ABSTRACT This paper addresses the meta-epistemological dispute over the basis of epistemic evaluation from the standpoint of meliorative epistemology. Meliorative epistemology aims at guiding our epistemic practice to better results, and it comprises two levels of epistemic evaluation. At the social level (meliorative social epistemology) appropriate experts conduct evaluation for the community, so that epistemic evaluation is externalist since each epistemic subject in the community need not have access to the basis of the experts’ evaluation. While at the personal level (meliorative personal epistemology) epistemic evaluation is internalist since each member of the community must evaluate the reliability of the (apparent) experts from the first-person perspective. I argue that evaluation at the social level should be the primary focus of meliorative epistemology since meliorative personal epistemology does not provide informative epistemic norms. It is then pointed out that epistemic evaluation at the social level can be considered internalist in the extended sense (social internalism) in that every component of the evaluation needs to be recognized by some members of the community at some points. As a result, some familiar problems of internalist epistemology, such as regress and circularity of epistemic support, carry over to meliorative social epistemology.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most heavily contested issues in recent epistemology is the meta-epistemological dispute over the proper basis of epistemic evaluation. The internalist camp favors the restriction that the basis of epistemic evaluation must be conditions internal to the epistemic subject, while the externalist camp rejects this restriction. There is however no consensus on how the internalist restriction is to be understood. Some epistemologists take internal conditions to be conditions that are accessible to the epistemic subject by reflection. Others take internal conditions to be the subject’s mental states, some of which may not be accessible to her by reflection. There are also different views on the scope of the internalist restriction. Ground internalism only requires that the grounds for believing the proposition be internal to the epistemic subject. Adequacy internalism demands further that the adequacy of these grounds must also be confirmed by conditions internal to the subject.
This lack of consensus is due in part to different ways the internalist restriction is motivated. Some internalists rely on thought experiments to show that our intuitive epistemic evaluations are in line with internalism. What motivates internalism of this kind is the project of describing our pre-theoretical epistemic intuitions in general terms. I call it descriptive epistemology. Other internalists start from their conviction that epistemic evaluation should play a role in a certain project. Two such motivations are well known. One is that epistemic evaluation should tell us whether the epistemic subject has fulfilled her epistemic duties, and that only conditions internal to the epistemic subject are relevant to this determination. I call the project of determining whether the subject has fulfilled her epistemic duties deontological epistemology. The other well-known line of reasoning is that epistemic evaluation should guide our epistemic practice to better results, and that the evaluation can guide the subject’s epistemic practice only if it is accepted by the epistemic subject based on evidence and reasoning available to her. I call the project of guiding epistemic practice to better results meliorative epistemology.

It is not uncommon that these lines of motivation are combined. One might regard deontological and meliorative epistemologies as two aspects of the same project by assuming that our epistemic duty is to attain a high level of epistemic performance. Another possibility is to combine deontological and/or meliorative epistemology with descriptive epistemology by assuming that our pre-theoretical epistemic concepts serve the deontological and/or meliorative objective. However, given the deep disagreements on the issue and the uncertainties about the nature of the internalist restriction, it is prudent to keep these potentially divergent projects separate until we become clear about each of them. It is particularly unwise in my view to try to accommodate our pre-theoretical intuitions (teased out by thought experiments) when we seek meta-epistemological constraints suitable for either deontological or meliorative epistemology. Epistemic concepts we should adopt to achieve the relevant objective may well be different in some respects from those currently in use, and thus prove inconsistent with certain aspects of our pre-theoretical intuitions. It is conceivable that different lines of motivation support different types of epistemic evaluation, or that both the internalist and externalist conceptions of epistemic evaluation have legitimate roles to play in our epistemic practice. In short, to untangle the complex knot of the dispute over the proper constraints on epistemic evaluation, it is better to address one line of motivation at a time.

