

CHAPTER 31

Internalism Defended

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Internalism in epistemology has been getting bad press lately. Externalism is ascendant, partly because insurmountable problems for internalism are supposed to have been identified.¹ We oppose this trend. In our view the purported problems pose no serious threat, and a convincing argument for internalism is untouched by the recent criticism.

Our main goal here is to refute objections to internalism. We begin by offering what we think is the best way to understand the distinction between internalism and externalism. We then present a new argument for internalism. This frees internalism from what we regard as suspect deontological underpinnings. Finally, we reply to what we take to be the most significant objections to internalism.

I. What is Internalism?

Internalism and externalism are views about which states, events, and conditions can contribute to epistemic justification – the sort of justification that, in sufficient strength, is a necessary condition for knowledge. Use of the terms “internalist” and “externalist” to classify theories of justification is a recent development, and the terms are routinely

applied to theories that predate their use. Thus, many proponents of theories of justification have not classified their views as internalist or externalist. The recent literature is, therefore, the best source of information about the nature of the distinction. Here are a few examples of how internalism has been identified. Laurence Bonjour writes:

The most generally accepted account ... is that a theory of justification is *internalist* if and only if it requires that all of the factors needed for a belief to be epistemically justified for a given person be *cognitively accessible* to that person, internal to his cognitive perspective.²

Robert Audi writes:

Some examples suggest that justification is grounded entirely in what is internal to the mind, in a sense implying that it is accessible to introspection or reflection by the subject—a view we might call *internalism about justification*.³

Alvin Plantinga writes:

The basic thrust of internalism in epistemology, therefore, is that the properties that confer warrant upon a belief are properties to which the believer has some special sort of epistemic access.⁴

John Pollock writes that:

Internalism in epistemology is the view that only internal states of the cognizer can be relevant in

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determining which of the cognizer's beliefs are justified.⁵

Finally, Ernest Sosa characterizes one version of internalism this way:

Justification requires only really proper thought on the part of the subject: if a believer has obtained and sustains his belief through wholly appropriate thought, then the believer is justified in so believing – where the appropriateness of the thought is a matter purely internal to the mind of the subject, and not dependent on what lies beyond.⁶

We find two distinct but closely related characterizations of internalism in passages such as these. One characterization uses a notion of access. What we shall call “accessibilism” holds that the epistemic justification of a person's belief is determined by things to which the person has some special sort of access. BonJour calls this access a “suitable awareness.”⁷ Audi says that the access is through “introspection or reflection.” Others say that the access must be “direct.”⁸ The quotations from Pollock and Sosa suggest a somewhat different account. They suggest that internalism is the view that a person's beliefs are justified only by things that are internal to the person's mental life. We shall call this version of internalism “mentalism.”⁹ A mentalist theory may assert that justification is determined entirely by occurrent mental factors, or by dispositional ones as well. As long as the things that are said to contribute to justification are in the person's mind, the view qualifies as a version of mentalism.

We think it likely that philosophers have not separated mentalism from accessibilism because they have tacitly assumed that the extensions of the two do not differ in any significant way. They have assumed that the special kind of access on which many internalist theories rely can reach only mental items, and perhaps all mental items, or at least all that might be counted as playing a role in justification.

We think that simplicity and clarity are best served by understanding internalism as mentalism. “Internalism” is a recent technical term. It has been introduced to refer to a variety of theories in epistemology that share some vaguely defined

salient feature. Any definition of the term is to some extent stipulative. Mentalism codifies one standard way in which the word has been used.

Somewhat more precisely, internalism as we characterize it is committed to the following two theses. The first asserts the strong supervenience of epistemic justification on the mental:

- S. The justificatory status of a person's doxastic attitudes strongly supervenes on the person's occurrent and dispositional mental states, events, and conditions.

The second thesis spells out a principal implication of S:

- M. If any two possible individuals are exactly alike mentally, then they are exactly alike justificatorially, e.g., the same beliefs are justified for them to the same extent.¹⁰

(M) implies that mental duplicates in different possible worlds have the same attitudes justified for them. This cross world comparison follows from the strong supervenience condition in (S).¹¹ Externalists characteristically hold that differences in justification can result from contingent non-mental differences, such as differing causal connections or reliability. Theories that appeal to such factors clearly deny (S) and (M). Thus, our way of spelling out the internalism/externalism distinction properly classifies characteristically externalist views.

One advantage of our way of understanding the distinction between internalism and externalism in epistemology is that it closely parallels the counterpart distinction in the philosophy of mind.¹² In the philosophy of mind case, the main idea is to distinguish the view that the contents of attitudes depend entirely on things within a person's own cognitive apparatus from the view that there are factors external to the person that help to determine attitudinal content. Mind internalism is naturally rendered as a supervenience thesis. Roughly, the thesis is that a person's mental content supervenes on the person's “purely internal” states, events, and conditions. The relevant supervenience base cannot be specified as “the mental,” as we have done for epistemic internalism, since a person's mental states, events, and conditions are trivially sufficient for the person's

attitudes with their specific contents. But the root idea is the same. The mind internalist is trying to exclude such plainly external factors as the environmental causal origins and the social milieu of the person's attitudes. Likewise, the epistemic internalist is principally opposed to the existence of any justification-determining role for plainly external factors such as the general accuracy of the mechanism that produces a given belief or the belief's environmental origin. Mentalism bears this out.

What internalism in epistemology and philosophy of mind have in common is that being in some condition that is of philosophical interest – being epistemically justified in certain attitudes, or having attitudes with certain contents – is settled by what goes on inside cognitive beings. The condition of interest is in this sense an “internal” matter, thus justifying the use of this term. Mentalism obviously captures this feature of internalism. Accessibilism captures it only when conjoined with the further thesis that what is relevantly accessible is always internal to something, presumably the mind.¹³

Thus, one modest asset of mentalism is that it renders readily intelligible the nominal connection of epistemic internalism to mind internalism. A much stronger consideration in favor of mentalism is that it turns out to be entirely defensible, as we shall try to show.

