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Evidentialism, Time-Slice Mentalism, and Dreamless Asleep

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Abstract: I argue that the following theses are both popular among evidentialists but also jointly inconsistent with evidentialism: 1) *Time-Slice Mentalism*: one’s justificational properties at *t* are grounded only by one’s mental properties at *t*; 2) *Experience Ultimacy*: all ultimate evidence is experiential; and 3) *Sleep Justification*: we have justified beliefs while we have dreamless, nonexperiential sleep. Although I intend for this paper to be a polemic against evidentialists, it can also be viewed as an opportunity for them to clarify their views. Furthermore, the paper is not only relevant to evidentialists. For example, the arguments of this paper could give Time-Slice Mentalists a reason to deny evidentialism [Word Count: 108].

Keywords: evidentialism, time-slice, epistemic justification, evidence, experience

**1. Introduction**

Earl Conee and Richard Feldman define ‘evidentialism’ as follows:

*ES*: The epistemic justification of anyone’s doxastic attitude toward any proposition at any time strongly supervenes on the evidence that the person has at the time (2004, 101).

ES is prominent and well-defended.[[1]](#footnote-1) It is a theory of *propositional justification*, which is, roughly, one’s justification *for* believing *p*, even if one doesn’t actually believe *p*. According to ES, what one is justified in believing – whether or not one actually believes – is determined solely by one’s evidence.

Evidentialists also affirm a theory of *doxastic justification*, which is,roughly, a property of a belief and often exemplified when the belief is *based on* one’s evidence.[[2]](#footnote-2) Suppose I have good evidence that the butler committed the crime. I might be (propositionally) justified in believing he did it, even if I resist believing this because of my friendship with him. When I come to actually believe that he did it on the basis of this evidence, then my belief is (doxastically) justified. Stating evidentialist necessary and sufficient conditions for doxastic justification is unwieldy and difficult; I will not try to do it here.[[3]](#footnote-3) Fortunately, all evidentialists will agree to the following simple, necessary condition for doxastic justification:

*Evidence Dependence*: If *S* has a (doxastically) justified belief that *p*, then *S* believes *p* on the basis of *S*’s evidence.[[4]](#footnote-4)

I’ll use the term ‘evidentialist’ to refer to someone who holds *at least* to ES and Evidence Dependence.

Evidentialists will often hold to more specific theses about evidence and justification. Here are three of them:

*Time-Slice Mentalism*: One’s (propositional) justificational properties at *t* are grounded only by one’s mental properties at *t*.

*Experience Ultimacy*: All ultimate evidence is experiential.

*Sleep Justification*: We have (doxastically) justified beliefs while we have dreamless, nonexperiential sleep.

In this paper, I argue that these three theses, though popular among evidentialists, are also jointly inconsistent with evidentialism. Evidentialists should make a decision about which one to reject.

Although I intend for this paper to be a polemic against evidentialists, it can also be an opportunity for them to clarify their views. Furthermore, since I am arguing for an inconsistency, this paper is not only relevant to evidentialists. For example, there’s recently been a growth of interest in Time-Slice Mentalism. Those who affirm Time-Slice Mentalism must choose between Experience Ultimacy, Sleep Justification, and evidentialism; they cannot accept all three.

In section 2, I explain the three theses and argue that they are popular among evidentialists. In section 3, I argue for the inconsistency. In section 4, I examine costs of rejecting each of the theses.

**2. The Theses and their Popularity**

I will not argue that *all* evidentialists endorse all three theses; some may not. However, it will become clear that some prominent evidentialists – namely, Conee, Feldman, and Kevin McCain – endorse, or at least think favorably, of all three.

Let us first discuss Time-Slice Mentalism. The idea is that *only* one’s mental properties at a time, such as one’s current beliefs and experiences at a time, ground (or determine) what one is justified in believing at that time. According to this view, nonmental properties – such as the property of *being in a well-lit room* – or past mental properties – such as *its having seemed that p five minutes ago* – are not *directly* relevant to the justification of one’s present belief that *p*; at most, these properties can only be *indirectly* relevant by virtue of affecting one’s present mental properties. Views in the spirit of Time-Slice Mentalism have been explicitly affirmed or defended by Feldman (2004, 219), Moon (2012b, 357–359), Smithies (2014, 120), McCain (2014, 119), Moss (2015), and Hedden (2015).[[5]](#footnote-5)

In the following paragraphs, I’ll explain why I think that McCain, Conee, and Feldman would affirm Time-Slice Mentalism. McCain writes,

[M]ental states that S once had, but no longer has, and mental states that S does not yet have, but will come to have, do not make a difference to what is justified for her *now*… propositional justification strongly supervenes on the non-factive mental states that one has at a particular time (2014, 119).

