart from obtaining knowledge has grown to the extent that there is virtual agreement among epistemologists that one can have justified beliefs without achieving knowledge. One may not, however, have knowledge without justified beliefs. These facts lead to some interesting combination of theories in the internalism/externalism debate. One may for example be internalist with regard to justification and externalist with regard to knowledge.<sup>1</sup> It is important then, when speaking of internalism and externalism that one is clear as to whether he is speaking with regard to justification or knowledge. Broadly speaking, internalism is the view that certain internal states are necessary in order to be in a certain epistemic relationship. Thus, two people who possess the same internal states will both be in the same epistemic relationship to knowledge or justification, and two people with different internal states will not be in the same relationship to knowledge or justification. What those certain internal states are and what that certain epistemic relationship is vary depending on the type of internalism under consideration. Internalism with respect to knowledge means that knowledge requires justification while externalism with respect to knowledge means that knowledge is based on the right kind of causal connection instead of justification.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sven Bernecker and Fred Dretske, *Knowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 65.

<sup>2</sup> For several varieties of causal requirements for knowledge, see Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), and Alvin Goldman, *Epistemology and Cognition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988). Richard Feldman, an internalist concurs with the notion that what divides internalism and externalism is the requirement of justification for knowledge (“Justification is Internal,” *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, eds. Matthias Steup and Ernest Sosa (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 273.

Strangely, Roderick Chisholm takes just the opposite view, arguing that “according to this traditional conception of ‘internal’ epistemic justification, there is no logical connection between epistemic justification and truth. A belief may be internally justified and yet be false. The externalist feels that an adequate account of justification should exhibit *some* logical connection between justification and truth” (, Roderick M. Chisholm “The Indispensability of Internal Justification,” *Knowledge*, eds. Sven Bernecker and Fred Dretske [New York: Oxford

There is unfortunately no real consensus on the nomenclature for the varieties of epistemic internalism, which adds further complication to defining it. So for example, Steup speaks broadly of an *access internalism*, defining it as: “If S is justified in believing that *p* at *t*, then S has at *t* cognitive access to the justifier (justifiers) that justifies (justify) S’s belief.”<sup>3</sup> More specifically, Richard Fumerton discusses two types of access internalism: potential access internalism and actual access internalism.<sup>4</sup> Earl Conee recognizes ontological internalism, awareness internalism, and knowledge internalism,<sup>5</sup> and Paul Moser speaks of Moderate Internalism and Radical Internalism.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, it is a matter of debate as to whether deontology is a necessary criterion for internalism. Alvin Plantinga, Alvin Goldman and Steup attribute a deontological requirement to every kind of internalism,<sup>7</sup> while Bonjour, Conee and Feldman deny that deontology is a necessary part of internalism.<sup>8</sup> Sorting the taxonomy of all of

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University Press, 2000], 119). The difference between the internalist views of Feldman and Chisholm on this point can be reconciled by taking them to be speaking of two different conceptions of justification. Feldman obviously means that externalist thinks that the *internalist* conception of justification is not necessary for knowledge where as Chisholm likely has in mind something like Goldman’s reliabilist justification

3 Matthias Steup, “Epistemic Duty, Evidence, and Internality” *Knowledge, Truth, and Duty: Essays on Epistemic Justification, Responsibility, and Virtue*, ed. Matthias Steup (New York : Oxford University Press, 2001), 136.

4 Richard Fumerton, “What and About What Is Internalism?” (paper presented at a symposium on Internalism and Externalism at the University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY, 19 March 2005).

5 Earl Conee, “Externalism, Internalism, and Skepticism,” eds., Ernest Sosa and Enrique Villanueva. *Philosophical Issues 14: A Supplement to Noûs: Epistemology*, 2004: 78-90.

6 Paul K. Moser, *Knowledge and Evidence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 80.

7 Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 19-20. Alvin Goldman, “Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge,” *Knowledge*, eds. Sven Bernecker and Fred Dretske (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 115. Steup, “Epistemic duty, evidence, and internality,” 143.

8 Laurence Bonjour, “Reply to Sosa” *Epistemic Justification – Internalism vs. Externalism, Foundations vs. Virtue*, eds. Laurence Bonjour and Ernest Sosa (UK: Blackwell, 2003), 177; Earl Conee and Richard Feldman, “Internalism Defended” [on-line], accessed Jan 18, 2006, <http://www.ling.rochester.edu/%7Efeldman/papers/intdef.html>; Internet. A published version of this paper can be found in Earl Conee and Richard Feldman, “Internalism Defended” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 38 (2001): 1-18. The published version, however, lacks Conee and Feldman’s discussion on deontology contained in the unpublished online version of the paper.

the varieties of internalism is difficult because there is no standardized terminology.

Nevertheless, there is a common thread that runs through most varieties of internalism that makes it possible to put them into two categories according to two criteria: access and awareness. Some varieties require one or the other and some require both.

### **Access Internalism**

Access internalism holds out the importance of cognitive access to the criteria of one's justification or knowledge. Thus, one must have the capability of knowing the grounds of one's justification or knowledge. Access internalists may require that one actually access these grounds, or only require that one *has* the ability to access them. Furthermore, it does not require that one have awareness of one's access to the grounds of justification.

### **Awareness Internalism**

Awareness internalism holds out a stricter criterion than access internalism. In addition to the access requirement, it requires that one have cognitive awareness to the grounds of one's justification or knowledge. The benefit of this criterion is that one can have knowledge of when one has knowledge or justification. The draw back however, is that it is hard to see how many of our most basic and common beliefs are justified or count as knowledge since very few people—if any—are self-aware enough to know the grounds of justification or knowledge for every belief. For this reason, most internalists do not require awareness for every belief.

