

# The Role of Virtue Epistemology in Resolving Internal-External Debates Taking the Sosa Virtue Perspective as an Example

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**Abstract.** In the development of contemporary epistemology, the evolving research focus of virtue epistemology has shifted towards the rational virtue that generates knowledge, thereby deepening our understanding of the essence of knowledge. Sosa's moral perspective is particularly prominent, skillfully blending the essence of internalism and externalism. Sosa not only retained the emphasis of internalism on the "controllability" of the internal state of the knower, but also absorbed the viewpoint of externalism that emphasizes the close connection between knowledge and the external world. This dual perspective of internal and external cultivation not only enhances the inclusiveness of its theory, but also significantly improves its ability to explain complex knowledge phenomena, opening up new avenues for resolving the long-standing internal and external disputes. Furthermore, Sosa's holistic approach fosters a comprehensive view of epistemic virtue, seamlessly integrating personal introspection with environmental interaction, thereby enriching contemporary debates and fostering a deeper, more nuanced understanding of knowledge acquisition.

**Keywords:** Epistemology, Debate between internalism and externalism, Moralepistemology, Ernest Sosa.

## 1. Introduction

In the field of epistemology, the debate between internalization and externalization has long been a focus of attention for scholars. The core of this debate lies in the nature of knowledge and its verification methods, that is, whether knowledge depends on the internal state of the cognitive subject (e.g., beliefs, rationality) or must rely on external factors of the world (e.g., evidence, truth, etc.).[1] With the deepening of epistemological research, virtue epistemology, as an emerging force, provides a new solution to this ancient debate with its unique perspective and theoretical framework. The theory of moral knowledge, especially the moral perspective represented by Ernest Sosa, has a profound theoretical background for its birth and development. Sosa was deeply inspired by Aristotle's virtue ethics and introduced rational virtue into the field of epistemology, attempting to re-understand and define knowledge by examining the cognitive qualities and abilities of the cognitive subject.

Sosa's moral perspective emphasizes that rational virtue is a key factor in the generation and verification of knowledge. He believes that in order for a cognitive subject to succeed in cognitive activities, they not only need to have correct beliefs and sufficient evidence, but also need to possess rational virtues such as accuracy, sensitivity, and openness. [2] This emphasis on the intrinsic qualities of the cognitive subject enables virtue perspective to go beyond a single dimensional consideration and provide more comprehensive and in-depth answers in resolving the debate between internal and external factors.

This article aims to explore how the theory of moral knowledge, especially Sosa's moral perspective, can provide new ideas and methods for resolving the debate between internal and external perspectives. Through in-depth analysis of Sosa's theoretical framework and core viewpoints, this article will further reveal the important position and value of virtue epistemology in epistemological research. At the same time, this article will also focus on the development trend and challenges faced by the virtue perspective in contemporary epistemology, in order to provide useful references and inspirations for future research.

This article first elaborates on the historical background and main viewpoints of the debate between internal and external factors; Subsequently, a brief introduction will be given to the basic concepts and theoretical background of the theory of moral knowledge and Sosa's moral perspective; Next, the focus is on analyzing how the moral perspective provides new perspectives and methods for resolving this debate; Finally, summarize the entire text and point out the contribution and future development direction of virtue epistemology in epistemology research.

## 2. The Debate Between Internal and External Factors

The debate between Internalism and Externalism in epistemology mainly revolves around the source and nature of the defense or confirmation of knowledge. This debate is a core issue in epistemology, involving how knowledge can be reasonably proven or defended. Internalism holds that the defense of beliefs is entirely determined by factors inherent in the cognitive subject. These internal factors usually include the subjective experience, reflective ability, and logical relationship between beliefs of the cognitive. Internalists emphasize that a belief is considered knowledge because the perceiver is able to prove its authenticity through internal means such as reflection, reasoning, etc.[3] Contrary to internalism, externalism holds that the defense of beliefs is not only influenced by factors intrinsic to the cognitive subject, but also by factors extrinsic to the cognitive subject. These external factors may include social environment, historical background, and the reliability of cognitive processes. Externalists usually believe that the reason why a belief is regarded as knowledge is not only due to the internal verification of the cognitive, but also the influence of external factors on the authenticity of the belief. David Armstrong's "Faith, Truth, and Knowledge" [4]

Although there are significant differences between internalism and externalism in epistemological issues, their debates are not completely opposed, but can achieve integration and complementarity to a certain extent. Some scholars have attempted to combine the reflective ability of internalism with the reliability standards of externalism, proposing a comprehensive theory of knowledge defense. The typical representative of this type of theory in contemporary epistemology is Virtue Epistemology, which helps to overcome the limitations of a single theory and improve the effectiveness and reliability of knowledge defense by integrating and complementing internal and external theories.