My focus in this paper is meliorative epistemology. I examine what restrictions, if any, should apply to the basis of epistemic evaluation for the purpose of guiding our epistemic practice to better results, where it is assumed that the main goal of our epistemic practice is to increase true beliefs and avoid false ones. The adoption of meliorative epistemology as our focus does not make it obvious what kind of restriction should be placed on the basis of epistemic evaluation. Some think that internalist restrictions do not make sense in meliorative epistemology since evaluation that is based on the limited resource available to the individual epistemic subject is not the best for improving her epistemic performance. Others point out that well-informed epistemic evaluation by the experts will not improve the individual subject’s epistemic performance unless she accepts the evaluation in light of evidence and reasoning that are available to her. There remains, therefore, a sharp divide among meliorative epistemologists as to what restrictions on epistemic evaluation, if any, is appropriate.
The reason for the disagreement in my view is that meliorative epistemology comprises two levels of epistemic evaluation. At the social level (meliorative social epistemology) appropriate experts conduct evaluation for the community, while at the personal level (meliorative personal epistemology) each member of the community needs to evaluate the reliability of the (apparent) experts. The evaluation at the social level is externalist since each epistemic subject in the community need not have access to the basis of the experts’ evaluation, while the evaluation at the personal level is internalist since each epistemic subject must evaluate the reliability of the (apparent) experts based on the epistemic resource available to her, e.g. whether she can trust IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) on the subject of global warming. The two components complement each other, but I argue that the evaluation at the social level should be the primary focus of meliorative epistemology since meliorative personal epistemology does not provide informative epistemic norms.

2. MELIORATIVE SOCIAL EPISTEMOLOGY

It is my contention that meliorative social epistemology calls for epistemic evaluation of an externalist kind, but some forms of externalism are clearly inappropriate for the project. For example, we cannot say—as some externalists do—that we are justified in believing a proposition provided the process of forming the belief is as a matter of fact reliable, or provided the cognitive faculty involved is as a matter of fact functioning properly. Take the proposition that global warming is due to human activity. When the epistemic subject processes a variety of information and forms a belief in the proposition, externalists may say that the epistemic status of her belief depends on certain facts she may not be aware of—viz. facts about her belief-forming process or cognitive faculty. However, if no one recognizes how reliable her belief-forming process is or how well her cognitive faculty is functioning, there is no way of improving her epistemic performance. From the standpoint of meliorative epistemology someone must recognize the relevant facts and help her make necessary changes. In some cases the evaluator may have direct evidence for or against the proposition itself—e.g. about the cause of global warming—and help the epistemic subject change her belief in the specific proposition. In other cases the evaluator may have evidence on the belief-forming process and help the epistemic subject change her epistemic practice. Whether the evidence is about the specific proposition or the belief-forming process, someone must have access to it and use the evidence for conducting epistemic evaluation. So, one requirement in meliorative externalism (short for “externalism appropriate for meliorative epistemology”) is that someone must conduct epistemic evaluation based on the available evidence. Let’s call it the evaluation requirement.

A crucial point in meliorative social epistemology is that the person who conducts epistemic evaluation need not be the epistemic subject herself. In many cases there are experts on the subject matter with far better epistemic resource. If the proposition concerns a medical issue, we should have it evaluated by doctors. If it concerns stars and galaxies, we should have it evaluated by astronomers. Letting the experts evaluate these propositions is a sensible strategy to achieve the goal of cognition. So, the meliorative externalist asserts that for the purpose of improving our epistemic performance, we
should let the experts evaluate those propositions that are in their areas of expertise. Let’s call it the **expertise requirement**. This means that the resource for epistemic evaluation need not be available to the epistemic subject, as long as it is available to the relevant experts. We may call this form of externalism **expert externalism**.\(^{13}\)

It is, of course, not sufficient for the purpose of improving our epistemic performance that the well-informed experts evaluate propositions in their offices and laboratories. If their evaluation is to improve our epistemic performance, the experts must have influence on what we believe. Let’s call it the **influence requirement**. This means that for the purpose of meliorative epistemology propositions must be evaluated by some experts in our own community, so that the evaluation can be conveyed to us.\(^{14}\) Since the experts disseminate propositions they have evaluated, epistemic evaluation in meliorative social epistemology is **propositional evaluation**, as distinguished from **doxastic evaluation**, to use the standard terminology. Positive doxastic evaluation entails (requires) positive propositional evaluation, but not the other way around. This is because positive doxastic evaluation requires not only positive propositional evaluation but the **basing relation** as well, i.e. the epistemic subject’s belief in the proposition and the evidence that supports the evaluation must be related in the right way etiologically.\(^{15}\)

Evaluation in meliorative social epistemology is not doxastic because the experts in specific fields, such as doctors and astronomers, cannot examine the etiological origins of beliefs held by individual members of the community. They only evaluate propositions in their area of expertise and disseminate them to the community.