### **Access to and Awareness of What?**

Thus far I have defined internalism according to the two categories of access and awareness is to the grounds of one's knowledge or justification. Admittedly, this is, on its own,

rather vague. What exactly are the grounds, and how precisely do they relate to knowledge or justification? Once again, there is disagreement among internalists on the answers these questions. Paul Moser, for example, argues that awareness need not be a conceptual awareness. That is, a nonconceptual awareness “does not essentially involve the application or the consideration of a concept” where a concept means a classificatory term or a propositional term.<sup>9</sup> Thus, when one has a perceptual belief about a bicycle it need not be a belief about the concept of a bicycle but only an immediate belief about the object of a bicycle. It is, in Moser’s opinion, a belief that is judgment-free. This nonconceptual awareness, according to Moser is necessary for justification or knowledge. Furthermore, he believes that nonconceptual awareness has the benefit of freeing internalism from any semantic constraint. As I move to relate language and knowledge, I will return to Moser’s nonconceptual awareness and explore whether it is, in fact, an adequate defense from the semantic constraint on internalism.

Other internalists hold out different notions of what are the grounds of one’s justification. Richard Feldman views the grounds of one’s belief as anything that a person can describe to someone else in support of his/her belief. He acknowledges though that some people may not be able to describe it to someone because of a linguistic barrier, such as vocabulary. Still, the grounds of one’s beliefs must be capable of articulation.<sup>10</sup> Here we see Feldman’s acknowledgment of a linguistic barrier for internalism and his attempt to overcome it by minimizing the restriction to the *capacity* for articulation instead of *actual* articulation. We will also return to Feldman’s grounds for justification or knowledge to see if it is sufficient to overcome the linguistic barrier.

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<sup>9</sup> Moser, *Knowledge and Evidence*, 80.

<sup>10</sup> Feldman, “Justification is Internal,” 273.

## Internalism and Personal Justification and Knowledge

It is, for most epistemologists, a desideratum that whatever criteria for justification or knowledge we propose that it be criteria that people can actually satisfy. That is, we must start from the premise that knowledge or justification occur on a regular basis for most of us, and that we are not just describing the conditions under which one could have knowledge or justification if knowledge and justification were possible, but also describing how most of us do in fact achieve knowledge or justification. Many internalists are concerned that externalism simply describes the general conditions but that internalism is necessary to show how we actually satisfy these conditions such as by having sufficient evidence or by having good reasons for belief or by fulfilling one's epistemic duty or whatever voluntaristic criteria we may propose. Earl Conee gives the example of making a judgment as to whether a plastic pen has sufficient ink to finish writing an essay. He grants that his judgment may well be caused by a reliable mechanism that produces true beliefs. However, while this may generally describe how the process of knowledge takes place, the person who is writing the essay cannot know whether or not the pen has enough ink unless he/she has sufficient evidence.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Laurence Bonjour argues that one must not just show the conditions under which a belief can be known, but that the belief held must also be justified for that particular person who holds the belief. For this reason, he says, it seems obvious that the reason that a particular person would hold his/her belief to be true is a reason to which that person himself/herself has access.<sup>12</sup> John Pollock argues that since externalist norms are impossible for a person to utilize, this highlights the necessity for an

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<sup>11</sup> Earl Conee, "The Basic Nature of Epistemic Justification," *Evidentialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 48-49.

<sup>12</sup> Bonjour, "Externalist Accounts of Justification," *Epistemic Justification – Internalism vs. Externalism, Foundations vs. Virtue*, eds. Laurence Bonjour and Ernest Sosa (UK: Blackwell, 2003), 24-25.

internalism to which it is possible that one can deliberately adhere.<sup>13</sup> We see, then, that a proper description of justification and knowledge according to internalists will describe how someone goes about possessing personal justification and knowledge and not just the conditions under which they come about. We will return to this emphasis in internalism and show that, given the connection between language and knowledge, it actually works against internalism.

### **Survey of Arguments against Epistemic Internalism**

There is a plethora of arguments offered up against internalism. I will focus only on those arguments against internalism which assume the correctness of its own criteria. That is I will trace only those arguments which argue that, given internalism's truth, it produces undesirable results for achieving justification or knowledge. Though I will ignore many good arguments that saddle internalism with problems, the one's I have chosen will help to frame the context for my own argument against internalism.

*The argument from forgotten evidence.* It is common and indeed acceptable to forget the necessary evidence for many of our beliefs. Once we forget evidence for a belief, we no longer satisfy internalist requirements. Without evidence, the belief is no longer justified or no longer counts as knowledge on an internalist view of things. As many externalists have argued, if forgetting evidence for a belief results in the loss of justification or strips a belief of its knowledge status, then many of our most basic beliefs must be abandoned (How many of us really have access to the evidence for some of our fondest childhood memories?). The following test case helps to clarify the argument.

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<sup>13</sup> John Pollock, *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 134.

Sherlock Holmes brilliantly solves the case and catches the criminal in *The Sign of Four* – Mr. Jonathan Small. Yet eventually he gets up in years and, laying aside his deerstalker cap and his magnifying glass, he ceases to investigate crime. Later, while reminiscing about their days of fighting crime together, Watson asks Holmes to recount the evidence in the “strange story of Jonathan Small.” But for the life of him, Holmes cannot remember what it was that proved Small guilty. Is Holmes unjustified in his belief that Small in the face of forgotten evidence, or is his belief still justified whether he can remember the evidence or not? In this case Holmes has neither access nor awareness to the grounds of his knowledge or his justification. Yet if justification requires that he continually maintain cognitive access and/or awareness to the evidence, then he can no longer be said to be justified in his belief that Small was the killer. But it would be absurd for Watson to tell Holmes that since he has forgotten the evidence he cannot say that he is justified in believing that Small did it (or that he knows he did it). Obviously, Holmes is justified without remembering *how* he is justified. So when Watson asks how it was that they ever solved the case, Holmes can simply respond in his typical fashion, “Elementary, my dear Watson.”<sup>14</sup>

