

## Internalism, Stored Beliefs, and Forgotten Evidence

### 1. Introduction

An internalist slogan says that justification depends solely on factors internal to the agent's perspective. But there is disagreement hidden behind the slogan. What factors are the internal ones?

**Synchronic internalism** says they are the agent's current non-factive and non-historical mental states. The more extreme **Cartesian internalism** further restricts the internal factors to the agent's current *conscious* mental states.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, the less restrictive **diachronic internalism** allows the internal factors to include not only non-conscious states, but also past mental states.

Despite their differences, these views present a united front on the epistemology of testimony. They all agree that the justification of your testimony-based beliefs do not depend on 'external' factors, like whether your source is objectively reliable, or whether she knows or at least justifiably believes what she says.

But they disagree about memory. Unlike Cartesian internalism, synchronic internalism can allow information currently stored in memory but not consciously accessed to make a difference to the justification of one's beliefs. And unlike synchronic internalism, diachronic internalism can allow forgotten evidence to make a difference.

It is natural to see these views as lying on a continuum. On the extreme internalist end is Cartesian internalism, which limits the supervenience base for justification to current conscious states. One step removed is synchronic internalism, which widens the supervenience base to include certain kinds of non-conscious mental states. Diachronic internalism widens the supervenience base even further, and is the form of internalism lying closest to externalism, which lies at the opposite extreme.

Because of their arrangement on this continuum, it is natural to view the choice among these views as a choice about "how internalist to be". Indeed, some internalists have argued that if we take the step from externalism to some form of internalism, the very same motivations that led us to do so should move us all the way to Cartesian internalism.<sup>2</sup> And some externalists have argued that the same moves that allow us to avoid (the allegedly unacceptable) Cartesian internalism can just as well be used in defense of externalism.<sup>3</sup> What these authors have in common is the conditional claim that if we should take one step along our continuum from externalism into internalism, then we for the same reason should take further steps until we hit the opposite extreme of Cartesian internalism.

But I think this way of carving up the logical space can be misleading. These views do vary by how narrowly they restrict the supervenience base for justification. But in terms of motivations and theoretical implications, I doubt that diachronic internalism is *more externalist*

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Feldman 2004, Chisholm 1989, Pollock and Cruz 1999. And see Barnett 2015 for critical discussion.

<sup>2</sup> Eg., Feldman 2004 and Huemer 2001 and 2006.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., Jackson 2011. See also Moon 2012, though Moon tells me that what was once intended as a *reductio* of internalism has ended up convincing him of the supposed *absurdum*, Cartesian internalism.

than synchronic or Cartesian internalism is. All three views accept that justification depends on an agent's perspective. What they differ on is how memory contributes to one's perspective. And these internal disagreements are different in kind from what separates them collectively from externalism. Perhaps there are reasons to reject moderate internalist views in favor of something more extreme. But they are not just extensions or strengthening of the reasons that lead internalists collectively to reject externalism.

That's the general idea of this paper, anyway. But since I can't offer a general survey of every putative motivation for internalism, I will focus on a particularly common one, which I call the **Argument from the Impermissibility of Alternatives (AFIA)**.<sup>4</sup> In Section 2, I will review how this style of argument can be lodged against a particular externalist view that applies to testimony. In Section 3, I will explain why this argument should not lead us to favor Cartesian internalism over synchronic internalism. And in Section 4, I will explain why it should not lead us to favor synchronic internalism over diachronic internalism.

## 2. The AFIA against externalism about testimony

An **externalist theory of testimony** is one that says an agent's justification to believe a source's testimony can depend on factors external to the agent's perspective, most naturally on factors involving the source itself. One such theory, **transmissivism**, says that a recipient's justification can depend on whether her source is justified.<sup>5</sup> Another, **reliabilism**, say that it can depend on whether her source is objectively reliable.<sup>6</sup>

To postpone the tricky question of what qualifies as 'external', I won't try to give a more precise definition of externalism about testimony. But I take it the kinds of factors cited by transmissivists and reliabilists are paradigmatically external, and we can keep these views in mind as central exemplars of the kind of externalism that the AFIA is meant to challenge.

Consider an example over which internalists and externalists about testimony might disagree:

**Bad Testimony:** Tamron has every reason to believe that Al is an expert meteorologist, so she believes him when he says that it will rain tomorrow. But as a matter of fact, Al is a total crank, and his reasons for predicting rain do not support this prediction at all.

Internalists should say that Tamron's belief that it will rain is justified, at least if they are not skeptics about testimony. Just contrast Bad Testimony with a good case where Tamron instead believes the testimony of an objectively reliable source, who believes that it will rain based on strong meteorological evidence. Any non-skeptic will say that Tamron's belief is justified in a good case like this. And an internalist must say the same for Bad Testimony, since the only differences between the good and bad cases concern factors external to Tamron's perspective.

---

<sup>4</sup> Alexander Jackson (2011) calls this the "Argument from Irrationality."

<sup>5</sup> E.g., Burge 1993, Owens 2000, and Schmitt 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Note that one way of applying reliabilism to testimony says that the justification of a recipient's beliefs depends on whether testimony is in general reliable, rather than on whether the particular source in question is reliable. This is one instance of the well-known generality problem for reliabilism.

Meanwhile, externalists can say Tamron's belief is unjustified in Bad Testimony, by allowing Al's unreliability or lack of justification to make a difference. Of course, externalism does not entail this verdict about this particular case. But it does entail that there are *some* cases where purely external factors make a difference to the justification of Tamron's belief. For concreteness, I will stick to this case, but nothing important will turn on the details.<sup>7</sup>

Is it plausible for the externalist to claim that Tamron's belief is unjustified? There is certainly a respect in which, objectively speaking, Tamron's belief is epistemically defective. For example, it seems that Tamron's belief is not an eligible candidate for knowledge, even if it is true. But when we consider how things appear from Tamron's perspective, it is hard to see how her rationality is impugned by believing as she does. Indeed, it seems intuitively that believing Al's testimony is what she rationally *ought* to do.

