Epistemological Externalism and the Project of Traditional Epistemology

Abstract

Traditional epistemological reflection on our beliefs about the world attempts to proceed without presupposing or ineliminably depending upon any claims about the world. It has been argued that epistemological externalism fails to engage in the right way with the motivations for this project. I argue, however, that epistemological externalism satisfyingly undermines this project. If we accept the thesis that certain conditions other than the truth of one’s belief must obtain in the world outside of one’s mind in order for one to have knowledge (or justified belief) about the world, then there is no good intellectual motivation for taking up the traditional project. This result stands even if we accept the traditional theses that knowledge requires justified belief and that justified belief requires the ability to provide good reasons for one’s belief.