So, the experts’ epistemic evaluation is propositional, but the process of belief formation is still an important part of meliorative social epistemology because just as doctors specialize in medical issues and astronomers specialize in stars and galaxies, there are experts who specialize in the process of belief formation. First, there are psychologists who study various modalities of perception, retrieval of memory, heuristics in informal inferences, etc. Social scientists can also help by elucidating the process of belief dissemination through various interpersonal channels. In addition to these empirical scientists, there are logicians (broadly construed, including statisticians) who provide normative standards of inference. I call all these experts who are best qualified to investigate the formation and dissemination of beliefs the **epistemic experts**. It is the epistemic experts’ responsibility to examine the process of belief formation. Of course, they do not examine beliefs held by individual community members one by one to determine whether they are formed properly. The epistemic experts only provide general guidelines on adequate and inadequate grounds for belief, so that non-experts can consult the guidelines.\(^{16}\) Since these guidelines are themselves propositions, even the epistemic experts’ evaluation is propositional evaluation, and not the doxastic evaluation of individual beliefs.

Social aspects of our cognitive practice have been emphasized in recent years (e.g. Schmitt, 1994; Goldman, 1999). The division of cognitive labor among a variety of specialists in the community is a powerful tool for increasing true beliefs and avoiding false ones. The meliorative externalist makes the further point that we can reap the same benefit from specialization in the way we form and disseminate beliefs, just as we do from specialization in the contents of beliefs such as medicine and astronomy. Thus, the meliorative externalist urges us to take full advantage of naturalized and social epistemology, in which the epistemic experts rely on evidence and reasoning that are not
available to ordinary epistemic subjects. It is absurd to ignore the wealth of information obtained in natural and social sciences. Epistemic guidelines are not an abstract possibility. Take, for example, the research program of “heuristics and biases” in recent psychology (Tversky and Kahneman, 1974) and its application in behavioral economics (e.g. Ariely, 2008; Thaler and Sunstein, 2008). Works in this research program have uncovered surprising weaknesses in our cognitive process that have clear implications in meliorative social epistemology, and are beginning to influence our epistemic practice. Epistemic guidelines significantly expand the range of beliefs that benefit from the division of cognitive labor. There are usually no experts who can evaluate the contents of our beliefs on personal matters, for example, whether I walked my dog on my last birthday. It is doubtful that any historian or veterinarian can answer the question better than I do for myself. However, I may still get some help from the experts on memory. In fact any belief we form can be the subject of epistemic guidelines. Given their significance in meliorative epistemology, I will pay special attention to epistemic guidelines in the following discussion, though most points on them also apply mutatis mutandis to propositions evaluated by the experts in other fields.

As is clear from the evaluation requirement, externalism in meliorative social epistemology accepts a constraint on epistemic evaluation—viz. the evaluation of propositions at the social level must be based on evidence and reasoning available to the relevant experts in the community. I will discuss implications of this constraint in meliorative social epistemology later in Section 4, but for now I turn to epistemic evaluation at the personal level.

3. MELIORATIVE PERSONAL EPISTEMOLOGY

This section examines the internalist component of meliorative epistemology. As explained in the preceding section, it is the relevant experts’ responsibility to evaluate propositions in their areas of expertise, including epistemic guidelines. The epistemic guidelines provided by the epistemic experts are community guidelines. However, meliorative epistemology is also in need of internalist evaluation at the personal level because the community guidelines help us improve our epistemic performance only if we incorporate them into our epistemic practice as our personal guidelines. Suppose I am the epistemic subject. The question at the personal level is no longer what, from the third-person perspective, I should accept as my personal epistemic guidelines. The answer to that question is already given in meliorative social epistemology. I should accept the community guidelines. The question here is what, from my first-person perspective, I should accept as my personal guidelines. The experts’ counsel comes to me in the form of testimony, and I need to evaluate any testimony from my first-person perspective relying on my own epistemic resource. Meliorative social epistemology may provide a guideline on how to evaluate the expert’s reliability (see, for example, Goldman, 2001), but that guideline itself must be evaluated as testimony from my first-person perspective based on my epistemic resource. Epistemic evaluation in meliorative personal epistemology is therefore internalist. Let’s call this form of internalism first-person internalism.