Externalists often respond that Tamron's belief is merely **blameless**, not justified. This response denies:

**Blamelessness Sufficient:** One is in a position to justifiably hold an attitude if one can blamelessly hold the attitude.

Externalists can plausibly claim independent motivation for denying Blamelessness Sufficient. One can be blameless for an action or attitude if one's doing so is fully excused, which is different from being justified by good reasons. So denying Blamelessness Sufficient allows the externalist to console us that, even if we say Tamron's belief is unjustified, this does not commit us to blaming Tamron for her defective belief. Its defectiveness still can be Al's fault, not Tamron's.

But I do not think we should settle for the externalist's consolation. If the externalist were right, then the most that could be said for Tamron's belief is that we should give her a pass for believing what she shouldn't—as we might to someone who forms a belief unsupported by her evidence due to tiredness or intoxication. But I want to say there is a sense in which Tamron's belief is subjectively appropriate, not merely excusable. Believing Al's testimony is the rational thing for someone in her position to do, given the evidence available. It is this kind of subjective appropriateness that the internalist takes to depend solely on internal factors.

Here is a way to drive home the internalist's sense that Tamron's belief is the appropriate attitude for her to hold. We might ask the externalist, who claims instead that her belief is merely excusable, what someone in Tamron's situation ought to do instead. Surely Tamron could not be justified in outright disbelieving Al's testimony that it will rain. Nor could she justifiably suspend judgment. She has strong reason to believe that Al is an expert meteorologist—more than enough, we might suppose, to support knowledge in a good case. For this reason, it seems irrational for her to suspend judgment on whether his testimony is accurate.<sup>8</sup> So belief in Al's testimony must be the justified (or rationally appropriate) attitude, since it is the only option remaining.

---

<sup>7</sup> For a more general argument, see Barnett, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Jennifer Nagel points out that those who deny “positive epistemic duties” (e.g., Nelson 2010) might take issue with this claim, even without endorsing externalism. These philosophers might consider the more complicated version of the AFIA presented in Barnett 2015, which uses a weaker premise that they might accept. See also Friedman 2017 for further discussion of suspended judgment.

This is a rough sketch of the Argument from the Impermissibility of Alternatives (AFIA). It has been developed in different ways by a number of authors, including myself in previous work.<sup>9</sup> The targets of the AFIA are not limited to externalist theories of testimony; there are versions of the AFIA about perception, memory, and reasoning as well. Indeed, I regard the AFIA the most obvious and natural way of pressing internalism-friendly objections to any view that is perceived by its opponents as “too externalist”.

Now my main purpose here is not really to press this familiar line of argument against externalism. Instead, it is to reject corresponding arguments for synchronic internalism over diachronic internalism, or for Cartesian internalism over synchronic internalism. But it will help to elaborate the AFIA in a little more detail first. The AFIA can be reconstructed as an argument with two premises:

- (1) Tamron is not in a position to justifiably withhold belief that it will rain.
- (2) If Tamron is not in a position to justifiably withhold belief that it will rain, then Tamron is in a position to justifiably believe that it will rain.
- (3) Therefore, Tamron is in a position to justifiably believe that it will rain.

How should externalists respond? Some might reject (1), and hold that Tamron is in a position to justifiably withhold. They might say, for example, that even though Tamron blamelessly takes herself to have a good reason to believe it will rain, in fact she does not. And in the absence of good reason to hold the belief, she ought to withhold.

But (1) is hard to give up. Tamron’s source, Al, has every appearance of being reliable and justified. In fact he is not, but Tamron has no reason to think so. Given Tamron’s perspective on the situation, it seems objectionably stubborn for her to withhold belief for no reason.

Importantly, denying (1) involves more than just denying Blamelessness Sufficient. Maybe we can deny Tamron’s apparent justifiedness in believing it will rain can be explained away as mere blamelessness. But what about her apparent unjustifiedness were she to withhold instead? Can the externalist write this off by distinguishing blameworthiness from justification? If so, she must deny:

**Blameworthiness Necessary:** One is not in a position to justifiably hold an attitude unless one can blamelessly hold the attitude.

Denying Blamelessness Sufficient has a clear rationale, appealing to the distinction between reasons and excuses. But what is the rationale for denying Blamelessness Necessary? Maybe sometimes we should not blame you for doing what you shouldn’t, if you have an excuse absolving you of responsibility. It is harder to see why we should blame you for doing what you should.

In reply, some externalists might deny even that Tamron is blameworthy for withholding belief, and try to explain away intuitions to the contrary. They might claim our negative reaction to Tamron is due to her manifesting a disposition to hold attitudes she shouldn’t in

---

<sup>9</sup> E.g., Barnett 2015, Comesana MS, Feldman 2005, Gibbons 2013, pg. 4, Huemer 2001 and 2006, and McGrath 2007. And see Jackson 2011 for important critical discussion.

other situations.<sup>10</sup> If Tamron wrote off Al's testimony and continued to withhold belief, perhaps she would betray a stubbornness that will often get her into trouble, even though in this situation she blamelessly does what she should by withholding.

