I. Motivating Reliabilism

Goldman's goal: “I want a theory of justified belief to specify in non-epistemic terms when a belief is justified” (p. 333). Moreover, these conditions must be “appropriately deep or revelatory” (pp. 334).

The guiding thought behind reliabilism: Just as a thermometer is a device for determining the temperature in some region, our belief-forming mechanisms are cognitive devices for acquiring true beliefs and avoiding false ones. So, just as a thermometer qualifies as reliable when it tends (in a suitable range of circumstances) to give the correct temperature, our belief-forming mechanisms qualify as reliable when they tend (in a suitable range of circumstances) to yield true beliefs rather than false ones. Moreover, a particular belief counts as justified when it is the outcome of a belief-forming mechanism that counts as reliable.

Another motivation: Babies and puppies.

II. Formulating Reliabilism: First Approximation

We're going to restrict our attention to Goldman's version of reliabilism (also known as process reliabilism).

At first pass, we can formulate Goldman's reliabilism as follows:

Process Reliabilism (first approximation): Subject S's belief in proposition P at time t is justified iff the process through which it was formed is reliable.

A belief-forming process counts as reliable iff it tends to produce beliefs that are true rather than false.

What is a process? Goldman's answer (p. 339):
Let us mean by a 'process' a functional operation or procedure, i.e., something that generates a mapping from certain states—'inputs'—into other states—'outputs.' The outputs of the present case are states of believing this or that proposition at a given moment.

How reliable does a belief-forming process need to be in order to yield beliefs that are justified? Answer: the degree to which the process is reliable corresponds to the degree to which the beliefs it produces are justified.

Reliabilism is a prototypical externalist theory of justification: according to reliabilism, the facts about your beliefs that determine whether or not they are justified need not be “internally available” to you—they might be outside of your cognitive grasp or epistemic purview.

In particular, you don't, according to reliabilism, have to know or even be justified in believing that a given belief of yours was formed via a reliable process in order for it to be justified.

We need to distinguish between the following:
- Whether a given belief held by a given person is justified.
- Whether that person can state or give a justification for that belief (in the form of an argument, defense, or set of reasons that support it).

III. The New Evil Demon Problem

One way of objecting to reliabilism is to produce (putative) counterexamples. An example allegedly showing that reliability is not necessary for justification:
Evil Demon: Your internal twin has the exact same beliefs, experiences, etc. as you do. However, your unfortunate twin is also the victim of an evil demon who has been bombarding his/her sensory organs with misleading perceptual input. Thus your twin's perceptual belief-forming mechanisms are uniformly unreliable: they almost always result in false beliefs about the external world. (See Cohen, p. 281.)

It seems to follow from reliabilism that your twin's beliefs about the external world are unjustified. Yet intuitively his/her external-world beliefs are as justified as yours are.

**IV. The Meta-Incoherence Problem**

An example allegedly showing that reliability is not sufficient for justification:

Norman the clairvoyant: “Norman, under certain conditions that usually obtain, is a completely reliable clairvoyant with respect to certain kinds of subject matter. He possesses no evidence or reasons of any kind for or against the general possibility of such a cognitive power, or for or against the thesis that he possesses it. One day Norman comes to believe that the President is in New York City, though he has no evidence either for or against this belief. In fact the belief is true and results from his clairvoyant power, under the circumstances in which it is completely reliable” (BonJour, p. 369).

It seems to follow from reliabilism that Norman's belief about the President’s whereabouts is justified. Yet intuitively his belief is unjustified.

BonJour's support for the claim that Norman's belief is unjustified (p. 370):

... Norman's acceptance of the belief about the President's whereabouts is epistemically irrational and irresponsible, and thereby unjustified, whether or not he believes himself to have clairvoyant power, so long as he has no justification for such a belief [i.e. that he has a clairvoyant power]. Part of one's epistemic duty is to reflect critically upon one's beliefs, and such critical reflection precludes believing things to which one has, to one's knowledge, no reliable means of epistemic access.

What both the Norman and evil demon victim examples are trying to show: “the rationality or justifiability of [a subject]’s belief should be judged from [the subject]’s own perspective, rather than from one that is unavailable to him” (BonJour, p. 371).

In §III of “What Is Justified Belief?” Goldman anticipates the Norman counterexample, and revises his formulation of reliabilism so that a belief does not count as justified if there is a reliable process waiting in the wings which would have stopped one from forming the belief, had one used it.

**V. The Generality Problem**

Suppose I look out my window one night and form the belief that it is snowing. What is the relevant process through which that belief was formed? Some candidates:

- The process of forming a belief on the basis of perception.
- The process of forming a belief about the weather on the basis of visual perception in bad lighting conditions.
- The process of forming a belief that it is snowing on the basis of such-and-such retinal stimulations at 8:02 PM on Tuesday, November 20, 2012.

Depending on which process we choose as the relevant one to test for reliability, process reliabilism yields different answers as to whether my belief is justified.

- a belief-forming process token = a specific, dated sequence of events that results in a specific belief
• a belief-forming process type = a kind of belief-forming process

Only process types are repeatable, so only process types can be usefully assessed for reliability. The generality problem for reliabilism is to determine, in a non-ad-hoc manner, the relevant process type to test for reliability when assessing whether a given belief is justified.

VI. Bootstrapping

1. I now seem to see a table before me. [by introspection]
2. There is a table before me. [by perception]
3. So, my perceptual faculties were accurate this one time. [follows from 1 and 2 by deduction]
4. I now seem to see a chair before me. [by introspection]
5. There is a chair before me. [by perception]
6. So, my perceptual faculties were accurate a second time. [follows from 4 and 5 by deduction]
...
C. Therefore, my perceptual faculties are reliable. [follows from 3, 6, 9, ... by induction]

If introspection and perception happen to be reliable belief-independent processes, and if deduction and induction happen to be conditionally reliable belief-dependent processes, then the reliabilist must admit that by reasoning in this way I can form a justified belief that my perceptual faculties are reliable.

Readings:
BonJour, “Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge” (E:A)
Cohen, “Basic Knowledge and the Problem of Easy Knowledge”
Conee & Feldman, “Internalism Defended” (E:A)
Feldman, “Reliability and Justification”
Feldman & Conee, “Evidentialism” (E:A)
Fumerton, “Externalism and Skepticism” (E:A)
Goldman, “What Is Justified Belief?” (E:A)
Goldman, “Internalism Exposed” (E:A)
Vogel, “Reliabilism Leveled” (E:A)

(E:A) behind the readings indicates that it can be found in:

All page numbers (unless stated otherwise) refer to this anthology.