It should be noted first that the personal evaluation of community guidelines is indirect in most cases. In a direct evaluation of a guideline the epistemic subject
determines whether or not the evidence and reasoning available to her support the
guideline, just as the experts would do. If no community guidelines are available, then the
epistemic subject has no choice but to rely on this form of evaluation. In indirect
evaluation, on the other hand, the epistemic subject determines whether or not the
evidence and reasoning available to her establishes the reliability of the testimonial
source, which in turn enables her to determine whether or not she should accept the
content of the testimony. Indirect evaluation is a departure from the traditional form of
internalism, in which each epistemic subject is expected to evaluate all propositions
directly as the experts would do. This is an unreasonably strong requirement. It may
appear intellectually conscientious to tell non-experts that they should not accept any
proposition or guideline unless they have confirmed its correctness for themselves, but
that would deprive us of all advantages of the division of cognitive labor. The point of the
division of cognitive labor is that we can accept a wide range of propositions, including
epistemic guidelines, based on testimonies without collecting the evidence for the
propositions for ourselves—provided we have the evidence that the sources of the
testimonies are reliable.

Indirect evaluation is still internalist because the reliability of the testimonial
source is evaluated from the first-person perspective based on evidence and reasoning
available to the epistemic subject, e.g. the track record of the speaker and inductive
reasoning from the track record. So, meliorative epistemology is internalist at the
personal level. This does not diminish the significance of expert externalism in
meliorative social epistemology—it is crucial for improving our epistemic performance
that the experts evaluate propositions, especially epistemic guidelines, based on evidence
and reasoning that are only available to the experts. Without their testimony, there is no
indirect evaluation of the propositions. So, expert externalism in meliorative social
epistemology and first-person internalism in meliorative personal epistemology
complement each other. In my view meliorative externalists—such as Goldman (1999)
and Kitcher (1992)—and meliorative internalists—such as Nagel (1986, Ch. 5), Pollock
and Cruz (1999, Ch. 1), and Stevenson (1999)—examine one of the two components well,
but often at the expense of the other component.

It is also worth noting that implications of first-person internalism in meliorative
personal epistemology have not been clearly understood, especially in connection with
skepticism. First-person internalism places the internalist restriction on the logical and
conceptual resource as well as on the empirical resource. The epistemic subject with no
knowledge of inductive reasoning cannot use it in support of the belief that her sense
perception and memory are reliable. We cannot sidestep the issue of logical and
conceptual resource by turning to the experts on these subjects because establishing the
reliability of testimony is itself a serious philosophical challenge, and we must rely on
perception and memory to meet the challenge—some (e.g. Coady, 1992) even argue that
we cannot establish the reliability of testimony based on sense perception and memory. It
looks as though very few epistemic subjects have personal resource to establish the
reliability of any belief-forming process, whether it is sense perception, memory, or
testimony. If epistemic evaluation must be based solely on the evidence and reasoning
available to the epistemic subject, as first-person internalism requires, then the result is
blanket skepticism for almost all people—or so it seems. Blanket skepticism would be a
serious problem for meliorative epistemology, not because it is counterintuitive, but
because it would put all propositions in one epistemic category—i.e. no propositions are supported by the evidence and reasoning available to the epistemic subject. If there is no meaningful distinction between well-supported and ill-supported propositions, we cannot use epistemic evaluation to guide our epistemic practice to better results.