Speaking for myself, I find this reply intuitively unsatisfying. It seems to me that Tamron shouldn't withhold in *this* case, not just that she betrays a disposition to do what she shouldn't in other cases. But maybe there are some limits to the force of intuitions on this point, where many of us are already dug in. Even so, there is a related case that might at least nudge anyone who is still on the fence:

**Conflicting Testimony:** Willie is confronted with two sources, both apparently expert meteorologists. Al, who is in fact a crank, tells him it will rain. Ginger, who is a genuine expert, tells him it will not rain.

Intuitively, it seems that Willie is not in a position to know that it will not rain, even if Ginger's testimony would be enough to provide knowledge had Al not been around. In short, Al's testimony is a (rebutting) defeater for something Willie otherwise could know. The obvious explanation is that Willie no longer is justified in believing that it won't rain, since he cannot blamelessly ignore Al's testimony. But this explanation presupposes that blamelessness is necessary for justification. And that it just what the externalist who denies (1) seems committed to rejecting.

Indeed, it seems that the externalist who rejects (1) is committed to saying that Willie is still in a position to justifiably believe that it will not rain. Al's testimony carries no more weight in Conflicting Testimony than it does in Bad Testimony. So if his testimony is not enough to make it unjustifiable for Tamron to withhold, it is hard to see why it would be enough to make it unjustifiable for Willie to believe. Both of these attitudes would be justified in the absence of Al's testimony. If it carries enough weight to make withholding rather than believing justified for Willie, it should make believing rather than withholding justified for Tamron.

Could the externalist instead deny (2)? You withhold belief (by stipulation) whenever you do not believe something that you consider. So denying (2) means that when Tamron considers whether it will rain, neither believing it nor not believing it are justifiable. To many of us, this seems unsatisfactory. Tamron has to adopt *some* attitude or other. So it's no fair prohibiting her from belief, and also prohibiting her from any attitude other than belief. It cannot be that all of her options are prohibited. In other words,

**No Dilemmas:** For any proposition one considers, not all doxastic options are epistemically impermissible.

Why accept No Dilemmas? While I don't think the case for it is decisive, there are some familiar considerations in its favor.

An initial motivation appeals to the connection between permission and reactive attitudes like blame. At least in the abstract, it can seem unfair to blame an agent no matter what she does. She has to take some option or other, so we can fairly blame her for adopting one option only if some alternative would not have been blameworthy.

---

<sup>10</sup> This reply is loosely inspired by Maria Lasonen-Aarnio's (2020) views about higher-order defeat, though I do not know if she would apply it as I have to cases like this. See also Williamson 2017.

But this motivation has obvious shortcomings. At best, it would seem to motivate the claim that at least one of one's options can be blamelessly adopted. No Dilemmas would follow only if blamelessness is sufficient for permissibility, which many externalists reject. Others might reject the claim that at least one option must be blameless. In discussions of moral dilemmas, the connection to reactive attitudes is often taken to *favor* the existence of dilemmas.<sup>11</sup> In a Sophie's Choice situation, for example, perhaps the agent should later feel guilt no matter what she chooses. The same might be claimed, at least for some cases, regarding blame.

A second and I think stronger motivation appeals to an apparent inconsistency involving epistemic dilemmas. If neither withholding nor believing are permitted, then both believing and not believing must be obligatory. This strikes many of us as somehow inconsistent. But why? Notions of permission, obligation, and prohibition are not merely *evaluative* notions, the way any notion with a positive or negative valence might be. They are *normative*, in a sense tied directly to the guidance of one's actions and attitudes. If we say an agent ought to do something, that somehow goes along with telling the agent to do it. That does not necessarily mean that making normative assertions *simply amounts to* endorsing an imperative. But it does seem plausible that asserting a normative proposition at least *commits one* to endorsing the corresponding imperative. If so, we cannot consistently say both that believing is impermissible and that withholding belief is impermissible. That is like offering inconsistent guidance, as if we both told the agent not to believe and also not to withhold belief.

That is the idea, anyway. But the question of consistency here is a fraught one, and I am ambivalent about it myself.<sup>12</sup> It is open to the externalist to reject the claim that consistency is incompatible with genuine deontic dilemmas, as some ethicists have done.<sup>13</sup> I won't explore that here, because I think there is another way for externalists to resist premise (2) of the AFIA. Instead of rejecting No Dilemmas, they can reject:

**Deontological Conception:** One is in a position to justifiably hold a doxastic attitude if it is not impermissible.

Deontological Conception rules out a view where Tamron is permitted to withhold belief, but is unable to do so justifiably. Such a view might say: "It is permissible for Tamron to write off Al's testimony, since he is a crank. But since Tamron does not know this, she is unable to write him off in a way that is properly guided by its permissibility—and is thus in no position to justifiably withhold belief." Under Deontological Conception, in contrast, it is no good saying Tamron is permitted to hold an attitude that she has no way of holding justifiably.

Externalists can reject Deontological Conception, but it means rejecting a fairly weak conception of justification as an attitude-guiding notion. It is not obviously committed to doxastic voluntarism, for example, nor implausibly strong requirements for what it takes to

---

<sup>11</sup> E.g., Williams 1966 and Marcus 1980.

<sup>12</sup> Barnett 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Marcus 1980 and Sinnott-Armstrong 1988, Ch. 6.

be guided by an epistemic norm or rule.<sup>14</sup> For example, there is nothing in Deontological Conception that requires you always to be in a position to *know* which attitudes are permissible. To be sure, adopting an attitude justifiably will plausibly require being guided by the system of norms or rules that permit it. If I adopt a permissible attitude in a manner having nothing to do with its being permitted, then my attitude plausibly must be (doxastically) unjustified. So, Deontological Conception says I always am in a position to be guided by what is permissible. But it is a further dispensable assumption that being guided in the relevant way requires higher-order knowledge of what attitude is permissible.<sup>15</sup>

Instead of just rejecting particular accounts of epistemic guidance, rejecting Deontological Conception probably means rejecting altogether a conception of justification as a genuinely normative, attitude-guiding notion. Such a view might say identify justification as a positive epistemic status, or ‘justification’ as a term of positive epistemic appraisal, without thereby linking justification (or ‘justification’) directly to (claims about) permission or guidance. This might go along with a further denial that there are such things as epistemic permissions or prohibitions, in which case no attitudes ever are epistemically impermissible. Or it might go with a more moderate view that permission is not sufficient for justification.