Internalists do not accept the conclusion that externalists seek to draw from cases of forgotten evidence, namely, that given internalism, forgetting the evidence makes one’s belief unjustified. According to Conee and Feldman, even in the face of forgotten evidence one still has background information for this belief, such as a generally reliable and accurate memory that can serve as evidence for the belief. Thus, one is justified in holding forgotten-evidence beliefs

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<sup>14</sup> For additional examples of arguments from forgotten evidence, see Alvin Goldman, “Internalism Exposed,” *Journal of Philosophy* 96 (1999): 280-81; Thomas Senor, “Internalism Foundationalism and the Justification of Memory Belief,” *Synthese* 94 (1993): 453-76; and Robert Audi, “Memorial Justification,” *Philosophical Topics* 23 (1995): 31-45.

because of memory even though it is not the original evidence for the belief. Without background evidence or reason to trust one's memory, Conee and Feldman conclude that forgotten-evidence beliefs would indeed be unjustified.<sup>15</sup>

Notice here that evidence from the reliability of memory beliefs presupposes the reliability of memory beliefs. In the Holmes and Watson example, if Holmes simply says, "I'm sure I'm justified in holding my belief because of the general reliability of my memory" he is only remembering that his memory is generally reliable. His only access to whether his memory is reliable is his memory, and so his belief about the reliability of his memory is ungrounded. Thus, memory beliefs on an internalist epistemology cannot overcome the problem of forgotten evidence.

*The insurmountable skepticism problem.* Internalism gives strength to epistemological skepticism and is incapable of defeating it. This is because, according to John Greco,

evaluations from an objective point of view involve factors such as accuracy, reliability, and appropriate causal relations to one's environment. And these are paradigmatically external factors. That is, they are factors that cannot be understood as internal to our cognitive perspective, whether we understand "internal" in terms of privileged access or in terms of what goes on in one's mental life.<sup>16</sup>

Even internalist Richard Fumerton acknowledges that if an internalism like that which Conee and Feldman put forward is accurate then radical skepticism is true or we must only talk in terms of probability for all beliefs.<sup>17</sup> For this reason, Fumerton relaxes his understanding of

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<sup>15</sup> Conee and Feldman, "Internalism Defended" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 38 (2001): 9.

<sup>16</sup> Greco, John. "Justification Is not Internal," *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, eds. Matthias Steup and Ernest Sosa (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 259.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Fumerton, "What and About What Is Internalism?" (paper presented at a symposium on Internalism and Externalism at the University of Kentucky: Lexington, KY, 19 March 2005), 8.

internalism to “the property of having justification to believe, rather than the property of having a justified belief.”<sup>18</sup> On this view, one is only internalist about access and not about awareness. But this leads to the obvious problem of base relations. Fumerton is well aware that having proper reasons for a belief and basing one’s belief on those reasons are two different things. One may have cognitive access to evidence for one’s belief and yet fail to base one’s belief on this evidence by a failure to see the connection between the evidence and the belief. This then leads us to the next argument against internalism.

*The Proper Base Relations Problem.* This argument only relates to those brands of internalism that hold that awareness of the grounds of belief are not necessary for justification or knowledge. The problem becomes clear by contrasting a statement by William Alston with one from Adam Leite. Alston argues that we must distinguish between *being* justified in believing that *p* and *justifying* one’s belief that *p*. To *justify* one’s belief that *p* requires an effort on one’s part to show that *p* or to argue for one’s belief that *p*. *Being* justified is a state or condition that one is in.<sup>19</sup> Leite, on the other hand, defines being justified as “ordinarily a matter of being able to justify one’s belief—that is, of being able to develop and provide an appropriate and adequate defense of one’s belief when asked to do so under appropriate conditions.”<sup>20</sup> *Being* justified in Alston’s view does not require access or awareness while for Leite it requires both. As stated before, most internalists do not require awareness since we do not have awareness of the grounds for most of our beliefs. Fumerton relaxes his version of internalism to statistical probabilities for

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18 Ibid.

19 William P. Alston, “Concepts of Epistemic Justification,” *Epistemic Justification: Essays in the Theory of Knowledge*, ed. William P. Alston (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1989), 82.

20 Adam Leite, “On Justifying and Being Justified,” eds., Ernest Sosa and Enrique Villanueva. *Philosophical Issues 14: A Supplement to Noûs: Epistemology*, 2004: 220.

belief. But even here this requires awareness if one is to base one's belief on statistical probability. Fumerton makes a distinction similar to Alston, where *being* justified only requires access but *justifying* one's belief requires awareness. This is a possible way around the base relations problem. For internalists who fail to make this distinction, however, the problem still stands.

### **Implications of Arguments against Internalism**

I have selected a few arguments against internalism that take common epistemic desiderata such as justification in spite of forgotten evidence, overcoming skepticism, and properly relating evidence to the belief, and argue that if internalism is true then we lose these desiderata. The argument from semantic meaning that I will explore follows along similar lines. I take it that the most basic epistemic desiderata is being justified (or warranted) in holding one's beliefs. But if, as I will argue, internalism—of any variety—is correct and our beliefs are linguistically conditioned, then to achieve justification for our beliefs we must have access to rules or grounds of semantic meaning in order to have access to the grounds of our justification. This additional access requirement, however, threatens justification for our beliefs.

### **Semantic Influence on Belief**

There has been much written by postmodernists about the linguistic situatedness of belief. Jacques Derrida's famous line, for example, "There is nothing outside the text" encapsulates the idea generally but not very clearly.<sup>21</sup> Derrida has often been misunderstood to be speaking metaphysically as some sort of an idealist. He makes clear elsewhere, however, that he

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<sup>21</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 158. Emphasis added.

primarily intends this to be an epistemological statement. That is, in terms of human knowledge there is no way we can get beyond texts or language and garner a view from nowhere that allows us to see things without interpretation.