Fortunately, blanket skepticism is not an inevitable consequence of first-person internalism. Those who worry about blanket skepticism overlook a simple point about first-person internalism, viz. the basis of epistemic evaluation is any evidence or reasoning that affects the epistemic evaluation of the belief—either positively or negatively. It is true that first-person internalism allows very limited evidence and reasoning to support the proposition, but it is also true that first-person internalism allows very limited evidence and reasoning to discredit the proposition or undermine the support for the proposition. For example, even if it is known to the relevant experts in the community that recently uncovered evidence disprove a previously accepted proposition, it does not affect my evaluation of the proposition in meliorative personal epistemology unless the evidence becomes part of my epistemic resource. Similarly, even if there is a serious flaw in my reasoning and I would withhold my judgment on the conclusion if the flaw were explained to me, it is irrelevant to my epistemic evaluation in meliorative personal epistemology unless knowledge of the flaw becomes part of my epistemic resource. This makes first-person internalism very permissive—my belief is in good epistemic standing even if there is decisive evidence against it or my reasoning is seriously flawed, unless the evidence or knowledge of the flaw becomes part of my epistemic resource.

Once we see the permissive side of first-person internalism, the specter of blanket skepticism dissipates. But if first-person internalism does not lead to blanket skepticism, what is its true consequence? The answer varies, depending on the epistemic resource available to the individual. Some with rich epistemic resource may pay more attention to the danger of credulity and maintain a high epistemic standard, e.g. they may consider it necessary that the adequacy of the grounds for belief be confirmed by some evidence. However, they may also have access to more evidence and reasoning to meet the high standard. Those with much less epistemic resource may have a lax epistemic standard and accept whatever appears true to them intuitively with no reflection on the adequacy of the grounds for their belief. There is simply no common standard applicable across epistemic subjects. The only general norm of first-person internalism is that I (or any epistemic subject) should believe a proposition just in case I have sufficient evidence for its truth by my own standard. Beyond this uninformative general norm, each epistemic subject is left alone and only encouraged to do her best with whatever evidence and reasoning in her epistemic resource, but that is pretty much what we actually do anyway. The general norm only reminds us that non-epistemic reasons—such as religious edicts—should not be considered in the epistemic evaluation of the proposition. Informative general norms are provided by meliorative social epistemology. This is why meliorative social epistemology should be the primary focus of meliorative epistemology.

This is not an objection to first-person internalism. The point still stands that from the first-person perspective I should believe a proposition just in case I have sufficient evidence for its truth by my own standard. There is no way to get around it. So, it remains true that meliorative social epistemology and meliorative personal epistemology complement each other. Acknowledging the role of first-person internalism in
meliorative epistemology is helpful in meliorative social epistemology as well. For example, the experts and educators who disseminate community guidelines need to calibrate their presentation to suit the audience, so that the guidelines will be adopted by a wide range of people as their personal guidelines. They also need to make efforts to discredit those who make false claims of expertise, so that non-experts will not be misled by them. There will be, of course, cases where some people reject properly formulated community guidelines in favor of spurious ones. If those people have done their best from their first-person perspective based on their limited epistemic resource, they are not to blame. But our project is not deontological epistemology. From the standpoint of meliorative social epistemology each member of the community should still be pressed to adopt the community guidelines, i.e. even if the epistemic subject has done her best and is not to blame, the experts and educators should make efforts to change her mind. This does not mean that community members are pressed to reflect on the community guidelines whenever they form beliefs. Once they change their epistemic disposition in light of the community guidelines, there is no need to reflect on the guidelines when they form beliefs. If their epistemic practice already conforms to the community guidelines, there is no need even to disseminate the guidelines. It is when many people’s epistemic practice is at odds with the community guidelines that their dissemination is urgently needed.

4. SOCIAL INTERNALISM

I have argued that meliorative social epistemology should be the primary focus of meliorative epistemology and that its epistemic evaluation is externalist, i.e. the basis of the epistemic evaluation in meliorative social epistemology need not be available to each epistemic subject. However, as noted earlier, its epistemic evaluation is still subject to a resource constraint—viz. the basis of epistemic evaluation must be available to the appropriate experts in the epistemic subject’s community. This section elaborates this constraint and examines its implications.