This suggestion might sound odd to those of us accustomed to understanding justification in terms of epistemic rules or norms or permissions. But for comparison, there are plenty of positive evaluative statuses that actions do not automatically have if permissible. For example, while deciding whether to buy a pair of sneakers, neither option would be particularly courageous, or witty, or generous, even if one is permitted. Justification might be like that, for example, if it is identified with *adroitness* in Sosa’s sense. Maybe for many propositions, there are no attitudes I could adroitly adopt—whatever we say about their permissibility.

We have seen that an externalist can resist the AFIA for internalism by rejecting one of three theses: Deontological Conception, No Dilemmas, or Blamelessness Necessary. My main purpose here is not to refute externalism, so I won’t try to defend these theses any further. Instead, I want to consider whether internalists, or at least those internalists who reject externalism because they are sympathetic to these theses, ought to see them as motivating more extreme forms of internalism over more moderate ones. I will argue they should not.

### 3. The AFIA against synchronic and diachronic internalism

In previous work, I claimed that a corresponding AFIA fails when we replace testimony with memory.<sup>16</sup> I had in mind cases like the following:

**Fallacious Inference:** Kim recently came to believe that *q* via fallacious reasoning, but he is not currently conscious of that reasoning. He has not forgotten or changed his mind about anything in the meantime, and he has no other reasons for believing that *q*.

---

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., Goldman 1999 for an externalist objection that I think builds too much into the deontological conception. In Goldman’s defense, he is following the lead of many internalists.

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., Barnett MS and Boghossian 2003 and 2008.

<sup>16</sup> Barnett 2015.

A (non-skeptical) Cartesian internalist must say that Kim's belief is now justified. For consider a "good case", where another agent, Jim, comes to believe that  $q$  via good reasoning from justified premises, but is not currently conscious of that reasoning. Any non-skeptical epistemology of reasoning will grant that Jim's belief is justified. And since Kim is (we can suppose) just like Jim with respect to current conscious states, Cartesianism will say that Kim is justified in his belief as well.

Synchronic and diachronic internalists, in contrast, can say that Kim is unjustified. For they can let non-conscious differences between Kim and Jim make a difference for their justification.

The Cartesian internalist's verdict that Kim's belief is justified is hard to accept. We do not ordinarily think the justificatory status of an agent's beliefs changes dramatically from one moment to the next, as he shifts his attention between topics. If Kim's only basis for believing that  $q$  is fallacious reasoning, then consciously attending to something else will not make Kim's belief justified.

Yet it might seem possible to support the Cartesian internalist's counterintuitive verdict via an AFIA:

- (4) Kim is not in a position to justifiably revise his belief that  $q$ .
- (5) If Kim is not in a position to justifiably revise his belief that  $q$ , then Kim is in a position to justifiably believe that  $q$ .
- (6) Therefore, Kim is in a position to justifiably believe that  $q$ .

I think this argument should not persuade us. In fact, I think we should resist both premises. I will return to reasons for rejecting (5) in Section 4. Here, I will explain why we should reject (4).

In my prior work, I took the falsity of claims like (4) to be obvious. But Brian Weatherson (2016) has replied with a subtle and challenging argument in favor of such claims. (He does not endorse Cartesian internalism, but instead rejects (5) and with it No Dilemmas.) Here are Weatherson's premises (with minor tweaks):

- (i) Kim cannot rationally reopen inquiry regarding  $q$ .
- (ii) Kim cannot revise his belief that  $q$  unless he reopens inquiry regarding  $q$ .

From these premises, Weatherson infers that Kim cannot rationally revise his belief that  $q$ . An externalist who rejects that rationality is necessary for justification might accept Weatherson's conclusion, and still reject (4). But since I claim even internalists can reject (4), I need to reject Weatherson's argument as unsound.

Start with (ii). Reopening inquiry consists in activities like reevaluating the evidence or arguments concerning a belief, and perhaps in further activities like gathering new evidence. It might be possible to get rid of a belief without these activities, for example by taking a pill. But we can set aside other ways of getting rid of a belief by stipulating that they do not count as ways of *revising*. Given this restricted usage, (ii) is trivial.

What about (i)? I think it faces some more serious objections, but that Weatherson still has plausible replies available. A first objection says Kim can rationally reopen inquiry, since Kim *has good reasons* to. For example, the fact that the reasoning in question is fallacious seems like a good reason to reopen inquiry, and maybe in some sense it is available to Kim as a reason.

But I doubt this objection succeeds. Even if Kim *has* good reasons to reopen inquiry, rationally reopening inquiry requires reopening inquiry *for* those reasons. And Kim cannot do this, since it would require recognizing that the reasoning is fallacious. This puts Kim in a catch-22 situation, since he cannot recognize this without reopening inquiry.

A second objection holds that (i) is ambiguous. There is a true reading on which Kim cannot rationally reopen inquiry, but it involves prudential irrationality. In contrast, Kim can reopen inquiry without any epistemic irrationality—perhaps simply because the act of reopening inquiry, unlike doxastic attitudes like belief, is not subject to genuinely epistemic evaluation in the first place.<sup>17</sup> This is important, because Weatherson hopes to draw the conclusion that Kim cannot rationally revise his belief, and here the operative notion of rationality is epistemic. So it might be worried that Weatherson is guilty of equivocation.