II. A Defense of Internalism

Our argument for internalism focuses on pairs of examples that we take to be representative. Either in one member of the pair someone has a justified belief in a proposition while someone else's belief in that proposition is not justified, or one person's belief is better justified than the other's. We contend that these contrasts are best explained by supposing that internal differences make the epistemic difference. Here are the examples.

Example 1) Bob and Ray are sitting in an air-conditioned hotel lobby reading yesterday's newspaper. Each has read that it will be very warm today and, on that basis, each believes that it is very warm today. Then Bob goes outside and feels the heat. They both continue to believe that it is very warm today. But at this point Bob's belief is better justified.

Comment: Bob's justification for the belief was enhanced by his experience of feeling the heat, and thus undergoing a mental change which, so to speak, “internalized” the actual temperature. Ray had only the forecast to rely on.

Example 2) A novice bird watcher and an expert are together looking for birds. They both get a good look at a bird in a nearby tree. (In order to avoid irrelevant complexities, assume that their visual presentations are exactly alike.) Upon seeing the bird, the expert immediately knows that it is a woodpecker. The expert has fully reasonable beliefs about what woodpeckers look like. The novice has no good reason to believe that it is a woodpecker and is not justified in believing that it is.

Comment: The epistemic difference between novice and expert arises from something that differentiates the two internally. The expert knows the look of a woodpecker. The novice would gain the same justification as the expert if the novice came to share the expert's internal condition concerning the look of woodpeckers.

Example 3) A logic Teaching Assistant and a beginning logic student are looking over a homework assignment. One question displays a sentence that they both know to express a truth and asks whether certain other sentences are true as well. The TA can easily tell through simple reflection that some of the other sentences express logical consequences of the original sentence and thus she is justified in believing that they are true as well. The student is clueless.

Comment: Again there is an internal difference between the two. The difference is that the TA has justification for her beliefs to the effect that certain propositions validly follow from the original one. She is expert enough to “see” that the conclusions follow without performing any computations. This case differs from example 2 in that here the mental difference concerns cognizance of necessary truths of logic whereas in example 2 the expert was cognizant of contingent facts about visual characteristics of woodpeckers. But just as in example 2, relevant internal differences make the difference. The beginning student could come to share the epistemic state of the TA by coming to share the TA's familiarity with the logical consequence relation.

Example 4) Initially, Smith has excellent reasons to believe that Jones, who works in his office,

owns a Ford. Smith deduces that someone in the office owns a Ford. The latter belief is true, but the former is false. Smith's reasons derive from Jones pretending to own a Ford. Someone else in the office, unknown to Smith, does own a Ford. The fact that Jones is merely simulating Ford ownership keeps Smith from knowing that someone in his office is a Ford owner, but it does not prevent Smith from being justified or diminish his justification. At a later time Smith gains ample reason to believe that Jones is pretending. At that point Smith is not justified in believing either that Jones owns a Ford or that someone in his office owns a Ford.

Comment: Again the epistemic change occurs when a suitable external fact – this time, the fact that what Smith has seen is Jones pretending to own a Ford – is brought into Smith's mind. The difference between Smith being justified in believing that Jones owns a Ford (and that someone in the office owns a Ford) in the one case and not in the other is an internal change in Smith.

Example 5) Hilary is a brain in a vat who has been abducted recently from a fully embodied life in an ordinary environment. He is being stimulated so that it seems to him as though his normal life has continued. Hilary believes that he ate oatmeal for breakfast yesterday. His memorial basis for his breakfast belief is artificial. It has been induced by his "envatters." Here are two versions of relevant details.

5a) Hilary's recollection is very faint and lacking in detail. The meal seems incongruous to him in that it strikes him as a distasteful breakfast and he has no idea why he would have eaten it.

5b) Hilary's recollection seems to him to be an ordinary vivid memory of a typical breakfast for him.

Comment: Although in both (5a) and (5b) Hilary's breakfast belief is false and its basis is abnormal, the belief is not well justified in (5a) and it is well justified in (5b). Hilary in (5a) differs internally from Hilary in (5b). His mental states in (5b) include better evidence for the belief than he has in (5a).

In the first four of these examples the location of a relevant item of information – in the mind of a subject or outside of it – makes the epistemic difference. In the fifth example, a purely internal difference is decisive. It is reasonable to generalize from these examples to the conclusion that every

variety of change that brings about or enhances justification either internalizes an external fact or makes a purely internal difference. It appears that there is no need to appeal to anything extramental to explain any justificatory difference. These considerations argue for the general internalist thesis that these epistemic differences have an entirely mental origin.

In each case, it is natural to regard the mental difference as a difference in the evidence that the person has. Variations in the presence or strength of this evidence correspond to the differences in justification. Our favorite version of internalism, evidentialism, asserts that epistemic justification is entirely a matter of evidence.¹⁴ However, our goal here is to defend internalism generally, and not just its evidentialist version.

We have no proof that there is no exception to the pattern exhibited by our examples. The argument does not establish that internalism is true. It does support internalism. Further support will emerge from successful replies to objections.¹⁵

III. Objections and Replies

The objections we shall consider fall into two broad and overlapping categories. One sensible general description of internalist theories is that they say belief B is justified just in case there is some combination of internal states – typically featuring an experience or another justified belief – that is suitably related to B. Objections of the first sort focus on internal states that are supposed to justify beliefs, arguing that there are some justified beliefs for which there are no internal justifying states. Objections in the second group focus on the connections between candidate internal justifiers and the beliefs they are supposed to justify, arguing that internalists inevitably run into insurmountable difficulties when they attempt to say anything definite about the nature or status of the connections.