I want to note first that some points made in the preceding section on indirect evaluation in meliorative personal internalism apply to expert externalism in meliorative social epistemology. For example, the expert need not rely solely on the evidence and reasoning directly available to her. In a community that takes full advantage of the division of cognitive labor no single person—not even the best expert on the subject—thoroughly understands all of the evidence and reasoning that go into her evaluation. We cannot expect, for example, that the epistemic expert understands how various devices in her lab such as an MRI scanner work in complete detail. Among many other things, the epistemic expert (qua epistemic expert, hereafter the same) will not be able to assess directly the robustness of the computer program that controls the device. Just like anyone else in the community, an expert turns to experts in other fields with which she is not thoroughly familiar, and she relies mostly on indirect evidence that those experts in other fields are reliable before she makes use of their testimony. Provided she has done her best in her indirect evaluation, she is not to blame, deontologically, even if some of those (apparent) experts turn out to lack necessary expertise. However, from the standpoint of meliorative social epistemology, she should be pressed to accept the proper experts’
testimonies, and not those of people who she falsely thinks are the experts, so that her evaluation will be based on the best epistemic resource available to the community. The implications are similar to those discussed in the preceding section, viz. the experts should calibrate their presentation so that experts in other areas will accept their evaluation, and make efforts to discredit those who make false claims of expertise so that experts in other areas will not be misled by them. As a result, even for a single proposition the basis of its epistemic evaluation in meliorative social epistemology is spread across many fields of specialization.

Interdependence of experts in the division of cognitive labor is a complex subject of social epistemology, and I can only make some basic remarks here that are of philosophical interest. First, every element of epistemic evaluation in meliorative social epistemology must be recognized by some members of the community at some points. So, there is a sense (an extended sense) in which epistemic evaluation in meliorative social epistemology is internalist, viz. the basis of epistemic evaluation is internal to the epistemic subject’s community. I call this form of internalism social internalism. Note that “internal” to the community here means actually recognized by some members of the community at some points. It is not enough that evidence or reasoning is “accessible” in the sense that it would be recognized easily if one paid attention. Accessible evidence or accessible reasoning that is not actually recognized by anyone in the community at any point plays no part in epistemic evaluation. This should be clear from the standpoint of meliorative epistemology—an expert cannot endorse a proposition that would be supported by evidence and reasoning, which are never actually recognized by any member of the community. Mental states concealed from the expert’s consciousness cannot be the basis her epistemic evaluation, either. Meliorative social epistemology is therefore both thoroughly externalist and strongly internalist. It is thoroughly externalist by the standard classification since epistemic evaluation is not constrained by any single individual’s epistemic resources, but it is strongly internalist in the extended sense in that every element of evaluation—every piece of evidence and every step of reasoning used either as the grounds for the evaluation or for showing the adequacy of the grounds—must be actually recognized by some members of the community at some points.

Because of the “internalist” constraint in the extended sense, meliorative social epistemology inherits some issues of traditional internalist epistemology. The most significant among them is the structural problems of epistemic support, such as regress and circularity. Are there basic beliefs whose epistemic support does not depend on any other beliefs and thus provide the foundation for any epistemic support? Does mutual support among beliefs make them credible even if each belief has no credibility of its own? These structural problems of traditional internalist epistemology carry over to meliorative social epistemology, e.g. experts in different disciplines cannot keep passing the buck of epistemic support indefinitely or in a circle—or so it seems. The skeptic may then raise the question whether any expert’s belief can stand on its own epistemically. Meliorative social epistemologists cannot ignore these structural issues just because they reject the standard form of internalism, i.e. just because epistemic evaluation is no longer constrained by each epistemic subject’s epistemic resource. There has been some question of continuity between social epistemology and traditional epistemology because issues of social epistemology look more like subjects of social sciences (e.g. Alston, 2005, p. 5). It turns out there is strong continuity between meliorative social
epistemology and traditional epistemology in that both of them must address the structural problems of epistemic support.26

5. CONCLUSION

Both internalism and externalism in epistemology engender some obvious and natural concerns that make their advocates feel uneasy. It seems unreasonable of the internalist to restrict the basis of epistemic evaluation to each individual’s limited epistemic resource in disregard of the vast amount of information available in empirical and a priori sciences. Meanwhile, the externalist seems to ignore central questions of traditional epistemology, taking no interest in the project of improving our epistemic practice and leaving no room for the challenge of skepticism. Meliorative social epistemology provides an attractive alternative—it allows the full use of findings in empirical and a priori sciences while aiming at improving our epistemic practice and making the challenge of skepticism relevant. Given these virtues, meliorative social epistemology should have its place in the landscape of epistemology along with descriptive epistemology and deontological epistemology.