The first sentence explicitly rules out past and future mental states from grounding justificational properties, and the second sentence strongly indicates that only present mental properties do. Furthermore, in all of McCain’s examples throughout his book, it is always mental states at *t* that are grounding one’s justification at *t*. So, McCain would likely affirm Time-Slice Mentalism.

Conee and Feldman do not *explicitly* endorse Time-Slice Mentalism, but they do endorse mentalism,

Mentalism: “The justificatory status of a person’s doxastic attitudes strongly supervenes on the person’s occurrent and dispositional mental states, events, and conditions” (2004, 56).

I think Conee and Feldman would endorse Time-Slice Mentalism because of how they defend mentalism (2004, 58–61). They argue by appealing to cases. Whenever two individuals are mentally identical – i.e., identical with respect to their beliefs, experiences, and other mental properties – it seems that they are justificationally identical. But whenever they use cases to support mentalism, they *only* appeal to mental states the person has at the time to explain the person’s justification at that time. They never appeal to mental states outside that time. This is evidence that they are assuming that Time-Slice Mentalism is true.

There is additional reason to think that Feldman specifically would affirm Time-Slice Mentalism. Feldman affirms ES, that justification is solely a matter of the evidence one has. And in his paper “Having Evidence”, he defends, “a restrictive account that limits the evidence a person has at a time to the things the person is thinking about or aware of at that time” (2004, 219).[[6]](#footnote-6) So, Feldman would likely affirm Time-Slice Mentalism.

The second thesis is *Experience Ultimacy*, which states that all ultimate evidence is experiential. *Derived evidence* is evidence in virtue of something else that is evidence; *ultimate evidence* is evidence, but not in virtue of anything else that is evidence. The following quotes by some evidentialists will both help explain Experience Ultimacy and also illustrate its popularity. Trent Dougherty and Patrick Rysiew write:

Our experiences (broadly construed to include what it’s like to have intuitions and rational insights, etc.) are our basic evidence, in the light of which all else that is evident is made evident… Experience is what ultimately justifies belief, for it is ultimately to your experience that your beliefs must be called into account (2013, 17–18).

Conee and Feldman write,

Some philosophers have argued that only believed propositions can be part of the evidence one has. Their typical ground for this claim is that only believed propositions can serve as premises of arguments. Our view differs radically from this one. We hold that experiences can be evidence, and beliefs are only derivatively evidence… Experience is our point of interaction with the world—conscious awareness is how we gain whatever evidence we have (2008, 87).

Commenting on this passage of Conee and Feldman, McCain writes,

Now this is not to say that only experiences are evidence. It is quite plausible that things such as beliefs are evidence too. However... it must be a justified belief. That is, it must be a belief for which S has good evidence. This good evidence could itself consist of other justified beliefs or experiences, but if we trace back the evidence far enough, it is reasonable to think the evidence will bottom out in experiences of some sort (perceptual, introspective, memorial, intuitive, and perhaps others). So, beliefs can be genuine evidence, but one might think that they are not "ultimate" evidence. It is plausible that all ultimate evidence is experiential, and all other evidence is evidence in virtue of bearing appropriate relations to ultimate evidence (2014, 19–20).

So, a number of evidentialists find Experience Ultimacy to be plausible.

Here are a few clarifications. First, to say that all ultimate evidence is *experiential* is to say that all ultimate evidence involves an *actual* experience. The above evidentialists talk about our *experiences*; they do not talk about our *dispositions to* have experiences or our being *causally related to* experiences.[[7]](#footnote-7) Second, when the above proponents of Experience Ultimacy use the word ‘experience’, they are speaking of something that has *phenomenal character*, a *something it is like* to undergo the experience. This is how contemporary philosophers generally use the word ‘experience’. Candidates for ultimate evidence will be things like *being appeared to redly* or *having a conscious seeming that something is red*, both of which have phenomenal character. Lastly, although the above authors seem to make the strong claim that the ultimate evidence is *identical* with the experience, I will interpret “all ultimate evidence is experiential” as the logically weaker thesis that the ultimate evidence *at least* *has experience as a component or constituent*, leaving the identity claim open.[[8]](#footnote-8)