But this objection at least cannot tell the whole story. Weatherson offers another case where there can be no suspicion of equivocation:

**Bad Decision:** Ned has been thinking about buying a new bed. He is deciding between a wood bed and a metal bed. And he just decided to get the wood bed. This is bad mistake. He will like the metal bed much better, and this is in fact clear from the evidence available to Ned. But he's made up his mind. The wood bed store is five miles east, the metal bed store is five miles west. And there's Ned in his car, driving eastward. What does rationality require of Ned now?

It is plausible that Ned cannot rationally reopen deliberation, for the same reasons as Kim. Even so, I think we should resist Weatherson's conclusion that Ned cannot rationally turn around and drive west. But notice that the operative notion of rationality is prudential. So there is no room to worry about equivocation on 'rational' between the premise that it is irrational for Ned to reopen inquiry and the conclusion that it is irrational for him to turn around. This does not directly rebut the second objection to (i), but it shows it is at best insufficiently general.

Instead of rejecting (i) or (ii), my main objection to Weatherson's argument is that it relies on a further suppressed premise. Even waiving concerns about equivocation, (i) and (ii) do not logically entail that Kim cannot rationally revise his belief, not without a further premise along the following lines:

(iii) If an agent cannot B unless she As, and the agent cannot rationally A, then she cannot rationally B.

This premise can seem appealing when we restrict our attention to cases where an agent's reasons for B-ing derive from reasons for A-ing, such as the following:

**Missing Lemma:** A mathematician could prove a potential theorem if only she could prove a lemma.

In Missing Lemma, the mathematician's only reasons for believing the theorem crucially include whatever reasons she has for believing the lemma. If she lacked reasons to believe the lemma, then she would lack reasons for believing the theorem. And if she is unable to

---

<sup>17</sup> For discussion, see Friedman 2020 and Haziza MS.

prove the lemma—and thus unable to believe it for the reasons she has—then she will be unable to believe the theorem for the reasons she has for believing it. The mathematician thus cannot rationally believe the theorem without rationally believing the lemma.

But (iii) fails in cases where A-ing is merely a precondition for adopting a given action or attitude for *other* reasons, such as:

**Up Late:** While staying up too late, Nod forms a new belief.

**Queen Sacrifice:** While spending more time than she should thinking about a *prima facie* unpromising queen sacrifice, Sofia realizes that it will force a mate in five moves, and she makes the sacrifice.

In Up Late, Nod cannot rationally form the new belief without staying up late, but only because being awake is a precondition for forming the belief. His reasons for forming the belief might have nothing to do with whatever reasons he might have had for staying up late. So it seems that Nod's belief can be rational even if his staying up was irrational. Similarly, in Queen Sacrifice, Sofia cannot rationally sacrifice her queen without first irrationally allocating too much time to considering the move. But that, too, doesn't make the sacrifice of her queen irrational. Once she recognizes that it will result in mate in five, sacrificing her queen is entirely rational—even if it took some irrational allocation of mental energy to get her to realize that.

Similarly, I think Kim is in a position to rationally revise his belief, and Ned is in a position to rationally turn around and head west. Of course, in order to do these things, Kim and Ned will first have to do something irrational. But that does not mean that the attitudes or actions themselves will be irrational, any more than the irrationality of staying up late means that the beliefs one forms while awake are irrational, or the irrationality of spending too much time considering a move makes it irrational to take the move after realizing it is to one's benefit.

There is, as I have said, a further way for an internalist to resist the AFIA for Cartesian internalism, by rejecting (5). Indeed, I think a corresponding move is the only option available to diachronic internalists concerning cases of forgotten evidence. Let's turn to those cases now.

#### 4. The AFIA against diachronic internalism

I argued in the previous section that the AFIA fails to support Cartesian internalism over synchronic internalism. Does it fare better in motivating synchronic internalism over diachronic internalism? Consider an example from John Greco (2005):

**Forgotten Evidence:** Last year, Maria came to believe that Dean Martin is Italian for bad reasons. But she has long since forgotten what her reasons were for this belief, and she has no other reason to doubt it.

Is Maria's belief justified? A non-skeptical synchronic internalist must say it is. For consider a "good case", where Maria comes to believe Dean Martin is Italian for good reasons, but then later forgets those reasons. We must say that Maria is justified in the good case, on pain of discounting many ordinary beliefs as unjustified. But Maria's current non-historical mental states are the same in Forgotten Evidence and the alternative good case. Thus the synchronic internalist must say Maria is justified in Forgotten Evidence.

In contrast, diachronic internalists can say that Maria's belief is unjustified in Forgotten Evidence, by allowing Maria's past mental states to affect her present justification.

Some externalists consider it obvious that Maria's belief is unjustified. Assuming that all internalists must endorse synchronic internalism, they think Forgotten Evidence is a counterexample to internalism.<sup>18</sup> Some internalists have suggested in response that diachronic internalism might be a viable option for internalists.<sup>19</sup> But perhaps the more common response is simply to accept synchronic internalism's verdict that Maria's belief is justified. Indeed, Richard Feldman (2005) and Matthew McGrath (2007) have attempted to support this sort of conclusion with an AFIA:

(7) Maria is not now in a position to justifiably revise her belief that Dean Martin is Italian.

(8) If Maria is not now in a position to justifiably revise her belief that Dean Martin is Italian, then Maria is in a position now to justifiably believe that Dean Martin is Italian.