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(Lanham: Roman & Littlefield)

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1 See Audi (1998, pp. 233-234) for a clear statement of internalism along this line. BonJour (1992), Chisholm (1977, Ch. 2) and Plantinga (1993a, pp. 5-6), among many others, provide similar characterizations of internalism in terms of accessibility.
2 This view is often called “mentalism”. See Conee and Feldman (2001) for a defense of mentalism, and Pollock and Cruz (1999) for a variant of mentalism. Bergmann (2006, Ch. 3) argues against mentalism both as an interpretation of internalism and as a view on its own. See also Alston (1986) on the *kinds* of mental states—knowledge, justified beliefs, or beliefs—that are relevant to epistemic evaluation.
3 Conee and Feldman (2001) defend this type of internalism.
4 Fumerton (1995, Ch. 3) defends this type of internalism.
5 Frequently cited thought experiments in support of internalism about epistemic justification are BonJour’s (1980; 1985, Ch. 3) clairvoyance case, where (intuitively) the subject is not justified in holding the belief but (simplistic) externalism suggests otherwise, and Cohen’s (1984) new evil demon case, where (intuitively) the subject is justified in holding the belief but (simplistic) externalism suggests otherwise. Meanwhile even ardent defenders of internalism concede that our pre-theoretical concept of *knowledge* contains externalist components—but they downplay the role of knowledge in epistemology (Nagel, 1986, Ch. 5; BonJour, 1985, Ch. 1; Pollock and Cruz, 1999, Ch. 1) and focus their attention on the concept of epistemic justification. Externalists, on the other hand, frequently argue that internalism about epistemic justification leads to radical skepticism that is (intuitively) incorrect.
6 See, for example, Chisholm (1977) and BonJour (1980).
7 The term “meliorative” is due to Kitcher (1992, p. 64), who uses it in contrast with “analytic.” Descartes (1628/1985, p. 9) gives a classic expression of meliorative epistemology: “The aim of our studies should be to direct the mind with a view to forming true and sound judgments about whatever comes before it.” Recent advocates of meliorative internalism include Nagel (1986, Ch. 5; BonJour, 1985, Ch. 1; Pollock and Cruz, 1999, Ch. 1) and focus their attention on the concept of epistemic justification. Externalists, on the other hand, frequently argue that internalism about epistemic justification leads to radical skepticism that is (intuitively) incorrect.
9 The version of meliorative epistemology assumed here is therefore “veritistic” to use Goldman’s (1999) term. Not all epistemologists share the veritistic conception of epistemic practice. A major alternative is predictive success, i.e. epistemic practice should aim at increasing predictive success and avoiding predictive failure. Those who favor this alternative can replace reference to the veritistic goal throughout this paper with the predictive goal. This will not affect the substance of my discussion since the focus of
this paper is the meta-epistemological dispute over the restrictions on the basis of epistemic evaluation, and not specific strategies to achieve the epistemic goal. That belongs to normative epistemology. There is also the view (e.g. Zagzebski, 2003) that truth is not the only characteristic that has intrinsic epistemic value. This may be so, but I set aside auxiliary epistemic values in this paper, assuming that truth (or predictive success) is the central aim of our epistemic practice.


11 See Goldman (1979) on process reliabilism and Plantinga (1993b) on proper functionalism.

12 It might be suggested that the epistemic status of belief in a proposition—such as epistemic justification—is determined by the objective facts, while it is the evaluation of the epistemic status, based on accessible conditions, that guides our epistemic practice. Those who wish to distinguish the epistemic status and the evaluation of the epistemic status (cf. Alston, 1980) should read my discussion in this paper to be about the evaluation of the epistemic status, and not about the epistemic status.

13 Feldman (1995) raises the Euthyphro objection to “expertism” and more generally to authoritarian epistemology. The main point of his objection is the relation between expertise and rationality. Feldman rejects the idea that some practice is rational because the expert endorses it. The proper order is that the expert endorses it because it is rational. So, one cannot define rationality by the expert’s endorsement. This objection does not apply to the present view, which is not an attempt to define rationality. My only point is that experts with more resources tend to make better judgments on the subject of their expertise. Some may want the justification of this view and raise the question of circularity. The issue of circularity must be addressed at some point, but not here in the meta-epistemological discussion. Those who are concerned about circularity could, for now, take any empirical points made in this chapter to be plausible empirical hypotheses.