The third thesis is *Sleep Justification*, which states that we have (doxastically) justified beliefs while we have dreamless, nonexperiential asleep. Sleep Justification is held not just by evidentialists, but by philosophers generally. Most will agree that when we dreamlessly sleep, we are not undergoing experiences. There is *nothing it is like* to be dreamlessly asleep, just as there is *nothing it is like* to be a rock. And most will agree that we *know* propositions when we dreamlessly sleep. (For example, we still know our names.) And many of those same people will think that we also *justifiedly believe* propositions when we dreamlessly sleep, either because they think that knowledge entails justified belief, or because they just find it to be independently plausible. This leaves open questions about what the best theories of justification and belief are and how, according to those theories, we might have justified beliefs while dreamlessly asleep. Philosophers will disagree about *these* questions. But it is hard to get past the intuitive force of the claim that we *do* know (and have justified beliefs about) our names while dreamlessly asleep. Most philosophers will agree with that.

McCain is one of those philosophers. His response to a case of mine illustrates how he implicitly endorses Sleep Justification. I will present the whole case because I will use it later in the paper:

Tim, a freshman college student enrolled in an introductory logic course, is asked to consider for the first time the law of noncontradiction, the proposition that *for any proposition p, it is not the case that p and ~p*. The proposition seems clearly true to him and he comes to believe it. Tim immediately lies down and falls asleep from all of the excitement (Moon 2012, 312).

In context, I was arguing against the view that *S* knows that *p* only if *S* believes that *p* on the basis of evidence. I argued that Tim’s knowledge of the law of noncontradiction (LN), while he dreamlessly sleeps, is not based on any evidence. I will not address the merits of my earlier argument.[[9]](#footnote-9) I will instead note that McCain (2014, 148–149) does not deny that Tim knows LN while he dreamlessly sleeps and instead tries to find good candidates for evidence that Tim’s knowledge might be based on. Other evidentialist responses to me have followed this pattern.[[10]](#footnote-10) And such philosophers, including McCain (2014, 2), think that knowledge entails justified belief; hence, McCain would likely regard such cases of knowledge as cases of justified belief.

One might object that some remarks by Conee and Feldman (2004, 67–68) indicate that they would not affirm Sleep Justification. They suggest that stored beliefs are not justified in “the most fundamental sense of ‘justified’,” saying that such beliefs “are dispositionally justified.”[[11]](#footnote-11) Is this a denial of Sleep Justification? I do not think so. Even if such beliefs are merely “dispositionally justified,” it does not follow that those beliefs are not justified *simpliciter*. Conee and Feldman never say that being dispositionally justified is not sufficient for being justified; they also never say that being fundamentally justified is necessary for being justified. In general, it is unclear how the property *being justified* relates to either of the properties *being dispositionally justified* and *being fundamentally justified*. It is also unclear exactly what these two latter properties are and whether they are just species of the genus *being justified* or they are two entirely different types of positive epistemic evaluation (or something in between). Since it’s unclear, it is also unclear what inferences to draw from their remarks.

Perhaps more important are their remarks in their more recent paper, Conee and Feldman (2011, 467), in which they respond to a case by Alvin Goldman (2011, 400) that is similar to the case of Tim. They take for granted the existence of justified beliefs like that of Tim’s. So, this is evidence that their latest position on the topic is in support of Sleep Justification.

In this section, I have argued that the three theses are popular among evidentialists. Although they rarely endorse them all in one breath, at least McCain (2014) speaks favorably of all of them in his recent, book-length defense of evidentialism, *Evidentialism and Epistemic Justification*. If I need an actual person to be my target, he is it. Furthermore, Conee and Feldman have endorsed these theses, at least indirectly, in their various works. However, regardless of who holds what, an inconsistency between these theses and evidentialism will be of interest to many epistemologists. I will demonstrate that inconsistency in the next section.

**3. The Theses are Inconsistent**

I will demonstrate that the following theses are inconsistent:

*Evidence Dependence*: If *S* has a (doxastically) justified belief that *p*, then *S* believes *p* on the basis of *S*’s evidence.

*Time-Slice Mentalism*: One’s (propositional) justificational properties at *t* are grounded only by one’s mental properties at *t*.

*Experience Ultimacy*: All ultimate evidence is experiential.