(9) Therefore, Maria is now in a position to justifiably believe that Dean Martin is Italian.

Here I will present a way for the diachronic internalist to resist this argument. I am not certain that it is ultimately correct, but I do think it is enough to show that the AFIA for (9) is inconclusive. In this respect, I agree with externalist critics of the AFIA like Alexander Jackson (2011). But in a more important respect, I do not. For my way of resisting this argument does not extend to the AFIA regarding testimony considered in Section 2. So if I am right, then the diachronic internalist can have his cake and eat it too. That is, he can hold on to the AFIA as a core reason for rejecting externalism, and still resist it as a reason to accept synchronic internalism.

Can we reject (7)? Section 3 rejected the corresponding premise (4), and claimed Kim is in a position to justifiably revise his belief that *q*, even if it requires irrationally reopening inquiry. This move is unavailable here. Even if Maria irrationally reopens inquiry regarding whether Dean Martin is Italian, this will not enable her justifiably to revise her belief, since she has forgotten her original reasons.

Diachronic internalists thus need to reject (8). I think this is possible even if we accept the corresponding premise (2), which said that if Tamron cannot justifiably withhold belief from what her source says, then she can justifiably believe it.

One option is to reject No Dilemmas in favor of a restricted principle that allows *self-imposed* dilemmas, which result from the prior bad acts of the agent.<sup>20</sup> This weaker principle could still be strong enough to support premise (2) in the AFIA against externalism, since Tamron doesn't find herself in the position she is in as a result of her own prior bad acts. But the weaker principle might still be too weak to support (8), since Maria does find herself in her present position as a result of irrationally coming last year to believe Dean Martin is Italian. So, it could work.

---

<sup>18</sup> E.g., Goldman 1999 and Greco 2005.

<sup>19</sup> E.g., Feldman 2005.

<sup>20</sup> This option has an illustrious history, arguably tracing back to Aquinas's distinction between *perplexity simpliciter* and *perplexities secundum quid*. See Donagan 1977, Ch. 5 for a more recent discussion.

What's more, this restriction to No Dilemmas is not obviously *ad hoc*. One reason we might have wanted to ban dilemmas is that we think impermissible choices must be blameworthy, and yet we don't want to blame an agent for finding herself in a bad situation through no fault of her own. If this is our main reason for accepting No Dilemmas, then a restriction to world-imposed dilemmas might make sense. Perhaps there is nothing wrong with blaming an agent for how she handles a bad situation of her own making.

But I worry that this restriction of No Dilemmas still faces problems of inconsistency. If we endorse epistemic norms that prohibit all of an agent's options in a given situation, then we seem to be guilty of inconsistency—even if it is the agent's own fault that she has found herself in the situation we are being inconsistent about. So even though I think there is a kernel of truth to this suggestion, I do not think that restricting No Dilemmas to exclude self-imposed dilemmas is the best way to develop it.

The better way is to reject the common assumption that Maria's only options are to retain her belief or to revise it. Maria wasn't born yesterday; she has been around long enough to have come to believe last year that Dean Martin is Italian. What are Maria's doxastic options during this time? They include the following:

- (a) come to believe Dean Martin is Italian last year and retain the belief now
- (b) come to believe Dean Martin is Italian last year and revise the belief now
- (c) withhold belief that Dean Martin is Italian last year and revise the withholding now
- (d) withhold belief that Dean Martin is Italian last year and continue withholding now

Of these temporally extended options, which should Maria adopt? Clearly, it is (d). Maria ought to have withheld belief that Dean Martin is Italian from the outset, and she ought to persist in withholding belief now. But if Maria adopts option (d), then she will not now revise a belief that Dean Martin is Italian, nor will she now retain that belief. So Maria ought to adopt an option that does not involve her in now revising a belief that Dean Martin is Italian. Doesn't that mean that she ought not to revise a belief that Dean Martin is Italian?

Some might think that the answer is 'No'. Put roughly, their thinking is that while Maria never should have believed that Dean Martin is Italian in the first place, what's done is done, and Maria's options now are simply to revise or to retain the belief that she already formed. There are at least two ways of developing this rough objection.

The first way relates the objection to a general problem that has surfaced in a variety of literatures. Call it the *problem of contrary-to-duty obligations*.<sup>21</sup> The problem arises because we sometimes act contrary to what we ought to do. When we do, it is natural to say that we ought to accompany our contrary-to-duty actions with others that differ from what we ought to have done if we had acted as we should have to begin with. Here is an example from Holly Goldman (1978):

**Changing Lanes:** Jones is driving through a tunnel behind a slow-moving truck. It is illegal to change lanes in the tunnel, and Jones's doing so would disrupt the traffic. Nevertheless, she is going to change lanes—perhaps she doesn't realize it is illegal, or perhaps she is simply in a hurry. If she changes lanes without accelerating, traffic will be disrupted more severely than if she

---

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Chisholm 1963.

accelerates. If she accelerates without changing lanes, her car will collide with the back of a truck.

Should Jones accelerate? There are strong reasons to think she should not. Here are the available options:

- (e) change lanes and accelerate
- (f) change lanes and don't accelerate
- (g) stay in lane and accelerate
- (h) stay in lane and don't accelerate

It is true that each of these options can be decomposed into two component sub-options. But that is true for most any ordinary action. So it's hardly a reason to doubt that she has each of these four options available. If so, she surely should adopt (h). For she should stay in her lane, and she shouldn't stay in her lane and accelerate.