While some internalist theories may have trouble dealing with some of these objections, there are several internalist approaches that can deal adequately with all of them. We concentrate primarily on two approaches, one that limits justifying states to currently conscious mental states and one that also includes as potential justifiers whatever is retained in memory. Since theories of

each sort surmount all of the objections, the internalist approach is in no danger of a general refutation.¹⁶

A. Are there enough internal justifiers?

A1. *Impulsional evidence*

Alvin Plantinga's objection focuses on evidentialist versions of internalism.¹⁷ But the same sort of objection seems equally applicable against any *prima facie* plausible internalist view. Plantinga asserts that there are three views evidentialists can hold concerning what constitutes evidence, and he argues that each view renders evidentialism unsatisfactory. The three possibilities are: (1) evidence consists only of other beliefs (all evidence is propositional); (2) evidence consists only of beliefs and sensory states (all evidence is propositional or sensory); (3) evidence can also include the sense of conviction or confidence that accompanies beliefs (all evidence is propositional, sensory, or impulsional).

Plantinga uses knowledge of simple arithmetical facts to defend his objection. He asserts that we do not believe that $2 + 1 = 3$ on the basis of propositional or sensory evidence. So, if evidentialists adopt alternatives (1) or (2), their theory implies that this belief is not justified. Yet, of course, we do know that $2 + 1 = 3$. Plantinga claims there is a "felt attractiveness" about the content of that belief, and he says $2 + 1 = 5$ "feels wrong, weird, absurd, eminently rejectable."¹⁸ He calls the "felt attractiveness" an "impulse" and classifies it as "impulsional evidence." So internalists might take Plantinga's third alternative and claim that this impulsional evidence is the internal factor that justifies simple mathematical beliefs.

Plantinga argues that there is a problem with this account. He claims that necessarily all beliefs would have similar justification: "You have impulsional evidence for *p* just in virtue of believing *p*. ... It isn't even possible that you believe *p* but lack impulsional evidence for it: how could it be that you believe *p* although it does not seem to you to be true?"¹⁹ He infers that on this view of evidence, the internalist justification condition for knowledge that consists in having evidence is implied by the belief condition. If Plantinga is right about this, then evidentialists who take alternative (3) are stuck with the unacceptable conclusion that

all actual beliefs are justified. The other initially plausible internalist views, for instance, those that appeal to epistemic responsibility as the key to a belief's justification, seem equally susceptible to this sort of objection. The "felt attractiveness" seems equally to render believing the epistemically responsible course of action to take. So, again, all beliefs would be justified.

Even if Plantinga were right in claiming that the evidence for beliefs like $2 + 1 = 3$ is impulsional, however, he would be mistaken in thinking that all beliefs have any similar sort of evidential support. There are several internal states to distinguish here. Perhaps we feel attracted to the proposition that $2 + 1 = 3$ and we feel impelled to believe it. Not everything we believe feels attractive in this way or any other. For instance, some known propositions are believed reluctantly, on the basis of reasons, in spite of their seeming distinctly unattractive and implausible. Some beliefs result from fears. They need not seem in any way attractive. Correspondingly, the denials of things we believe do not always feel "weird" or "absurd," even if we think that they are false. There may be a sense of obviousness that accompanies belief in some propositions. This sense may contribute to their evidential support. But quite plainly not all believed propositions share that feature, or anything that resembles it. So it is not true that there is "impulsional evidence" for every believed proposition.

Furthermore, even if there were impulsional evidence for each belief, it would not follow that each belief satisfies any plausible evidential version of the justification condition for knowledge. The existence of a bit of supporting evidence is clearly not enough. A plausible evidential condition for knowledge requires something more, such as strong evidence on balance, or at least evidence undefeated by other evidence. An impulse to believe would not always qualify as strong evidence on balance, or undefeated evidence. Moreover, even if there were some impulsional evidence for all beliefs, it would not follow that all beliefs are justified to any degree. In some cases anything like impulsional evidence is decisively outweighed by competing evidence. Therefore, the existence of impulsional evidence for all beliefs would not render redundant a plausible evidential condition on knowledge and would not saddle internalists with the unacceptable result that all beliefs are justified.

Even with regard to the simplest of mathematical beliefs, impulsional evidence of the sort Plantinga mentions is not our only evidence. We have evidence about our success in dealing with simple arithmetical matters and knowledge of the acceptance our assertions about these matters enjoy. So, we have reason to think that our spontaneous judgments about simple mathematical matters are correct. Furthermore, we know that we learned these sorts of things as children and we have not had our more recent assertions about them contradicted by others. If we had been making mistakes about these kinds of things, it is very likely that problems would have arisen and we would have been corrected. Finally, at least according to some plausible views, we have a kind of a priori insight that enables us to grasp simple mathematical propositions. This insight provides us with some evidence for the truth of simple mathematical truths. Much of this evidence is retained in memory; some of it is conscious whenever such propositions are consciously apprehended. There seems to be plenty of additional evidence, whether or not justifiers are restricted to conscious states. Indeed, the suggestion that the only evidential bases for simple arithmetical beliefs are impulses to believe is extremely implausible.

Thus, Plantinga's objection makes no real trouble for evidentialism. Any other reasonable internalist view clearly has a similar response available to the counterpart objections.

A2. *Stored beliefs*

Alvin Goldman argues that internal states cannot account for the justification of stored beliefs.²⁰ The problem is this. At any given moment almost nothing of what we know is consciously considered. We know personal facts, facts that constitute common knowledge, facts in our areas of expertise, and so on. Since we know all these things, we believe them. These are stored beliefs, not occurrent beliefs. Since we know them, we are justified in believing them. But on what internalist basis can these beliefs be justified? As Goldman says, "No perceptual experience, no conscious memory event, and no premises consciously entertained at the selected moment will be justificationaly sufficient for such a belief."²¹ Internalists are stuck with the unacceptable result that these beliefs are not justified, unless something internal that justifies them can be found.