Immediately following his famous statement that “there is nothing outside the text,” Derrida makes clear that he has in mind the issue of epistemic *access* to reality. Referring to lives of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and several other figures, he argues there is nothing outside the text “because we have *access* to their so-called ‘real’ existence only in the text and we have neither any means of altering this, nor any right to neglect this limitation.”<sup>22</sup> Derrida’s final thesis, however, is more radical than his initial proposal. According to Derrida, behind interpretation is not an uninterpreted world but only more interpretation. Language doesn’t just stand between the subject and the world. The point he makes is that any experience of that world is an interpretation. At this point it is clear that while Derrida may intend his thesis to come to bear on epistemology, it can do so only while making a metaphysical statement concerning the kind of world one interprets and experiences. In the interests of my argument, I set aside Derrida’s more radical thesis and consider the initial proposal that he offers, namely, that our experience of the world is mediated by language. This observation is not explicitly postmodern. It is a point which is acknowledged prior to the postmodern era by the analytic tradition as well (though far less ubiquitously).

W. V. O. Quine gives a telling illustration of a translator working with the language of a newly discovered tribe. The translator attempts to learn the language by observing what the natives say under certain circumstances. The translator notices that on the appearance of a rabbit

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22 Ibid.

the natives make a certain utterance. Thus, the translator understands the meaning of this utterance to be equivalent to the English word “rabbit.” But, as Quine observes, the evidence is not sufficient to identify the utterance and “rabbit” as synonymous, since there are numerous competing hypotheses that can just as easily account for the evidence. It could be argued that the utterance refers to a particular kind of rabbit, or the appearance of a rabbit in a certain way, or a particular rabbit part; or it may remind them of another object somehow associated with a rabbit. The possibilities are nearly endless. The translator can only narrow the possibilities by asking questions to the natives. But to ask questions will require making assumptions about the meaning of the words used to ask the questions, which are similar to those assumptions involved in associating the utterance with rabbit. Quine uses the illustration to make the point that linguistic behavior does not give us the ability to develop a semantic form or structure.<sup>23</sup> But this point is dependent on a far more obvious and far less controversial point, namely that our understanding of reality is based on certain linguistic assumptions about it. Our experience is no different than that of the translator. As we experience the world we make linguistic assumptions about it and discover reality through language.

Michael Dummett makes a similar point. According to Dummett,

The whole analytical school of philosophy is founded on the rejection of this conception [that language is the codification of our thoughts], first clearly repudiated by Frege. The conception of language as a code requires that we may ascribe concepts and thoughts to people independently of their knowledge of language; and one strand of objection is that, for any but the simplest concepts, we cannot explain what it is to grasp them independently of the ability to express them in language.<sup>24</sup>

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23 W. V. O. Quine, *Word and Object* (Boston: MIT Press, 1960), 28-31, found in Michael Losonsky, *Linguistic Turns in Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 222-23.

24 Michael Dummett, “What Do I Know When I Know a Language?” in *The Seas of Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 98.

This statement could initially be interpreted to mean that knowledge of a concept is always accompanied by an ability to put these concepts into a language. On this interpretation, Dummett is not saying that our concepts are linguistically conditioned but rather are only linguistically accompanied. A further reading of Dummett makes clear that this is not his argument. What he means to say is that contrary to understanding language as a code for our thoughts or non-linguistic concepts, we should understand language as a vehicle for thought. Dummett does not mean that language is a vehicle for the *communication* of our thoughts, but is a vehicle for thinking itself. There is no way that a concept can become a thought apart from the influence of language. We cannot say what it is for a speaker to take a pure concept and associate the concept with a certain word. Were this possible, interpretation would not be necessary. All that would be necessary to get at the concepts in the speaker's head would be to decode the language. But interpretation is necessary because thoughts are linguistically developed. Language is involved in the thinking not just in the communication of the thinking and thus we cannot get at concepts uninformed by language.

One of the philosophical implications of Dummett's argument is that philosophy of language is not simply an isolated branch of philosophy, but rather profoundly affects all other branches of philosophy. The study of language becomes the study of all thought. This includes epistemology as well. Thus, there is no way to talk about how we know and what we know without including about the influence of language on our thoughts.

At this point there is a possible objection that arises. If language is the vehicle of our thoughts, then this includes our thoughts about language? And our thoughts about language's

influence on our thoughts? More specifically, if all thoughts occur in and through language then perhaps it is impossible to think properly about language and thus we cannot know that our belief about the influence of language on our thought is accurate because this belief is influenced by language and not purely developed. Perhaps we're not thinking clearly about the linguistic influence on our thoughts because even our thoughts about the linguistic influence on our thoughts are linguistically influenced. This objection aims to create a skepticism about the influence of language on thought by granting that if it were true we couldn't know it since our thought about language's influence on our thought is itself influenced by language.

In order to begin answering this objection, and in order to distinguish the influence of language on our thoughts from the influence of language on our thoughts about language's influence on our thoughts we will term the latter "the meta-influence of language." Wittgenstein took account of the meta-influence of language in his writing on the rules of language.