*Sleep Justification*: We have (doxastically) justified beliefs while we have dreamless, nonexperiential sleep.

Note that Evidence Dependence, not ES, is the component of evidentialism that is inconsistent with the other three theses.

Here is my argument for the inconsistency. Suppose Sleep Justification is true. We can imagine Tim napping dreamlessly at 2:00pm with his justified belief that LN is true. By Evidence Dependence, he must believe LN on the basis of his evidence. Call this evidence ‘E’.

 I will now defend the following conditional: if Time-Slice Mentalism is true, then E exists at 2:00pm. According to Time-Slice Mentalism, nothing outside 2:00pm can ground Tim’s justification for believing; only mental states at that time can play that role. These mental states must be what constitute or ground Tim’s evidence.[[12]](#footnote-12) So, E must exist at 2:00pm. Therefore, the conditional is true.

Now, E is either ultimate or derived. Suppose E is ultimate. Then by Experience Ultimacy, E is experiential. But this contradicts Sleep Justification. At 2:00pm, Tim is engaged in a nonexperiential nap.

Suppose that E is derived. Then E will be evidence in virtue of some of Tim’s other evidence, which is ultimate. Call this ultimate evidence, ‘E\*’. E\* either exists at 2:00pm, or it exists at some other time. Suppose it exists at 2:00pm. Then by Experience Ultimacy, E\* is experiential. This contradicts Sleep Justification. Again, at 2:00pm, Tim is engaged in a nonexperiential nap.

Suppose E\* exists at some other time. This contradicts Time-Slice Mentalism. According to Time-Slice Mentalism, nothing outside 2:00pm, including E\*, can ground Tim’s justification for believing. This completes my argument that the theses are inconsistent.[[13]](#footnote-13)

**4. Weighing the Options**

There are costs to rejecting one or more of the theses. I'll use the following labels for the people who take the various options: bullet-biters, compromisers, dispositions-appealers, and past-lookers.[[14]](#footnote-14)

*4.1 The Bullet-Biters*

The bullet-biters deny Sleep Justification. Now, this is not so easy. It is very intuitive that we both know and justifiedly believe propositions while dreamlessly asleep. Hence, they are biting a bullet. No evidentialist I know of has explicitly denied this in print.[[15]](#footnote-15)

 The bullet-biter might try to assuage our worries by saying that we are speaking loosely when we say we have knowledge or justified belief when we dreamlessly sleep. This is what leads our intuitions astray. In reply, it does not appear that we are speaking loosely when we make such claims. Suppose someone says that the door sensor knows that we passed through. If I asked that person, “C’mon, does the door sensor really have *knowledge*? Does it really have a *justified belief* that we passed through?” The person would probably say, “No.” This is not the case when we say that a person knows his name or has justified beliefs about his name while dreamlessly asleep. If we asked, “C’mon, does Fred really know his name while he’s asleep? Does he really have *knowledge*? Does he have a *justified belief* about what his name is while he’s asleep?” We would likely say, “Yes.”

 There are further costs to rejecting Sleep Justification.[[16]](#footnote-16) The following thesis is very intuitive:

*Awake Unconscious Justification*: While *awake*, we have (doxastically) justified beliefs that are not conscious beliefs.

A *conscious belief* is a belief that is, in some sense, brought to mind. When you see your friend and form the belief that *there’s my friend*, at that moment, the belief is conscious. However, plausibly, one can go for days without bringing one’s phone number to mind. Awake Unconscious Justification allows for the possibility that we continue to have a justified, unconscious belief that our phone number is X during those times (when we are awake). Now, one who accepts Awake Unconscious Justification but not Sleep Justification is saddled with the view that when we sleep, we have no unconscious, justified beliefs, but we suddenly do have them once we wake up. This seems implausible. It seems that if one rejects Sleep Justification, one should reject Awake Unconscious Justification as well.