In formulating this objection Goldman assumes two propositions, either of which internalists can sensibly reject. On the one hand, he assumes that virtually all justified beliefs are stored beliefs. On the other hand, he assumes that internalists must find something conscious to serve as their justification. But internalists have good reason to reject this pair of propositions. One alternative is to argue that, in the most central sense, few beliefs are justified, and typically the ones that are justified are occurrent. The second option is to argue that other non-occurrent internal states can contribute to the justification of non-occurrent beliefs.

The first response relies on the idea that there are occurrent and dispositional senses of "justified," just as there are occurrent and dispositional senses of "belief." In the most fundamental sense of "justified," a belief can be justified for a person only by the person's current evidence, and one's current evidence is all conscious. In this sense, non-occurrent beliefs are typically not justified. However, in the same way that there are propositions in which one has stored belief, one can have "stored justifications" for these beliefs. That is, one can have in memory reasons that justify the belief.²² Beliefs like this are dispositionally justified.²³ Thus, although stored beliefs are seldom justified in the most fundamental sense, they are often dispositionally justified.

Goldman objects to a proposal along these lines that one of us made previously.²⁴ He takes the general idea behind the proposal to be that a disposition to generate a conscious evidential state counts as a justifier. He then raises the following objection:

Suppose a train passenger awakes from a nap but has not yet opened his eyes. Is he justified in believing propositions about the details of the neighboring landscape? Surely not. Yet he is *disposed*, merely by opening his eyes, to generate conscious mental states that would occurrently justify such beliefs.²⁵

The idea behind the current proposal is not what Goldman criticizes here. It is not that any conscious mental state that one is disposed to be in counts as evidence. The idea is that some non-occurrent states that one is already in, such as non-occurrent memories of perceptual experiences, are

stored evidence. Presently having this stored evidence justifies dispositionally some non-occurrent beliefs that one already has. The train passenger does not have the evidence that he would have received were he to open his eyes. The dispositional state that he is in, his disposition to see the landscape by opening his eyes, is not stored evidence for propositions about the landscape. It is a potential to acquire evidence, and that is crucially different.

The second solution to the problem of stored beliefs does not invoke a distinction between occurrent and dispositional justification. Internalists can plausibly claim that if we have numerous ordinary justified beliefs that we are not consciously considering, then there is no reason to exclude from what justifies these beliefs further stored beliefs or other memories. These stored justifications are internalist by the standard of *M* and they are plausibly regarded as evidence that the person has.²⁶

The description presented here of the second internalist approach leaves open important questions about which stored internal states can justify beliefs and what relation these stored states must have to a belief to justify it. No doubt these are difficult questions. Versions of internalism will differ concerning which stored states they count as justifiers.²⁷ But there is no appearance that internalism lacks the resources to provide satisfactory answers to these questions.

However, one might think that external factors having to do with the actual source of a memory belief can affect its justification. In fact, Goldman himself describes something similar to our second internalist approach and claims that it fails for just this reason.²⁸ We turn next to this objection.

A3. *Forgotten evidence*

Several authors have raised objections involving forgotten evidence.²⁹ We will focus on an example Goldman provides:

Last year Sally read about the health benefits of broccoli in a *New York Times* science-section story. She then justifiably formed a belief in broccoli's beneficial effects. She still retains this belief but no longer recalls her original evidential source (and has never encountered either corroborating or undermining sources). Nonetheless,

her broccoli belief is still justified, and, if true, qualifies as a case of knowledge.³⁰

This example illustrates something that must be conceded to be common. We now know things for which we have forgotten our original evidence. The problem for internalism arises most clearly if we assume that Sally's original evidence is irretrievably lost and not part of any stored justification that Sally might have. Let us assume that Sally is occurrently entertaining her justified belief about broccoli and that the facts about the original source of the belief are not part of any internalist justification of it. Externalists might argue that the contingent merits of the external source of this belief account for its justification. How can internalists explain why this belief is currently justified?

One internalist answer to this question is that Sally's justification consists in conscious qualities of the recollection, such as its vivacity and her associated feeling of confidence. We see no fatal flaw in this response. It will be most attractive to internalists who hold that only what is conscious can justify a belief. We note that not all memory beliefs are justified according to this theory. Some memory beliefs are accompanied by a sense of uncertainty and a lack of confidence. Other memory beliefs are accompanied by a recognition of competing evidence. This competing evidence can render vivacious memory beliefs unjustified. These are plausible results, so this restrictive version of internalism does have the resources to deal with forgotten evidence.

Another defensible answer is available to internalists who think that not all evidence is conscious. If Sally is a normal contemporary adult, she is likely to have quite a bit of readily retrievable evidence supporting her belief about broccoli. The healthfulness of vegetables is widely reported and widely discussed. Furthermore, her belief about broccoli is probably not undermined by any background beliefs she is likely to have. Finally, she, like most people, probably has supporting evidence consisting in stored beliefs about the general reliability and accuracy of memory. She knows that she is generally right about this sort of thing. So Sally would have justification for her broccoli belief, though it is not her original evidence. If Sally lacks any supporting background information and also lacks any

reason to trust her memory, then we doubt that her belief about broccoli really is justified.

Goldman considers and rejects this second response on the basis of a new version of the example about Sally.³¹ The crucial feature of the revised example is that the belief originally came from a disreputable source. Sally has the same belief about broccoli and the same background beliefs about the reliability of her relevant capacities. But now it is part of the story that Sally obtained the belief about broccoli from an article in the *National Inquirer*, a source Goldman assumes to be unreliable. Goldman claims that

Sally cannot be credited with justifiably believing that broccoli is healthful. Her past acquisition is still relevant, and decisive. At least it is relevant so long as we are considering the “epistemizing” sense of justification, in which justification carries a true belief a good distance toward knowledge. Sally’s belief in the healthfulness of broccoli is not justified in that sense, for surely she does not know that broccoli is healthful given that the *National Inquirer* was her sole source of information.³²

We agree that Sally does not know that broccoli is healthful under these conditions. We also agree that facts about her acquisition of the belief determine this result. However, it does not follow that Sally’s belief is not justified. The “epistemizing” sense of justification is said by Goldman to be a sense according to which a belief that is justified is one that has been carried “a good distance toward knowledge.” This fits with our initial characterization of epistemic justification as the sort which is necessary for knowledge. But from the fact that Sally’s belief falls short of knowledge, it does not follow that it has not been carried a good distance toward knowledge. Thus, an initial weakness in this objection is that its concluding inference is invalid.