## 3. Overview of Moral Knowledge Theory

Virtue Epistemology is a unique branch of contemporary epistemology that changes the epistemological tradition centered on propositional knowledge and shifts towards examining the relevant intellectual virtues that generate knowledge. Sosa further proposed the concept of "moral perspective", believing that different rational virtues will lead to different cognitive perspectives and outcomes. [5] A cognitive subject with good rational character can more accurately grasp the essence and truth of things, thereby generating more reliable knowledge. At the same time, the perspective of virtue emphasizes the subjectivity and agency in the cognitive process, that is, the cognitive subject does not passively receive information in the cognitive process, but actively uses rational virtue to analyze and judge.

Virtue epistemology emphasizes cognitive virtues, and knowledge is not only an embrace of true beliefs, but also involves the cognitive virtues possessed by individuals. Individual cognitive virtues are crucial in acquiring knowledge. For example, Socrates' excellent reasoning ability and judgment can help inspire moral dilemmas such as the Cave Case or the banality and evil accused by Hannah Arendt, providing a cognitive path for the cognitive subject.

#### **4. The Role of Virtue Epistemology in Resolving Internal and External Disputes**

Virtue epistemology can recognize the combined effects of internal and external factors. By emphasizing cognitive virtue, virtue epistemology can bridge the emphasis on reflection in internalism and the focus on belief sources in externalism. Sosa's "virtue perspective" attempts to address the differences in traditional epistemology, emphasizing the role of rational virtue in belief confirmation and proposing a knowledge theory based on rational virtue. This theory not only acknowledges the importance of internal confirmation, but also acknowledges that internal confirmation is insufficient for knowledge, thus seeking external basis for knowledge. Sosa believes that evaluating whether a belief can serve as knowledge depends not only on the nature of the belief itself, but also on the rational virtues and external environment involved in the formation process of the belief. [6] The introduction of this perspective allows virtue epistemology to more comprehensively consider the complexity and diversity of cognitive processes compared to traditional epistemology.

In addition, virtue epistemology emphasizes the natural basis of cognition, taking into account the complexity of human cognition and the influence of the environment on knowledge acquisition and belief formation. Sosa's theory of moral knowledge emphasizes the dynamic nature of knowledge generation, that is, knowledge is not a static and fixed result, but a result obtained by cognitive subjects through the use of rational virtues in specific environments and conditions for cognitive activities.[7] This viewpoint contrasts with the static and reflective cognitive processes emphasized by internalism, and also differs from the objective and reliable cognitive processes emphasized by externalism. Imagine the following scenario: a student demonstrates good intuition, memory, and judgment abilities in mathematics learning, which can be seen as their natural cognitive foundation. However, relying solely on these natural foundations is not enough to ensure that students achieve excellent grades in mathematics. Sosa's theory of moral knowledge holds that students also need to cultivate their rational virtues through continuous learning and practice, such as rigorous logical reasoning ability, independent thinking habits, and pursuit of mathematical beauty. [8] The cultivation of rational virtues not only relies on the individual efforts and persistence of students, but also requires the guidance of teachers and the influence of the environment. In a challenging and motivating learning environment, students are more likely to actively explore, dare to question, and exercise their rational character in the process of problem-solving. At the same time, as disseminators of knowledge and enlighteners of wisdom, teachers' teaching methods and attitudes will also have a profound impact on students' rational character. Therefore, from the perspective of virtue epistemology, the natural foundation of cognition and the cultivation of rational virtue complement each other, jointly forming a solid foundation for knowledge acquisition and belief formation.

At the same time, moral epistemology focuses on the verification and reflection of knowledge. Virtue epistemology focuses on the process of confirming knowledge, that is, how to prove that a belief is knowledge. [9] This is not only a logical verification process, but also a reflection process involving the rational virtue of cognitive subjects. The cognitive subject needs to use their rational character to examine their beliefs, evaluate their authenticity, rationality, and reliability. In Sosa's theory, the verification of knowledge requires meeting certain standards, which are usually closely related to the rational virtues of the cognitive subject.[10] For example, in order for a belief to become knowledge, it not only needs to have authenticity, but also needs to be reflected and evaluated by the cognitive subject to prove that it is formed under the guidance of rational morality. These standards may include the accuracy, consistency, and trustworthiness of beliefs, which together form the cornerstone of knowledge verification.

In addition, the theory of moral knowledge emphasizes that the confirmation of knowledge is not a one-time process, but a continuous and dynamic process. Cognitive subjects should constantly reflect and revise their beliefs to adapt to new information and situations. This kind of reflection and correction not only helps to improve the quality of knowledge, but also promotes the growth and improvement of the rational character of cognitive subjects. Therefore, the theory of moral knowledge

provides us with a more profound and comprehensive way of understanding knowledge, revealing the inherent connection between knowledge verification and the rational virtue of cognitive subjects.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the above, Sosa's virtue perspective differs from the traditional epistemological view of knowledge as a Justified True Belief (JTB), which views knowledge as the result of fully utilizing the rational virtues within the cognitive subject. He provided a new perspective for re examining the relationship between knowledge and virtue by introducing the core concept of "moral perspective". This provides a new perspective for re examining the relationship between knowledge and virtue, and helps to resolve the differences between internalization and externalization in traditional epistemology.

## Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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