 But suppose someone is willing to bite another bullet and also reject Awake Unconscious Justification. There is a further cost. It seems that we must posit the existence of justified, unconscious beliefs in order to explain the justification of some of our conscious beliefs and actions. Suppose Connie has formed many justified beliefs about Max: he is a criminal, he is dangerous, he wants to take her life, and more. Now, suppose Connie is at a convenience store and sees Max. She quickly reasons as follows: “That’s Max; I had better get out of here before he sees me.” She then sneaks out of the store. None of those unconscious beliefs about Max become conscious; it all happens in a flash. Intuitively, she arrived at a *justified* belief that *I had better get out of here*, and her sneaking out of the store was a *rational* action. A very good explanation for why that belief is justified, and why that action was rational, includes her justified, unconscious beliefs about Max. On the other hand, suppose Connie\* was in the same situation as Connie but *did not* have all of those justified, unconscious beliefs about Max. If Connie\* saw Max, reasoned, “That is Max; I had better get out of here before he sees me,” and quickly sneaked out of the store, then it seems that Connie\*’s conscious beliefs and actions would be irrational, even if her conscious states during that episode were identical to Connie’s.[[17]](#footnote-17)

So, rejecting Awake Unconscious Justification is costly. It seems that justified, unconscious beliefs justify some of our conscious beliefs and actions. But then it seems that there are justified, unconscious beliefs even when they are not actively justifying some of our conscious beliefs and actions, both when we are awake and when we are asleep. So, rejecting Sleep Justification is a hard bullet to bite.

*4.2 The Compromisers*

The compromisers reject Evidence Dependence. I call them ‘compromisers’ because Evidence Dependence is so much a part of the heart and soul of evidentialism. Of the theses, I believe it is the least likely to be abandoned.

Compromisers could object by saying that the following weaker thesis is still in the spirit of the original and can also help to avoid the inconsistency:

*Revised Evidence Dependence*: If *S* has a conscious, justified belief that *p*, then *S* believes *p* on the basis of evidence.

The inconsistency is avoided because the evidentialist can say that Tim’s unconscious belief that *p* does not need to be based on evidence in order to be justified.

 In an earlier paper (2012a, 325–326), I argued that making this sort of move involves costs. For example, the person who endorses Revised Evidence Dependence but denies Evidence Dependence must accept,

1. Believing on the basis of evidence is not necessary for a belief to be justified if the belief is unconscious, but believing on the basis of evidence is necessary for a belief to be justified if it is conscious.

If believing on the basis of evidence is not *required* for justification when the belief is unconscious, then what could make it so that it is required when a belief is conscious? It seems that there is no plausible factor. This proponent of Revised Evidence Dependence must also deny,

1. If an unconscious belief has whatever it takes to be justified when unconscious, then it will not lose whatever it takes to be justified *merely* by becoming conscious.

However, it seems implausible that a belief could lose a necessary condition for justification *merely* by becoming conscious.

So, although an evidentialist could replace Evidence Dependence with Revised Evidence Dependence, it comes with counterintuitive results. Furthermore, even if the evidentialist could find a way to lessen the oddity of accepting (1) and denying (2), sacrificing Evidence Dependence alone is still a sacrifice. It is more in the spirit of evidentialism to say, “*All* beliefs must be based on evidence in order to be justified,” than to say, “All beliefs *except* \_\_\_ must be based on evidence in order to be justified,” however one might fill in the blank. W.K. Clifford (1879, 186), a hero of evidentialism, famously said, “It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.” He did not add, “*Unless*, that is, you are asleep. Then it’s okay.” That would be a compromise for the evidentialist.

*4.3 The Dispositions-Appealers*

Suppose the evidentialist gives up Experience Ultimacy.[[18]](#footnote-18) This evidentialist can then say that the ultimate evidence that Tim’s belief is based on is some nonexperiential state. However, this nonexperiential ultimate evidence could still be thought to be *suitably related* to an experience, even if it itself does not involve an experience. For example, perhaps this ultimate evidence upon which Tim’s belief is based is a *disposition* *to have an experience*.[[19]](#footnote-19) For example, Tim might have a disposition to have a conscious seeming that LN is true. This evidentialist could then adopt,

*Dispositional Experience Ultimacy*: All ultimate evidence involves either an experience or a disposition to manifest an experience,

as a general principle to support this claim about Tim. I call those who make this sort of move ‘Dispositions-Appealers’.

 Here are two reasons to doubt that Tim’s ultimate evidence is a disposition to have an experience. First, Tim’s belief in LN does not seem to be *based on* the disposition to have a conscious seeming that LN is true (or any other disposition to have an experience). In his discussion of the case of Tim, McCain writes, “Some might doubt that a disposition is the sort of thing that a belief can be based on because it is not clear how an un-activated disposition can cause a belief to form or to be sustained” (2014, 148). On many views, basing requires causation, and Tim’s belief does not seem to be causally related to the disposition in question.