A second fault is that the allegedly unjustified belief is actually a justified true belief that is not knowledge. It is a Gettier case. We endorse the following rule of thumb for classifying examples of true beliefs that are not knowledge:

RT. If a true belief is accidentally correct, in spite of its being quite reasonably believed, then the example is a Gettier case.

RT helps to show that the second version of the example about Sally is a Gettier case. Sally believes that broccoli is healthful. She believes (presumably justifiably) that she learned this from a reliable source. She is wrong about her source but, coincidentally, right about broccoli. This fits exactly the pattern of Gettier cases, and RT classifies it as such. It is a quite reasonable belief on Sally’s part which, in light of its unreliable source, is just accidentally correct. It is a justified true belief that is not knowledge.

Our view has an implication that may initially seem odd. When Sally first came to believe that broccoli is healthful, the belief was unjustified because Sally had reason to distrust her source. Yet we seem in effect to be saying that merely because she has forgotten about that bad source, the belief has become justified. We are not quite saying that. As we see it, when she forgets about the source she has lost a defeater of a justification for her broccoli belief. Assuming that Sally knows herself normally to be judicious about her sources, any belief she retains thereby has considerable internal support. Whatever beliefs she retains are justified by this, unless they are defeated. A belief is defeated in any case in which she has indications that impeach what it is reasonable for her to take to be the source of her belief. But when she no longer possesses any such indication, as in the present Sally case, the otherwise generally good credentials of her memorial beliefs support the belief and are undefeated.

Some confirmation of our analysis comes from comparing the case as described to a case in which Sally does remember the unreliability of her source but retains the belief anyway. It is clear that there would be something far less reasonable about her belief in that situation. This suggests that forgetting the source does make the belief better justified.

Further confirmation emerges from contrasting the example with yet another variation. Suppose Sally believes both that broccoli is healthful and that peas are healthful. Suppose that her source for the former is still the *National Inquirer* but her source for the latter belief is the reliable *New York Times*. Again she has forgotten her sources, but she correctly and reasonably believes that she virtually always gets beliefs like these from trustworthy sources. Goldman’s objection requires differentiating these two beliefs in an

unacceptable way. It counts the former belief as unjustified, on the basis of the unreliability of its forgotten source. Yet from Sally's present perspective, the two propositions are on a par. It would be completely unreasonable for her to give up one belief but not the other. The best thing to say is that both are justified, but the broccoli belief does not count as knowledge because it is a Gettier case.

We conclude that internalism does not have any difficulty finding adequate justification in cases of forgotten evidence.³³

B. Links and connections

We turn next to two objections concerning the connections between perceptual experiences or other justified beliefs and the beliefs they are supposed to justify. There are difficult questions about exactly how these states manage to justify the beliefs they support. These are problems of detail, and internalists have reasonable choices concerning how to work out the details. As we shall show by responding to several related objections, there are no unresolvable problems here.

B1. The need for higher order beliefs

William Alston has argued that the considerations that support internalism equally support the imposition of what he calls a "higher order requirement" on justification. The idea is that if the argument that leads to the conclusion that only internal factors can serve as justifiers is sound, then there is also a sound argument to the conclusion that for a belief to be justified the believer must be able to tell which factors justify the belief. Alston writes:

Suppose that the sorts of things that can count as justifiers are always accessible to me, but that it is not accessible to me which items of these sorts count as justifications for which beliefs. I have access to the justifiers but not to their justificatory efficacy. This will take away my ability to do what I am said to have an obligation to do just as surely as the lack of access to the justifiers themselves. To illustrate, let's suppose that experiences can function as justifiers, and that they are accessible to us. I can always tell what sensory experiences I am having at a given moment. Even so, if I am unable to tell what belief about the current physical environment is justified by a given sensory experience, I am thereby unable to regulate

my perceptual beliefs according as they possess or lack experiential justification.³⁴

Alston goes on to argue that this higher level requirement is one that few of us are able to satisfy, and he rejects the requirement partly for this reason. Since the argument for the higher order requirement is clearly unsound, Alston concludes that the original argument for internalism is unsound as well.

The argument that Alston is considering relies on a deontological conception of justification according to which justification is a matter of conforming to duties one must be in a position to know about. Internalists are free to reject that conception.³⁵ They need not defend an identification of justification with any sort of duty fulfillment. They need not defend anything that makes having justified beliefs depend on having some way to know what justifies what. To cite our favorite instance, evidentialists hold that the possession of the right evidence by itself secures the justification of the corresponding beliefs. The justification supervenes on the internal possession of appropriate evidence. Neither epistemic evaluations nor duties need enter in at all.

It might be thought that evidentialism should be formulated in ways that require for justification not only supporting evidence but also knowledge of higher level principles about the justificatory efficacy of this evidence. Some internalists do seem to impose such a requirement.³⁶ We agree with Alston that any such theory is implausible, implying that few people have justified beliefs. However, we see no reason to think that evidentialists, or internalists generally, must endorse any higher order requirement. Having evidence can make for justification on its own.

The appearance that justifying relations pose a problem for internalism arises partly from formulating the debate between internalists and externalists as a debate over whether all "justifiers" are internal. For example, Goldman takes to internalists to require that all "justifiers" must be in some suitable way accessible.³⁷ This way of formulating the issue is problematic. Suppose that a person who believes *q* on the basis of believing *p* is justified in believing *q*. We might then say, as a first approximation, that the justifiers for *q* are (i) the belief that *p* together with its justification, and (ii) the fact that *p* justifies *q*. The fact in (ii) is

not itself an internal state, and so it might be thought that internalists are faced with the difficult task of finding some internal representation of this state to serve as a justifier.³⁸

There is a sense in which *p*'s support for *q* is a "justifier." It is part of an explanation of the fact that the person's belief in *q* is justified. But this does not imply that internalists are committed to the view that there must be some internal representation of this fact. It may be that a person's being in the state described by (i) is sufficient for the belief that *q* to be justified. If so, then all individuals mentally alike in that they share that state are justified in believing *q*. The fact in (ii) may help to account for the justification without the person making any mental use of that fact.