According to Wittgenstein, when we think about language even our thoughts about language require language. Consider any given rule for interpretation or for meaning. The rule will itself require interpretation.<sup>25</sup> Even our behavior cannot follow a rule apart from interpretation since it can be explained to fit any given rule.<sup>26</sup> Wittgenstein gives the example of a teacher who gives his student the task of continuing the series "2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12". The student adds by two up to 1,000. Beyond 1,000 he adds by four. The teacher scolds the student for what he considers an error, but the student is baffled because he thought he was following the rule: add by two up to 1,000 then add by four up to 2,000, then by six up to 3,000. The point of the illustration is not

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<sup>25</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen/Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: MacMillan Press, 1958), §185.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, §201.

that had the student been given more evidence he might have done what his teacher expected. Rather, it demonstrates that whatever the evidence or the amount of evidence, it will still require interpretation. Had the teacher given the student further information it may have clarified what he expected, not because the information requires no interpretation, but because the student had come to share the teacher's interpretation of the information. Thus there is no thought – not even thought about the influence of language on thought – that can be accessed apart from interpretation.

But the meta-influence of language does not ultimately undercut the truth of the influence of language on thought. The fact that we do not conclude uninfluenced by language that language influences our thought should not bother us. This is precisely what we would expect to be the case. So we have to wonder in what way the argument from the meta-influence of language would require skepticism regarding the influence of language on thought in the first place. The objection can only stand when we grant the assumption of the superiority of non-linguistic thought. Without this assumption we have no reason to think that the meta-influence of language leads to skepticism regarding the claim that language influences all thought. But we have no reason to acknowledge the superiority of non-linguistic thought. Nor do we have reason to hold that we think non-linguistically.

Yet we should not conclude from the influence of language on our thought or the meta-influence of language that any interpretation is as good as another. The point is rather that one interpretation cannot be shown to be better than another on non-interpretive grounds. Some interpretations are absurd because they contradict other interpretations or do not follow rules of interpretation, but even here it will require interpretation to determine this.

I return for a moment to the discussion of internalism to draw some preliminary conclusions. When we read some internalists in light of the linguistic influence on our beliefs the problem is clear. Roderick Chisholm states that “the concept of epistemic justification is... internal and immediate in that one can find out directly, by reflection, what one is justified in believing at any time.”<sup>27</sup> On Chisholm’s understanding, epistemic justification is an armchair exercise. One can find out about justification directly, immediately and within the confines of one’s mind. For this to be true, these thoughts must not require interpretation and must be uninfluenced by language. But since, as I have argued, all concepts are themselves linguistic they must be interpreted.

Richard Rorty sums up the shift of the early Wittgenstein to the later Wittgenstein as one in which the distinction between saying and showing becomes a distinction between assertions and social behavior that makes assertions meaningful. In other words, all assertion is interpretation.<sup>28</sup> Our language never refers to things directly. It is always limited by the inherent restrictions of language. If this is true then our access to our epistemic justification is not immediate and direct as Chisholm assumes, it must be interpreted and mediated by the vehicle of language.

Though Chisholm does not use the words “access” or “awareness,” the idea of access is buried in the phrase “one can find out” and the word “reflection.” But this access entails access to the rules of semantic meaning or interpretation. If our beliefs themselves require interpretation, then they have semantic content. In order for us to hold justified beliefs, then, we

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27 Roderick Chisholm, *Theory of Knowledge*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1989), 7.

28 Richard Rorty, “Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and the Reification of Language,” *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Charles B. Guignon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 351.

must be required to access not just the epistemic grounds for our beliefs but also access the linguistic grounds as well. But this poses a problem. Access to semantic meaning requires that we have access to the rules of meaning. What are the rules of meaning? Identifying the rules of language is a problem even for those who seek to do so deliberately. But if they cannot be identified, then they cannot be accessed. And thus we identify a problem for epistemic internalism. I offer the tentative thesis, then, that if epistemic access and awareness is requisite for justification, then one cannot avoid adding the requirement that semantic access and awareness is necessary as well. Chisholmian internalism is, however, one of the strictest varieties of internalism. Perhaps other varieties are immuned from the requirement of semantic access and awareness.

### **Implicit Knowledge and Rules of Meaning**

Implicit knowledge of the rules of meaning may be a way to avoid the challenge of the semantic constraint on internalism. If the rules of meaning are implicit or tacit, then perhaps one need not access them deliberately or with awareness. The fact that someone cannot identify rules of meaning does not mean that they do not have access to them. I raise the issue of implicit knowledge because the connection between implicit knowledge of rules of meaning and the internalist requirement of epistemic access seems clear. Just as some varieties of internalism argue that only access is necessary for justification so also there are those semantic theorists who argue that only an implicit knowledge of the rules of meaning is necessary to use words meaningfully.

Something like implicit knowledge is surely probable. After all, how else do we account for a language speaker's capacity to understand a potential infinite number of sentences?

Furthermore, without implicit knowledge it seems impossible to explain how people are able to learn a language or even learn a second language. Dummett, who was quoted above on the connection between language and thought, also argues for implicit knowledge. He writes,

A theory of meaning will, then, represent the practical ability possessed by a speaker as consisting in his grasp of a set of propositions; since the speaker derives his understanding of a sentence from the meanings of its component words, these propositions will most naturally form a deductively connected system. The knowledge of these propositions that is attributed to a speaker can only be an implicit knowledge. In general, it cannot be demanded of someone who has any given practical ability that he have more than an implicit knowledge of those propositions by means of which we give a theoretical representation of that ability.<sup>29</sup>

According to Dummett, implicit knowledge is a genus of knowledge. It is a knowledge formed naturally and thus the speaker is not capable of formulating his knowledge of language theoretically. But it is a severely limited knowledge. It cannot be a propositional or intentional knowledge—certainly not if it denies awareness.