One might say that the following counterfactual is true: if Tim didn’t have the disposition to have a conscious seeming that LN is true, then he wouldn’t have the belief that LN is true. The objector might say that this indicates that the disposition is a cause of the belief.[[20]](#footnote-20) In response, this counterfactual would be true even if the belief was the cause of the disposition, or the belief and the disposition did not cause each other but shared a common cause, or the disposition was itself a constituent of the belief. Each of these possibilities seems somewhat likely, and at least none is obviously false. So, even if that counterfactual is true, it would be only weak evidence that the disposition is the cause of the belief.

There is a second reason to doubt that the disposition is the ultimate evidence upon which Tim’s belief is based. The mere disposition to have an experience is not the sort of thing that is *evidence* upon which a belief is based. This is because it does not have content. Consider some paradigmatic mental states that are reasonably regarded as evidence. I can see how its seeming to me *that* something is red could be evidence for me that something is red. I can see how a conscious memory *of* Sally’s having been at the party could be my evidence that she was at the party. I can see how my justified or warranted beliefs *that* all men are mortal and *that* Socrates is a man could be my evidence that *Socrates is mortal*. (Justified) beliefs, perceptual experiences, and memories seem to be the *sorts of things* that are evidence because they have *content*; they are *about* things. While a conscious seeming that *p* has content, a mere *disposition to* have a seeming that *p* does not have content; it is thereby not the sort of thing to count as evidence.[[21]](#footnote-21)

I have mostly been criticizing Dispositional Experience Ultimacy, which is a candidate replacement of Experience Ultimacy. Furthermore, I will note that rejecting Experience Ultimacy is itself a cost for the evidentialist. Evidentialists have traditionally said that ultimate evidence consists in actual experiential states, like *being appeared to redly* or *sensory experiences* or *conscious seemings*. It is the *experience*, something with phenomenal character, that is at least part of the ultimate evidence for our beliefs. As McCain said above, these confer justification to basic beliefs, which in turn can confer justification to nonbasic beliefs. It is an attractive picture of the structure of justification, and it is not clear that a mere disposition to have an experience, or *any* other nonexperiential mental state, can capture this intuitive picture that originally moved evidentialists to accept Experience Ultimacy in the first place.[[22]](#footnote-22)

*4.4 The Past-Looker*

The past-looker rejects Time-Slice Mentalism. She will say that Tim’s *past seeming* (or some other past mental state) is what grounds the justification of Tim’s current belief in LN. Note that this position is compatible with regular mentalism, which holds, without any relativization to a time, that one’s justification supervenes on one’s mental states.[[23]](#footnote-23)

But could the evidentialist accept mentalism, reject Time-Slice Mentalism, and still endorse ES? Recall that ES states that one’s justification at *t* supervenes on one’s evidence at *t*. Here is the most natural option for the evidentialist. She could just drop ES and turn to,

ES\*: The epistemic justification of anyone’s doxastic attitude toward any proposition strongly supervenes on the person’s evidence.

ES\* is identical to ES, but without the time index. McCain could then say that Tim’s past seeming is the ultimate evidence upon which Tim’s belief in LN is based.[[24]](#footnote-24) Furthermore, even though Conee and Feldman use ES to define ‘evidentialism’, it does seem that ES\* is still very much in the spirit of evidentialism. (Although I would call the one who replaces Evidence Dependence with Revised Evidence Dependence a ‘compromiser’, I would not do the same for the one who rejects ES for ES\*. ES\* seems enough in the spirit of evidentialism.)

Unfortunately, I believe that many evidentialists will balk at this option, simply because they think it implausible that a past mental state could be directly relevant to justification. Perhaps this is because they think that something counts as one’s present evidence only if it is accessible, and past mental states are inaccessible.[[25]](#footnote-25) This is a sort of internalist requirement on evidence that many evidentialists are inclined to accept. So, rejection of evidence accessibility will be a stumbling block for evidentialists who are considering this option.