General beliefs that relate evidence to a conclusion sometimes do make a justificatory difference. This occurs in some of the examples in our argument for internalism. But the sort of connecting information that the examples suggest to be necessary is nonepistemic information that justified believers typically have. The logic TA, for example, had justification for beliefs about implication relations that the student lacked. The expert bird watcher had justification for beliefs about what woodpeckers look like. This might take the form of various generalizations, e.g., any bird that looks like that is a woodpecker, any bird with that sort of bill is a woodpecker, etc.³⁹ The student and the novice bird watcher lacked these justifications. It would be a mistake, however, to argue from these cases to any universal "higher order requirement," especially to a higher order requirement to have epistemic information about what justifies what.

A fully developed internalist theory must state whether linking information of the sort possessed by the logic TA and the expert bird watcher is required in the case of simpler connections. Suppose that a person has a justified belief in some proposition, *p*. Suppose further that *q* is an extremely simple and intuitively obvious (to us) logical consequence of *p*. For *q* to be justified for the person, must he have additional evidence, analogous the TA's additional evidence, for the proposition that *q* follows from *p*?

One possible view is that the answer is "No." According to this view, there are certain elementary logical connections that are necessarily reflected in epistemic connections. The best candidates for this

relation include cases where one proposition is a conjunction of which the other is a conjunct. The general idea is that some propositions, *p* and *q*, have a primitive or basic epistemic connection. If *p* and *q* have this connection, then, necessarily, if a person is justified in believing *p*, then the person is also justified in believing *q*. Perhaps it is part of understanding *p* that one grasps the connection between *p* and *q*. There is, then, no need for additional information about the link between *p* and *q* that a person who is justified in believing *p* might lack. By the test of the supervenience thesis asserted by S, internalists can accept this answer.

Internalists can also hold that the answer to the question above is "Yes." In this case, there is something resembling a higher order requirement. However, it is not any implausible requirement to the effect that one have beliefs about justification. It is merely a requirement that one have evidence that there is a supporting connection – for instance, the logical consequence relation – between what is ordinarily regarded as one's evidence and what it is evidence for. This evidence can come from direct insight or from any other source. This is evidence that people normally have in a variety normal situations.⁴⁰

A similar question arises concerning perceptual beliefs about the qualities of the objects one is perceiving. We said above that the expert bird watcher has background information about the look of woodpeckers that justified the belief that he saw a woodpecker. The novice lacked that information. The new question concerns simpler qualities such as redness. Must a person with a clear view of a red object have evidence about the look of red things in order to be justified in believing that there is something red before him or is the mere experience of redness (in the absence of defeaters) sufficient for justification?

Again, it is not crucial to answer this question here. What is important for present purposes is that internalists have plausible options. If an experience of the phenomenal quality corresponding to redness automatically justifies the belief (absent any defeater), then people internally alike in that they share the experience will be justified in believing the same external world proposition. If information about the look of red objects is required, then people internally alike in that they share this information as well as the experience of red will have the same external

world proposition justified. There is a problem for internalism here only if there is some reason to think that internal differences are inadequate to account for some difference in justification. We see no threat of that.

B2. *Justification of introspective beliefs*

Ernest Sosa raises a problem about how experiences justify introspective beliefs:

Some experiences in a certain sense “directly fit” some introspective beliefs. But not all experiences directly fit the introspective beliefs that describe them correctly. Thus my belief that at the center of my visual field there lies a white triangle against a black background would so fit the corresponding experience. But my belief that my visual field contains a 23-sided white figure against a black background would *not* fit that experience.⁴¹

The question, then, is this: Why does having a suitable experience of a triangle justify the introspective belief that one is having that experience, while our experience of a 23-sided figure does not justify for us the belief that we are having that experience?

Internalism has resources to explain why the two experiences have different epistemic consequences. We can best explain the relevant internal features through consideration of some hypothetical person who does have the ability to identify 23-sided figures in his visual field and contrasting this person with ordinary people who lack that ability. According to one internalist option, someone who has the ability has an experience qualitatively different from the experiences of those who lack that ability. We will call the quality that underlies the ability “recognition.” It can plausibly be held that recognition makes a justificatory difference. When our visual field contains a triangle that contrasts clearly with its surroundings, we recognize it as such. We do not similarly recognize 23-sided figures. The recognition is not a true belief linking the experience to a belief about its content.⁴² It is, instead, a feature of experience itself. This experiential feature is what makes it true that triangles, optimally viewed, are generally seen as triangles, while 23-sided figures, even when optimally viewed, are not generally seen as being 23-sided. It is this aspect of the experience that provides evidential support for

the corresponding belief. For most of us, this sort of feature is present when we experience clearly discriminable triangles and not present when we experience 23-sided figures. But a person who did have that remarkable ability would have an experience qualitatively unlike ours.

Rather than appealing to any qualitative difference in experience, internalists can appeal instead to background information. Ordinary people have learned that the property of being a three-sided image is associated with a certain sort of visual appearance. They have not learned which sorts of visual appearances are associated with being a 23-sided image. On this view, only by learning some such association could a person have justification from experience for making these sorts of classifications of images. Internalists can plausibly appeal to this sort of background information as the internal difference that accounts for differences in justification in these cases. As in the cases considered in section B1, the information here is not epistemic information about what justifies what, information people typically lack. It is simply information about properties that are associated with experiences of certain types.