Propositional and intentional knowledge, according to Crispin Wright, must satisfy certain conditions in order to be counted as such. He compares a human belief that a particular substance is poisonous to the disposition a rat might have to avoid that substance. Are they equal forms of belief? Wright does not think so. The human's belief can be extended to apply to multiple circumstances and projects and can combine new information with his belief about the substance to form further beliefs. The human can make new conclusions out of his belief such as: this poison would be useful for killing an adversary, this poison should not be put on his/her child's food, etc. In the case of the rat, however, its disposition cannot be extended to new circumstances and situations. The rat cannot combine a belief about the substance with other

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<sup>29</sup> Michael Dummett, "What is a theory of meaning?" in *Truth and Meaning*, eds. G. Evans and John McDowell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 70.

beliefs or put it in perspective of a total set of beliefs. Intentional states, then, according to Wright, are part of a “holistic network” or “articulated system.” Implicit knowledge of semantic meaning is not therefore a form of propositional or intentional knowledge. One cannot, therefore, even have access to the grounds of semantic meaning on this account. At best, one may be able to understand new sentences and learn new languages according to a naturalized understanding of rules of language. But this is hardly the same as having access to those rules. Access would require that one be able to relate rules to new rules and to be able to extend those rules to further sentences and learn from the semantic beliefs or rules of others. We cannot say that these are intentional states.

There is an additional problem with attributing access to semantic rules to a speaker. As listeners we only have access to what is going on in a speaker’s mind by the external linguistic signs he uses. But we have no way of distinguishing between cases in which one intentionally follows a rule due to implicit knowledge and cases in which one has no knowledge of a rule and conforms to a rule by accident. This then is a semantic version of Gettier problems in epistemology. A statement may be accidentally meaningful.

Consider subject  $s$  using expression  $e$ . He does not know rule  $r$  for using  $e$  on occasions  $m_n$ .  $s$  faces semantic occasion  $m_I$  and accidentally uses  $e$  correctly. Certainly  $e$  has meaning in  $m_I$ , but it tells us nothing about the speaker’s implicit knowledge of any rule.  $s$  may have no clue as to when the statement “When in Rome, do as the Romans” applies. He has heard people use it before, but cannot figure out the rule for using it. Intent on saying something witty and impressive, he throws it out while in conversation at a party. By a stroke of luck he uses it correctly. The listeners at the party, therefore, form the belief that  $s$  knows what “When in

Rome...” means. But the listeners are wrong. It is only by accident that *s* used the phrase correctly, and while it still has meaning, there is no discernible difference between his accidentally-correct use and one used on the basis of implicit knowledge. The point then is this: there is no way of knowing whether someone has implicit knowledge or not. Neither the speaker nor the listener has the ability to discern whether or not the speaker has access to the rule of semantic meaning.

Wittgenstein makes a similar point regarding identifying understanding in someone. We want to know what it is for someone to be in a state of understanding. Thus, we identify what is a common physical state when someone is said to be in a state of understanding. By identifying that physical state we have not discovered what it is to be in a state of understanding. Rather, we have only identified that which accompanies understanding and not the understanding itself. Wittgenstein states, “For even supposing I had found something that happened in all those cases of understanding—why should *it* be the understanding?”<sup>30</sup> This is not just a problem for connecting implicit knowledge to semantic access. It is also a problem for attributing implicit knowledge to a speaker in the first place.

But what about the fact that a speaker can learn new languages, can implicit knowledge account for that? Even if learning new languages is due to an implicit knowledge, this need not entail access to the rules of meaning. Implicit knowledge does not tell us how this knowledge is connected to language exactly. It says nothing about whether access to the grounds of the implicit knowledge is necessary. Implicit knowledge can easily be explained according to

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30 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §153. I owe the discovery of this statement in Wittgenstein to Warren Goldfarb, “Wittgenstein on Understanding” *The Wittgenstein Legacy. Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 17, eds. Peter A. French, Theodore E. Uehling, Jr. and Howard K. Wettstein (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 119.

semantic naturalism, thereby making implicit knowledge just as compatible with externalism as it is with internalism. A speaker may even gain intentional knowledge of rules of use, but this should not be confused with access to rules of what makes them meaningful. The conclusion as to whether implicit knowledge can be appropriated by internalists to overcome the semantic constraint must be that they can only do so if they identify implicit knowledge as the same semantic access.

I have argued in this section that implicit knowledge can be accounted for naturally and therefore does not require one to have access to the rules of meaning. There is the further problem of Gettier versions of semantic rules. If implicit knowledge is true, and I think that it is, then it argues best for externalism both semantically and epistemically. It argues for naturalized semantics by establishing the necessity of a mental state being caused by a metaphysical state.

### **The Semantic Constraint on Internalism and the Versions of Semantic Meaning**

So far I have argued that epistemic internalism is faced with a semantic constraint of access and possibly awareness of rules of semantic meaning. But what are these rules? There are many competing theories on what are the rules for semantic meaning. For the purposes of establishing the semantic constraint on internalism, it is not relevant what set of rules one subscribes to or even that there are in fact rules. Whatever rules there may be—picture theory, rule theory, convention, pragmatism, use, etc.—given that all of our beliefs require interpretation, internalism must require access (possibly awareness) to them. The semantic constraint against epistemic internalism is not based on a particular theory of speaker meaning. It is not dependent on a particular answer as to how speakers can understand sentences which are novel to them or how listeners can understand a potential infinite number of sentences they have

never heard. Explaining this phenomenon, and others like it is important in its own right, but is not necessary to make the case against internalism by means of the semantic constraint.