If we grant that Jones should adopt (h), then we are pressured to say she should not accelerate. For if an agent ought to A and B, then it follows by the rule RM from deontic logic that she ought to B. This rule is very appealing. But even so, some philosophers reject it.<sup>22</sup> They think there are compelling arguments for the conclusion that Jones instead should accelerate, such as:

- (iv) Jones is going to change lanes.
- (v) If Jones is going to change lanes, then she should accelerate.
- (vi) Therefore, Jones should accelerate.

Now the diachronic internalist had better reject this argument for (vi). If she doesn't, there will be no bar on arguing as follows:

- (vii) Maria last year came to believe that Dean Martin is Italian.
- (viii) If Maria last year came to believe that Dean Martin is Italian, then she should retain the belief now.
- (ix) Therefore, Maria should retain the belief now.

The diachronic internalist needs to deny (ix). If Maria should retain the belief now, then she should not withhold belief now. And then it really would follow by No Dilemmas that believing Dean Martin is Italian is permitted—and by Deontic Conception, justified. The upshot is that the AFIA against diachronic internalism succeeds if the arguments for (ix) is sound.

But there are well-known ways of resisting the argument for (vi), and they work just as well for the argument for (ix). The crucial thing is how we understand premises (v) and (viii). On a narrow-scope reading, (v) says:

(v-narrow) Jones changes lanes  $\supset$  Ought-(Jones accelerates)

On this reading, the argument for (vi) is a valid instance of *modus ponens*. But even if we think some reading of (v) must be true, that does not mean it has to be (v-narrow). As John Broome (1999) and others have urged, we could instead give (v) the following wide-scope reading:

---

<sup>22</sup> E.g., Jackson and Pargetter 1986.

(v-wide) Ought-(Jones changes lanes  $\supset$  Jones accelerates)

If we are wide scopers about (v), then the argument for (vi) is an instance not of *modus ponens*, but instead the highly controversial factual detachment inference rule, which can plausibly be rejected.

In addition to (v-wide), I also think we should be open to readings of (v) which do not analyze it in terms of a material conditional and an ought operator. We might for example read (v) as saying that among the options where she changes lanes, (e) and (f), the best one is (e), the option where she also accelerates. That is, *given* that she will change lanes, the best option is to change lanes and accelerate. That too is consistent with saying she ought not to accelerate, since the best option overall still can be (h).

What is the upshot for diachronic internalism? In similar fashion, the diachronic internalist can grant that of Maria's options (a) and (b), option (a) is preferable. And so if Maria initially believes that Dean Martin is Italian, she should retain that belief now. So long as this conditional is not given a narrow-scope reading, it will not follow that today she should retain the belief.

Turn now to the second way of developing the “what's done is done” objection to diachronic internalism. It draws on what I call the *problem of temporally extended options*. The problem stems from an important difference between Forgotten Evidence and cases like Changing Lanes, namely that in Forgotten Evidence, Maria's options are extended over a long period of time. This means that by the time Maria is faced with the doxastic choice of what to believe today, it is too late to change what was done last year.

The objector might claim that we should think of Maria as confronted with two separate doxastic choice situations. The first, which occurred last year, presented Maria with two options: to adopt the belief, or to withhold.<sup>23</sup> The second, which she faces today, presents her with two new options: to retain the belief already adopted, or to revise it. She should have taken the option of withholding a year ago, and if she had, then she would have been presented with different options today. But she didn't, and so her current options merely are to revise or to retain the existing belief. Since she is not permitted to revise it, No Dilemmas says that she is permitted to retain it.

Opponents of diachronic internalism might find it obvious that we should think of Maria's options in this way. But I think it is not obvious. In response, I have a tentative reply and a broader comment. The tentative reply is that every aspect of our epistemic lives unfolds over time. Adopting a belief that is supported by our evidence often requires us to consider the evidence before our minds, recall any other evidence that might be relevant, and proceed through multiple inferential steps. These things take time. Even making a judgment often takes an appreciable amount of time, since one of the main ways that we entertain propositions is by articulating them in inner speech. Now Descartes, troubled that the temporal extendedness of our thinking made us reliant on memory, claimed in the *Rules* that with enough practice, we could condense the entire process of appreciating the demonstration of a proposition, the entertaining of the proposition itself, and the act of assenting to it into “a continuous and wholly uninterrupted sweep of thought.” But even if

---

<sup>23</sup> Jonathan Weisberg points out to me that the objector instead could claim that Maria's initial options included (a)-(d). I think this view makes obligations time-relative in an objectionable way, in addition to other issues discussed here.

this much is admitted to be possible in principle, it seems a gross distortion if suggested as a description of how we really do form and revise beliefs in response to our evidence. An epistemology that attaches permissions and obligations only to allegedly instantaneous doxastic responses is not true to these facts about our epistemic lives.<sup>24</sup> And once we allow an agent's doxastic options to take some modest amount of time, it is hard to see what principled reason we might have for denying that they can extend over longer periods.

Now for the broader comment. It is that this disagreement about the nature of Maria's options does not seem like merely an extension of the kinds of disagreements that animate debates between internalists and externalists. So if this is the central disagreement between synchronic and diachronic internalists, they are not best seen as disagreeing about "how internalist to be."

To be sure, there are superficial similarities between externalist and diachronic internalist replies to the AFIA. The diachronic internalist's reply holds that Maria is in a position to justifiably withhold belief that Dean Martin is Italian, just as some externalists claim that in Bad Testimony, Tamron is in a position to justifiably withhold belief that it will rain. But when externalists make this claim about Bad Testimony, it is not because they think Tamron has available to her a subjectively appropriate (or blameless) course of action that involves withholding belief. Instead, they say that the justification of a doxastic attitude depends on its reliability or some other objective standard, and does not require it to be appropriate by the subject's lights.