We conclude that Sosa is right to say that some but not all experiences lead to justification of introspective beliefs that correctly describe them. But internal differences, either in the experiences themselves or in background information, are available to account for the difference between those that do lead to justification and those that do not.

IV. Conclusion

We have defended internalism not just to praise it, but to move the debate beyond it. We have tried to show that no genuine problem for this category of theories has been identified. We have seen that even versions of internalism that depend on only conscious elements have not been refuted. Various less restrictive views about what determines justification have emerged entirely unscathed as well. On any account of what internalism is, including the one we have offered here, internalism is nothing more than a broad doctrine about the location of the determining factors for epistemic justification. Having argued that internalist views stand in no jeopardy of being generally refuted, we recommend that epistemological attention focus on more specific accounts that are more informative.

Notes

- 1 For a summary of the current state of epistemology that illustrates this sort of view, see Philip Kitcher, "The Naturalists Return," *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 101 (1992), pp. 53–114.
- 2 Laurence BonJour "Externalism/Internalism," in *A Companion to Epistemology*, ed. Jonathan Dancy and Ernest Sosa (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 132.
- 3 Robert Audi, *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 233–4. Emphasis in the original.
- 4 Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 6. A very similar formulation appears in William Harper, "Paper Mache Problems in Epistemology: A Defense of Strong Internalism," *Synthese*, vol. 116 (1998), pp. 27–49. See p. 28.
- 5 John Pollock, "At the Interface of Philosophy and AI," *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*, ed. John Greco and Ernest Sosa (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999) pp. 383–414. The quotation is from p. 394.
- 6 Ernest Sosa, "Skepticism and the Internal/External Divide," *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*, pp. 145–57. The quotation is from p. 147. Sosa goes on to describe another version of internalism that highlights accessibility.
- 7 Laurence BonJour, "The Dialectic of Foundationalism and Coherentism," *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*, pp. 117–42. The quotation is from p. 118.
- 8 William Alston, "Internalism and Externalism in Epistemology," reprinted in William Alston, *Epistemic Justification: Essays in the Theory of Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 185–222. See p. 186.
- 9 Pollock does not make explicit that the internal states to which he refers must be mental states. However, it is reasonable to assume that this is what he has in mind.
- 10 It has become standard to distinguish between an existing belief (or other attitude) being justified and a person being justified in believing (or having another attitude toward) a proposition whether or not the person actually believes it (or has that attitude). We shall use phrases such as "justified belief" to refer to beliefs that are justified and we shall say of a person that he or she is justified in believing a proposition when we mean to say that the latter relation obtains. This distinction will not play a significant role in the discussion that follows. As stated, (S) and (M) are about the justification of existing attitudes. They could easily be reformulated to state internalist constraints on the conditions under which a person is justified in having a particular attitude.
- 11 Whether (M) implies (S) depends upon details of the supervenience relation which we will not discuss here.
- 12 Not all philosophers who make this sort of comparison seek an account of internalism with this advantage. James Pryor takes internalism to be accessibilism, notes that internalism in the philosophy of mind is a supervenience thesis, and concludes that the two kinds of internalism are dissimilar. See "Highlights of Recent Epistemology," *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 52, 1 (March 2001), pp. 95–124.
- 13 In "Skepticism and the Internal/External Divide," Sosa considers and rejects an argument that has mentalism as a premise and accessibilism as its conclusion. See pp. 146–8.
- 14 See Richard Feldman and Earl Conee, "Evidentialism," *Philosophical Studies* vol. 48 (1985), pp. 15–34.
- 15 In describing and assessing the beliefs in the examples of Section II, we did not say anything about what the individuals had a duty or obligation to believe, what they were permitted to believe, or what they might be praised or blamed for believing. There might be deontological truths of these sorts. We reject arguments for internalism based on the idea that epistemic concepts are to be analyzed in these deontological terms.
- 16 Other versions of internalism could be considered. For example, some internalists hold that a belief is justified only if the believer is able to formulate good reasons for it. We will not address the merits of these versions of internalism here. We note that a theory requiring for justified belief that the believer not only be able to formulate good reasons

but also be able to articulate those reasons or persuade others is not an internalist theory by our standards.

- 17 “Respondeo Ad Feldman” in *Warrant in Contemporary Epistemology: Essays in Honor of Plantinga’s Theory of Knowledge*, ed. Jon Kvanvig (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), pp. 357–61.
- 18 “Respondeo,” p. 259.
- 19 “Respondeo,” p. 360.
- 20 Alvin Goldman, “Internalism Exposed,” *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 96, no. 6 (1999), p. 278.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 It may be that if one were to become conscious of the belief, one would also bring to mind some stored justification that one has for it. Thus, if these stored beliefs were occurrent, they would be justified in the fundamental sense. Whether this justification would happen to accompany an occurrent consideration of a belief does not seem crucial. What may be crucial to having a stored epistemic justification for a stored belief is being capable of recalling a conscious justification, or at least being capable of recalling the key confirming evidence in such a justification.
- 23 Though it is possible for a stored belief to be justified by one’s current evidence, in the usual case, one’s evidence for a stored belief will also be stored. It is also possible for an occurrent belief to have only dispositional justification.
- 24 Richard Feldman, “Having Evidence,” in *Philosophical Analysis*, ed. David Austin (Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Kluwer, 1988), pp. 83–104.
- 25 Goldman, “Internalism Exposed,” pp. 278–9.
- 26 It is, in the typical case, an internal state that is accessible to the believer, so accessibilist versions of internalism can accept this approach as well. We suspect that many internalists will find the second sort of approach to the problem of stored beliefs more appealing. By limiting evidence to current conscious states, the former view limits severely the number of justified beliefs a person has at any time. We do not regard this limitation as clearly unsatisfactory, given the availability of a dispositional notion of justification to account for the favorable epistemic status of many stored beliefs. We shall continue to present both approaches in the remainder of this paper.
- 27 For example, they can differ with respect to how readily accessible those states must be. It is also possible to hold that the degree of justification provided by a state is partly determined by how readily accessible it is.
- 28 Goldman, “Internalism Exposed,” p. 279.
- 29 See, for example, Sosa, “Skepticism and the Internal/External Divide,” pp. 145–57. The relevant example appears on pp. 152f. Goldman cites Gilbert Harman, Thomas Senor, and Robert Audi as having raised similar objections. See Gilbert Harman, *Change in View* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986); Thomas Senor, “Internalist Foundationalism and the Justification of Memory Belief,” *Synthese*, vol. 94 (1993), pp. 453–76; and Robert Audi, “Memorial Justification,” *Philosophical Topics*, vol. 23 (1995), pp. 31–45.
- 30 Goldman, “Internalism Exposed,” p. 281.
- 31 The new example resembles one that Ernest Sosa presents involving a generally reasonable person who believes a conclusion as a result of a now-forgotten “tissue of fallacies.” Sosa thinks this origin renders the belief unjustified, no matter what the person now thinks about the source of her belief or her general capacities. See Sosa, “Skepticism and the Internal/External Divide,” p. 153.
- 32 Goldman, “Internalism Exposed,” pp. 280–1.
- 33 A third problem Goldman poses for internalism is the problem of concurrent retrieval. It purports to affect only those internalist views that are versions of holistic coherentism. A person has a large set of stored beliefs at any time. Holistic coherentism says that a belief is justified only if it coheres with one’s whole corpus of beliefs, including stored beliefs. This leads to a problem for a defender of holistic coherentism who also accepts the deontologically defended claim that one can always find out whether a belief is justified. Ascertaining whether one belief coheres with the rest by bringing them all consciously to mind at once is well beyond the capacities of any person.
- This is a problem for holistic coherentism only when it is conjoined with the deontologically defended thesis just mentioned.