### **The Semantic Constraint Applied to Non-Chisholmian Internalism**

I have already shown that the semantic constraint successfully applies to Chisholmian internalism because argues for direct access by reflection to the grounds of justification apart from semantic interpretation. I have shown that an appeal to implicit knowledge does not remove the constraint for any version of internalism. I mentioned above that some versions of internalism recognize some linguistic and semantic constraints. Paul Moser for example, argues that epistemic awareness need not be conceptual awareness. All that is needed is an immediate perceptual awareness which is not categorical or propositional. Thus, in order to satisfy the internalist requirement, when one sees a bicycle, one need not have awareness that what one actually sees is a bicycle, only the awareness of that one is being presented to in the form of a bicycle.<sup>31</sup> Non-conceptual awareness is not, however, simply sensory experience. “Being nonconceptual, does not itself essentially involve one’s predicating something of the presented contents; yet of course it can be accompanied by such predicating. And such attention attraction is different from mere sensory stimulation, since it essentially involves direct awareness, albeit nonconceptual awareness, of what is presented in experience.”<sup>32</sup>

Though I think there are reasons to reject the possibility of Moser’s claim on epistemic grounds, I am interested primarily in Moser’s belief that his argument avoids semantic challenges that might confront other varieties of internalism. Though he does not describe the

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<sup>31</sup> This is similar to the adverbial theory of apperception, where one only believes that one is being appeared to bicyclely.

<sup>32</sup> Paul Moser, *Knowledge and Evidence*, 81.

nature of the semantic challenge to internalism, he nevertheless takes non-conceptual awareness to be immune to it. I want to explore ways in which non-conceptual awareness attempts to avoid semantic problems.

Moser takes a concept to be classificatory “such as a class term (perhaps only in a language of thought) that can be a constituent of a proposition.”<sup>33</sup> Obviously, classification takes on semantic requirements. How we classify items is a linguistic project. In order to avoid classification in epistemic awareness, Moser argues that non-conceptual awareness needs to happen passively. He calls this process, “direct attention attraction” and defines it strictly as “one’s being directly psychologically ‘affected’ by certain contents in such a way that one is psychologically *presented* with those contents.”<sup>34</sup> The contents of these presentations may be either perceptual (sensory) or non-perceptual (non-sensory). This then forms two categories of nonconceptual awareness: nonconceptual perceptual awareness and nonconceptual nonperceptual awareness. Nonconceptual perceptuals are easily understood. Nonconceptual nonperceptuals, however, require some explanation. Moser defines these as “relations of inclusion or exclusion between concepts, psychological states such as thinking, believing, remembering and intending, and nonconceptual mathematical items.”<sup>35</sup> Since Moser’s nonconceptual awareness admittedly concerns concepts, he seeks to explain how it can remain nonconceptual. He writes, “Even if the *object* of my remembering is conceptual, we can distinguish between a state of remembering and its object. My awareness simply of the state or event of remembering would be a nonconceptual nonperceptual experience of attention

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33 Ibid., 80.

34 Ibid., 82. Emphasis original to Moser.

35 Ibid., 85.

attraction.”<sup>36</sup> The point is that for any nonconceptual state *s* whose content is remembering that *p*, *s* is not identical with *p*. It is not easy to see how awareness of these nonconceptuals can satisfy the needs of internalism, but the more relevant point at this juncture is whether nonconceptual awareness can avoid the semantic constraint. Moser is under the impression that only concepts are semantically oriented because they involve categorization. Nonconceptual perceptuals and nonconceptual nonperceptuals come by way of direct access, and therefore are uninfluenced by a person’s semantic judgments.

Moser is right to see that conceptals involve semantic judgment, and, I think, right to see nonconceptuals as free from semantic judgment. But being free from intentional semantic judgment is not the same as being free from semantic or linguistic influence. Nonconceptuals are not free from the necessity of interpretation. One may certainly have awareness that is not necessarily intentionally conceptualized or categorized, but this does not mean that it is free from the influence of language or from interpretation. We interpret our experience without it even being deliberate. We make assumptions about the value and meaning of things and may not even be aware that we do so. This is no problem for the externalist, but internalists must answer how one can be justified in holding beliefs that require interpretation and are formed by language without access or awareness to the rules of meaning. At the moment one enters the game of needing epistemic access and awareness, one has by default entered the game of needing semantic access and awareness.

Moser seems to think that our ideas are influenced by language only where we intentionally do so. But language and meaning is at work apart from our normal awareness to it.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. Emphasis original to Moser.

Recall Dummett's point: language is not just how we organize our thoughts, it is in fact how we think. Wilhelm von Humboldt makes the point perhaps even more clearly than Dummett. According to Humboldt, language does not just designate or categorize our experience of objects. Our experience of the objects is made possible by our language. "Just as no concept is possible without language, so also there can be no object for the mind."<sup>37</sup> Humboldt explains that the experience of objects necessitates concepts and language. So while our experience of objects does not involve semantic judgment, the concepts on which the experience of objects depends do involve semantic judgment. Thus, we make use of language in ways that are not deliberate or intentional and thereby we do not have access or awareness of them. Language is itself a structure and because it is responsible for the structuring of the human mind, "there resides in every language a characteristic world view [*Weltansicht*]." Languages are also structurally diverse, and so they constitute different worldviews. How then can one learn a language while operating from a different worldview? Humboldt answers that to learn a new a language is to gain a new viewpoint, but it is never divorced from one's linguistic worldview. It is a viewpoint within the worldview of the first language.<sup>38</sup>

The view of language I have outlined here does not see language as a barrier to the world. Language is not an obstacle that stands between human beings and objects. Rather, we are immersed in a language that provides us the way of experiencing those objects. Thus, there is no experience without interpretation, whether we are aware of this or not. Humboldt points out that in making cognition possible, language does not cut us off from the world. As we surround

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<sup>37</sup> Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Wilhelm von Humboldts Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. A. Leitzmann, vol. 7 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1968), 7:59, quoted in Michael Losonsky, *Linguistic Turns in Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 93.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:60, quoted in Losonsky, *Linguistic Turns*, 93.

ourselves by the world of language, “we do not abandon the world that really surrounds us.”<sup>39</sup> The effect of these conclusions on Moser’s view of nonconceptual awareness is that the divide between nonconceptual awareness and semantics is not that great. If our awareness is nonconceptual it remains influenced though distinct from our concepts. As Moser points out, our nonconceptual awareness about our concepts does not become conceptual awareness. The question is, however, how can one not be required to have semantic access or awareness when nonconceptuals are so clearly influenced by our concepts and our semantic judgments? The dilemma for Moser is that he holds out awareness of nonconceptual thoughts, but it is impossible to have access or awareness to the influence of semantic influence of our concepts on nonconceptual thoughts. But in order to satisfy internalist criteria, he must be able to do just that.