14 The “community” here refers to the epistemic community. People who refuse to share their knowledge with others are not members of our epistemic community even if they live among us. People who make their knowledge available to us by some means of communication are members of our epistemic community even if they live in a different continent and we may never see them in person.

15 See Korcz (1997) for a review of the literature on the basing relation up through mid 1990’s. See Turri (2010) for more recent work on the subject.

16 The term “non-experts” here refers to epistemic non-experts. Direct beneficiaries of epistemic guidelines are often experts in other fields. For example, detectives, journalists, etc. can learn from the epistemic experts about various biases and fallacies to guard against. It is possible in some contexts for the epistemic experts to influence the non-expert’s epistemic practice without the epistemic subject’s consent. In an extreme case the epistemic experts may put a stubborn epistemic subject under hypnosis to change her epistemic practice. There are more realistic cases as well. For example, it has been noted that the occurrence of some common fallacies of probabilistic reasoning is reduced when the problem is posed differently (Gigerenzer, 1991). So, in order to improve the non-expert’s epistemic performance the epistemic experts may simply re-formulate the problem for the non-expert, instead of providing guidelines for avoiding fallacies. I will set aside these kinds of influence in this paper and focus on the more conventional influence through the dissemination of epistemic guidelines.

17 It is sometimes pointed out (e.g. Alston, 1988) that we form most of our beliefs automatically in response to perceptual and testimonial input without conscious deliberation. This may appear to make epistemic guidelines largely irrelevant, but it is not necessary for the guidelines to be relevant that we consciously think of them at the time of belief-formation. We may accept epistemic guidelines upon conscious deliberation and dispose ourselves to automatically form beliefs in the future in accordance with the guidelines.

18 Thus Descartes writes that his aim in writing Discourse is “not to teach the method which everyone must follow in order to direct his reason correctly, but only to reveal how I have tried to direct my own.” (Descartes, 1637/1985, p. 112) Presumably, each reader is expected to figure out the method of directing her reason for herself.

19 Alston (1986, p. 192) calls a factor that is relevant to the epistemic evaluation either positively or negatively “an epistemizer”, while calling a factor that is positively relevant to the epistemic evaluation “a justifier”. My point here, explained in Alston’s terms, is that the internalist restriction in meliorative personal epistemology applies to epistemizers in general, and not only to justifiers.
Some people may find it counterintuitive that a *less* attentive reasoner is *more* likely to be in good epistemic standing, but that is only because we usually evaluate people’s beliefs from the third-person perspective, and not from the first-person perspective. Having a counterintuitive consequence is not a problem in meliorative epistemology anyway because, as explained in Section 1, it is not an objective of meliorative epistemology to accommodate our intuitions about epistemic evaluation.

Goldman (1980, Section IV) describes a path of internalism that leads to epistemic relativism.

See Brandom (1998) and Stevenson (1999) for the view that beliefs and justified beliefs (nearly) converge from the first-person perspective.

This may require that the expert or the educator communicates with some members of the community *initially* in such a way that her testimony would not be acceptable by the community guideline on acceptable testimony, if that is the only way to influence their epistemic practice.

Some people may suggest that an analogous reasoning leads to the view that the epistemic subject should adopt epistemic guidelines that are *as a matter of fact* correct, even if they are not obtainable from the evidence and reasoning currently available to the experts in the community. That would serve as our regulative ideal. Meliorative epistemology can be considered an effort to get closer to this ideal. However, there is no way of actually achieving this ideal if nobody in the community can tell what the correct guidelines are. Meliorative social epistemology only pursues the achievable goal of formulating and disseminating epistemic guidelines based on the best epistemic resource available to the community.

This is only a necessary condition. It is required further that the relevant evidence and reasoning must be communicated properly among the members of the community, and that all the elements must be put together in a structurally sound way.

Indeed some meliorative social epistemologists, who are externalists in the traditional sense, take up the structural problems of epistemic support. For example, Goldman (1999, Section 3.3) defends Bayesian coherentism as a (qualified) solution to the problem of circularity.