The diachronic internalist says no such thing. Her point is that Maria does have available a rational doxastic response to her situation that involves withholding belief today. It is just that this option was already passed over when Maria came to hold the belief last year. This claim commits the diachronic internalist to potentially controversial views about temporally extended doxastic agency. But these commitments differ from the more familiar internalist commitments that externalists routinely dispute. So even if, in the end, the synchronic internalist's conception of doxastic options carries the day, it would be a mistake to cast this as a rejection of diachronic internalism as "too externalist." The issues that divide diachronic and synchronic internalists from one another cut across what divides them jointly from externalists.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> See Jackson 1988 for related thoughts, and Moss 2015 and Hedden 2015 for opposition.

<sup>25</sup> For valuable feedback and discussion, thanks to Nate Charlow, Sinan Dogramaci, Janice Dowell, Jennifer Nagel, Sergio Tenenbaum, Jonathan Weisberg, Alex Worsnip, and the participants at the 2016 Memory and Subjectivity conference at the University of Grenoble and the 2017 graduate seminar on internalism and externalism at the University of Toronto.

## References

- Barnett, David James. 2015. "Is Memory Merely Testimony From One's Former Self?" *Philosophical Review* 124(3): 353-392.
- . 2022. 'Graded Ratifiability' *Journal of Philosophy* 119(2): 57-88.
- . MS. 'Reflection Deflated' Available at [www.davidjamesbar.net](http://www.davidjamesbar.net).
- Boghossian, Paul. 2003. "Blind Reasoning" *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume*. 77(1): 225-248.
- . 2008. "Epistemic Rules" *Journal of Philosophy* 105(9): 472-500.
- Broome, John. 1999. "Normative Requirements." *Ratio* 12: 398-419.
- Burge, Tyler. 1993. "Content Preservation." *Philosophical Review* 102(4): 457-488.
- Chisholm, Roderick. 1963. "Contrary-to-Duty Imperatives and Deontic Logic." *Analysis* 24(2): 33-36.
- . 1989. *Theory of Knowledge*, 3rd Ed. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
- Feldman, Richard. 2004. "Having Evidence." In *Evidentialism*, Richard Feldman and Earl Conee. Oxford University Press.
- . 2005. "Justification Is Internal." In *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, ed. Matthias Steup and Ernest Sosa. Blackwell.
- Friedman, Jane. 2017. 'Why Suspend Judging?' *Noûs* 51(2): 302-326.
- . 2020. 'The Epistemic and the Zetetic' *Philosophical Review* 129(4): 501-536.
- Gibbons, John. 2013. *The Norm of Belief*. OUP.
- Goldman, Alvin. 1999. "Internalism Exposed" *Journal of Philosophy* 96(6): 271-293.
- Goldman, Holly. 1987. "Doing the Best One Can," in *Values and Morals*, ed. A. I. Goldman and J. Kim, Holland: Reidel.
- Greco, John. 2005. "Justification Is not Internal." In *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, ed. Matthias Steup and Ernest Sosa. Blackwell.
- Hedden, Brian. 2015. *Reasons Without Persons: Rationality, Identity, and Time*. OUP.
- Huemer, Michael. 2001. *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*. Rowman and Littlefield.
- . 2006. "Phenomenal Conservatism and the Internalist Intuition." *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 43(2): 147-158.
- Jackson, Alexander. 2011. "Appearance, Reality, and Justified Belief." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 83(3): 564-593.

- Jackson, Frank and Pargetter, Robert. 1986. "Oughts, Options, and Actualism." *Philosophical Review* 95(2): 233-255.
- Jackson, Frank. 1988. "Understanding the Logic of Obligation." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 62: 255-283.
- Lasonen-Aarnio, Maria. 2020. "Enkrasia or Evidentialism? Learning to Love Mismatch" *Philosophical Studies*.
- Marcus, Ruth Barcan. 1980. "Moral Dilemmas and Consistency." *Journal of Philosophy* 77(3): 121-136.
- McConnell, Terrance. 2010. "Moral Dilemmas." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta. [plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2010/entries/moral-dilemmas/](http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2010/entries/moral-dilemmas/).
- McGrath, Matthew. 2007. "Memory and Epistemic Conservatism" *Synthese* 157: 1-24.
- Moon, Andrew. 2012. "Three Forms of Internalism and the New Evil Demon Problem" *Episteme* 9(4): 345-360.
- Moss, Sarah. 2015. "Time Slice Epistemology and Action under Indeterminacy" *Oxford Studies in Epistemology*, vol. 5: 172-194.
- Nelson, Mark T. 2010. "We Have No Positive Epistemic Duties" *Mind* 119(473): 83-102.
- Owens, David. 2000. *Reason without Freedom: The Problem of Epistemic Normativity*. Routledge.
- Pollock, John and Joseph Cruz. 1999. *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge*, 2nd ed. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Pryor, James. 2001. "Highlights of Recent Epistemology." *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 52(1): 95-124.
- Schmitt, Frederick F. 2006. "Testimonial Justification and Transindividual Reasons." In *Testimony*, ed. Jennifer Lackey and Ernest Sosa, Oxford University Press.
- Sinnott-Armstrong, Walter. 1988. *Moral Dilemmas*. Basil Blackwell.
- Wedgwood, Ralph. 2002. "Internalism Explained." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 65(2): 349-369.
- Weatherson, Brian. 2016. "Memory, Belief, and Time." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 45(5-6) 692-715.
- Williams, Bernard. 1966. "Consistency and Realism", *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 40: 1-22.
- Williamson, Timothy. 2017. 'Ambiguous Rationality' *Episteme* 14(3): 263-274.