It is important to note that influence of language on our experience of the world is not because the objects of experience do not exist without language. Rather, there is an epistemological problem that prevents us from separating them. Quine points out that as we think about our knowledge, we are unable to determine how much of knowledge “is merely contributed by language and how much is a genuine reflection of language.” In order to determine what is language and what is not, “we must talk about the world as well as about language, and to talk about the world we must already impose upon the world some conceptual scheme peculiar to our own special language.”<sup>40</sup>

We must modify Quine’s overstatement, however. He is right to point out the influence of language on our experience of the world, but wrong to think that there is no possible

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39 Ibid., 7:61, quoted in Losonsky, *Linguistic Turns*, 94.

40 W. V. O. Quine, *From a Logical Point of View*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 78.

distinction between them. If we were unable to make a distinction between language and our world, why do we speak of both to begin with instead of only one? Where would the notion that language is not identical with the world come from in the first place? Were we truly unable to distinguish them, we would not even be able to entertain the question to begin with. Furthermore, as Losonsky points out,

The fact that external questions and statements about a linguistic framework will rely on a linguistic framework does not mean there is no distinction between external and internal questions. Questions that are internal to one framework can be external to another. Just because there is no cosmic exile from frameworks entirely does not mean that there is no exile: we can emigrate from one framework and become immigrants of another.<sup>41</sup>

Losonsky's criticism does not mean that we must outright reject Quine (for to do so would be to deny that language has any influence on our experience of the world). Rather, it pulls Quine's radical thesis back a bit to say that we can distinguish between language and the world, but only from the standpoint of another framework and never from no standpoint or framework at all.

Once again, this highlights the fact that we lack to view from nowhere by which we will see the difference between language and world. So while Moser's conception of access and awareness is much more nuanced than Chisholm's, he is nevertheless unable to escape the semantic constraint on internalism so long as he appeals to direct access and awareness to the objects of our experience. Our beliefs have semantic meaning, and thus if Moser requires access and awareness to the grounds of our beliefs—however nuanced, he must also require access and

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<sup>41</sup> Losonsky, *Linguistic Turns*, 218.

awareness of some sort to the rules of semantic meaning.

Richard Feldman also recognizes a possible semantic problem for internalism. As mentioned above, he argues that in order to be justified, one must have access to the grounds of one's belief, where the grounds are anything that a person can describe to someone else in support of his/her belief. He seeks to avoid the semantic problem that might arise from a person's linguistic inability to describe the support for his/her belief. He argues that the grounds must be capable of articulation, rather than the person being capable of articulating it. Does this avoid the semantic constraint? Clearly, this does not. At best it avoids the semantic problem that Feldman has in mind. But even there was no gap between what a person is capable of articulating and what is capable of articulation, the semantic constraint that I have argued for here would still remain. A person with no incapacity for articulation would still hold beliefs that are influenced by language, and thus his beliefs would require interpretation according to semantic rules. On Feldman's internalist account, he would need access not only to all the grounds of belief, whether epistemic or semantic.

### **The Effect of the Semantic Constraint on Internalism**

The semantic constraint follows the pattern of the three other criticisms of internalism mentioned above. It argues that given certain epistemic desiderata, internalism fails. I have argued that given the epistemic desiderata of being able to hold justified beliefs, internalism fails without the semantic constraint. It is saddled with the additional problem of accessing the rules of semantic meaning, and thus, without being able to do so, someone cannot satisfy internalist criteria for justification or knowledge.

### **Replacing Internalist Criteria and Avoiding the Semantic Constraint**

My intention has not been to argue *for* externalism so much as it has been to argue *against* internalism. I will only take a moment to argue for how externalism might fair against the semantic constraint. The problem of the semantic constraint for internalism was that it required access (sometimes awareness) to the rules of meaning because it required access and awareness to the epistemic grounds of one's belief. Because externalism argues for an external causal connection between belief and justification and knowledge, it does not hold out epistemic access or awareness as necessary for justification or knowledge (though externalists generally appreciate access and awareness for other purposes). Whether one is a reliabilist of Goldman's sort, or a warrant proponent like Plantinga, he/she will hold that there are external factors that determine whether one is justified (or warranted) or possesses knowledge. And one can be in conformity to these external factors whether one knows it, has access or awareness to them or not. Generally, we may consider externalism a naturalized epistemology. It is formed in us by factors outside of us and thus when we forget the evidence for previously held for a belief, we do not lose justification for our belief. The belief was still formed in us by reliable belief-producing processes or by properly functioning cognitive equipment, and thus we are justified (or warranted).

The same holds for semantic rules. We need not be able to access them in order to conform to them. Perhaps there is an a priori knowledge of them or a conformity to them because of a reliable semantic-producing process. Regardless of the theory, we need not access them in order to conform to rules of semantic meaning. Furthermore, even if it should turn out that there are no rules for semantic meaning, externalism would still be able to account for someone speaking meaningfully. Whatever meaning the person's statements have are part of a natural formation in the person and not due to intentional attempts to be meaningful.

Because externalists does not argue for access and awareness to the grounds of belief, they do not need access or awareness to the rules of semantic meaning. It is still important to theorize how a speaker is able to conform to rules of meaning to which they do not have access, nevertheless the speaker need not know how he is able to do this in order to speak meaningfully.