A holistic coherentist need not accept a deontological conception of epistemic justification, and can simply deny that epistemic status is something that one always can find out. The holist can also respond to Goldman's objection by denying that finding out epistemic status so as to comply with any relevant duty requires the simultaneous retrieval of all that the status depends on. It might be held to be sufficient for complying with a duty to find out whether belief B1 coheres with one's other beliefs simply to form a true belief, B2, that B1 coheres with the others, as long as B2 itself coheres with the rest of one's beliefs.

In any case, problems peculiar to holistic coherentism cast no doubt on internalism generally. There are, however, related questions concerning the accessibility of stored beliefs that might be raised for other internalist theories, including evidentialism. Here is one of them. Suppose that someone has a conscious belief that is supported by some currently conscious evidence. Suppose further that the person also has a large number of stored beliefs whose conjunction implies the falsity of the conscious belief. This conjunction is too complex for the person to entertain. Under these circumstances, what is the epistemic status of the current belief?

Internalists have ample resources to deal with cases like this, whatever the correct answer to this question is. If beliefs like these are justified, internalists can hold that only currently accessed evidence is relevant to the epistemic status of occurrently believed propositions. So, potentially defeating combinations of beliefs that are not accessed would not undermine justification. If beliefs like these are not justified, internalists can say instead that all stored beliefs are among the mental items relevant to justification and that any conjunction of them can serve as a defeater of the justification of current beliefs, regardless of whether the individual can consciously consider the conjunction. It is also consistent with M to say that justification supervenes on a restricted class of stored mental items. Perhaps items that are too complex to be

retrieved are excluded. In that case, an unbelievably complex conjunction of stored beliefs would not be a defeater. Perhaps only combinations of stored beliefs whose negative relevance to the belief in question has been or could readily be noticed or appreciated count as defeaters. Perhaps, as accessibilists hold, only mental items that are in one way or another accessible can be defeaters. The same variety of claims can be made about what constitutes supporting evidence that one has.

Some of these approaches seem to us to be more promising than others. For present purposes it is not necessary to defend any particular view. We are arguing here for the explanatory power and credibility of internalist theorists. The devil may lurk in the details, for all that we have shown. But in the absence of any good reason to think that internalists must make ad hoc or indefensible claims about stored beliefs, there is no reason to think that there is a general problem here.

- 34 Alston, "Internalism and Externalism in Epistemology," p. 221.
- 35 Feldman and Conee, "Evidentialism."
- 36 See, for example, Laurence Bonjour, "Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 5 (1980), p. 55. In "Epistemology c. 1988–2000," James Pryor calls the view that endorses the higher order requirement "Inferential Internalism" and identifies several of its proponents.
- 37 Goldman, "Internalism Exposed," Section I.
- 38 For instance, Michael Bergmann, "A Dilemma for Internalism," APA, Central Division, 2000.
- 39 Internalists who hold that all evidence is conscious can point to evidence such as the expert's feeling of confidence and sense of familiarity while making the judgment.
- 40 There is a non-evidentialist view that some internalists find attractive. The idea is that a mental fact about people is that they have fundamental inferential abilities. Perhaps this view could also be described in terms of the ability to see connections. But this view denies that this ability is, or leads to, differences in evidence. This is a mental difference, but not an evidential difference.

These two views can also be applied to the original example about the logic student. We said the TA can see that the original sentence has consequences that the student can't see. This is what accounts for the differences in what's justified for them. As we described the case, we interpreted these facts in an evidentialist way, taking the difference in what they can see as an evidential difference. The non-evidentialist internalist alternative agrees that there is a mental difference between the two, but it characterizes that difference in terms of an inferential skill

rather a difference in evidence. It is not essential to a defense of internalism to select between these alternatives.

- 41 Ernest Sosa, "Beyond Skepticism, to the Best of our Knowledge," *Mind*, vol. 97 (1988), pp. 153–88. The quotation is from p. 171.
- 42 The term "recognize" suggests that the classification is accurate. There is no need to insist on an infallible capacity here. If there is some such phenomenon as seemingly recognizing a conscious quality while misclassifying it, then it is a seeming recognition which supplies the conscious evidence for the classification.