**5. Conclusion**

If you are an evidentialist, you should think about which thesis you will reject. Will you be a bullet-biter, a compromiser, a dispositions-appealer, or a past-looker? Or maybe you think that there is another viable option that I have overlooked. Regardless of which option you choose, I hope that I have helped move the discussion on evidentialism forward, and I hope that evidentialists will engage in productive debate about which thesis they should reject.[[26]](#footnote-26)

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1. See Conee and Feldman (2004, 2008, 2011) for influential essays in defense of evidentialism. Long (2012), McCain (2014), Poston (2014), and many others have defended versions of evidentialism. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Bergmann (2006: 4, 63–64, 109–142) argues that a belief can be doxastically justified even if it is not based on evidence, so long as the belief meets certain externalist conditions (e.g., being formed by properly functioning faculties). Evidentialists, however, will not consider this a live possibility because of their commitment to Evidence Dependence, to be introduced below. Silva (2015) has argued for claims that would entail that basing is irrelevant to doxastic justification. If he is right, then we should understand any claims about doxastic justification in this paper to be about what Oliveira (2015, 389–390), in his response to Silva, calls *rich doxastic justification*, which does require basing. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For an example of the unwieldiness, see Conee and Feldman’s (2004, 93) lengthy definition of doxastic justification (or ‘well-foundedness’). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. That evidentialists affirm Evidence Dependence is also made clear when opponents of evidentialism attack it. Evidentialists do not say, “You misunderstand us. We don’t think that justified belief [or knowledge] requires evidence.” They instead try to defend Evidence Dependence. This is true of McCain’s (2014, 148–149) response to my (2012a, 312) sleep case; Conee and Feldman’s (2011, 465–468) response to Goldman’s (2011, 400) Ichabod case; Todd Long’s (2012, 252–254) response to Bergmann’s (2006, 63–64) God-caused belief case; and Conee and Feldman’s (2004, 64–67) response to Plantinga’s (1996, 359) arithmetic knowledge case. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Note that my formulation of Time-Slice Mentalism is in terms of grounding and not as a supervenience thesis. This avoids some potential problems raised by Kelly (2016, 47–49). The ‘only’ is meant to exclude mental states at other times from also grounding justification now. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Feldman seems to back away from this view in Conee and Feldman (2011, 465–468). However, even there, they are still only appealing to mental states at the time as part of one’s evidence. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. In section 4.3, I will examine a revision of Experience Ultimacy that appeals to dispositions to have an experience. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Also, perhaps the ultimate evidence isn’t *identical* with the phenomenal character; it might consist in an experience that has *both* phenomenal character *and* representational content. Thanks to Raja Rosenhagen for helpful conversation. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. However, see footnotes 21 and 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. E.g., see section 3.a.iii and 3.b of Frise (2016) and Madison (2014, 52–57). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Richard Feldman suggests a similar view in his paper, “Having Evidence,” in Conee and Feldman (2004, 236). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. This follows from the plausible assumption that what grounds one’s propositional justification at *t* also constitutes or grounds the evidence that determines one’s doxastic justification at *t*. Call this assumption ‘Unity’, since it claims a unity to what grounds propositional and doxastic justification at a time. Unity is also assumed in the last step of the argument. I think that most evidentialists will find Unity plausible. However, it can be denied. Perhaps one’s doxastic justification at *t* is *also* determined by what grounds one’s propositional justification at times other than *t*. (Thanks to Declan Smithies for suggesting this possibility.) I will note that 1) evidentialists who are Time-Slice Mentalists will probably not find this plausible, 2) even if they do, an interesting result of my argument is that one must deny Unity in order to avoid the inconsistency, and 3) the resulting view of doxastic justification ends up looking like the one I examine in section 4.4. For discussion of that view, and for more on Unity, see footnote 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Thanks to Peter Markie and Pamela Robinson for helping me formulate this argument. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Thanks to Simon Goldstein for help with both the categorizations of options and their names. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. However, Matthew Frise (forthcoming, sect. 3.1), an evidentialist, accepts that such justified beliefs do not exist *if* representationalism, a popular theory of belief, is true. However, he does not accept representationalism. Jon Matheson, an evidentialist, has shared with me in personal correspondence that he denies Sleep Justification, and he has given me permission to share this information in this paper. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Thanks to Kevin McCain, Danny Forman, Simon Goldstein, Chris Willard-Kyle, Jasmin Contos, and Michael Bergmann for helpful conversation about the points in the following three paragraphs. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Plantinga (1993, 100–101) gives additional argument that background beliefs play a justificatory role in many of our perceptual beliefs. For a reply to Plantinga, see Markie (2004, 552–553). Feldman (2004) and Moon (2012b, 349–352) have argued that unconscious beliefs play no role in justifying conscious beliefs. McCain (2014, ch. 3) has replied to those arguments, and I have replied to McCain in Moon (2015). So, my current considered view is that unconscious beliefs do not play a justificatory role in our conscious beliefs. That said, I think this will be a hard pill to swallow for most evidentialists. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. I was helped with this paragraph by Kevin McCain and Matthew McGrath. Ted Poston (2014, 92–95) has recently defended a coherentist version of evidentialism that rejects Experience Ultimacy. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. This dispositional view is based on Conee and Feldman’s (2011, 465–468) response to Goldman’s (2011, 400) Ichabod case. Frise (2017) critiques Conee and Feldman’s dispositional view, after which he (forthcoming, sect. 3.2) provisionally defends his own dispositional view. What I say in the rest of the section count against both Frise’s and also Conee and Feldman’s dispositional views. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Thanks to Matthew Frise for this objection. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. McCain (2014, 148) and Madison (2014, 56) appeal to Tim’s *memories* as the evidential basis for his belief. I agree that memories are the *sorts of things* that could be evidence. However, I argued that Tim’s belief is not based on memories in Moon (2012a, 319–323), which both McCain and Madison ignored in their 2014 replies to me. McCain (2015, 371–372) does not ignore my argument. However, he only notes that it assumes that basing requires causation, which is a plausible assumption that he and I both accept. So, I do not take that to be an objection. In fact, McCain (2014) develops a sophisticated causal theory of basing in chapter 5 of his book. For more on McCain’s (2015) reply to my argument, see the next footnote. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Interestingly, McCain (2015, 372–373) posits to Tim the existence of mental states, with content, that “make it so that he has LN stored in the particular way he does” (372). These mental states “explain why Tim is disposed to recall LN as something he knows rather than as something he merely believes” (373). (Note that McCain is not *identifying* these mental states with the disposition; rather they are what *explain* the disposition.) I am skeptical that any such mental states both exist and are Tim’s evidence for LN, but space prevents me from both laying out McCain’s full argument and also criticizing it. Here, I will simply note that if McCain wants to accept Sleep Justification, Experience Ultimacy, and Time-Slice Mentalism, then he must also make the further claim that these mysterious mental states have phenomenal character. That is extremely dubious. As I said above, there is *nothing it is like* to dreamlessly sleep just as there is *nothing it is like* to be a rock. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. The past-looker affirms, from footnote 12, *Unity*, the view that what grounds one’s propositional justification at *t* also constitutes or grounds the evidence that determines one’s doxastic justification at *t*. However, in footnote 12, I also discussed a view, call it ‘V’, that affirms Time-Slice Mentalism but rejects Unity by affirming that one’s doxastic justification at *t* is *also* determined by what grounds one’s propositional justification at times other than *t*. V holds in common with the past-looker’s view the claim that factors at times other than *t* are relevant to one’s doxastic justification at *t*.My criticism of the past-looker’s view in this section will also apply to V. The past-looker’s view and V only differ in their affirmation or rejection of Unity and their affirmation or rejection of Time-Slice Mentalism. I think the evidentialist should hold fast to Unity since that will keep a tight connection between one’s propositional justification at *t* and one’s doxastic justification at *t*. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Marshall Swain (1981, 74) defends a view like this. See section 2.3 of Moon (2012a) for discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Although Tim’s past seeming *token* is no longer accessible, perhaps it is enough that a present seeming *type* is accessible now. Tim, by reflection, could bring about a seeming that LN is true. I am not sure if evidentialists will be satisfied with this option. Thanks to Peter Markie for the idea behind this suggestion. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Thanks to Brian Cutter, Declan Smithies, and Philip Swenson for helpful conversation and to David Black, Patrick Bondy, Matthew Frise, Kolja Keller, John Komdat, Peter Markie, Kevin McCain, Matthew McGrath, Ted Poston, Pamela Robinson, Raja Rosenhagen, Joshua Smart, and Chris Tucker for helpful written comments and discussion of earlier drafts. Thanks for helpful questions from those present at a Rutgers epistemology reading group session on this paper, specifically Chris Willard-Kyle, Danny Forman, Simon Goldstein, and Philip Swenson. Thanks also for helpful questions from attenders at a colloquium at Purdue University, especially Michael Bergmann, Jeffrey Brewer, and Paul Draper. Lastly, thanks to commenters on the Board Certified Epistemologists Facebook group (including Trent Dougherty, Ali Hasan, Clayton LittleJohn, and Samuel Taylor). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)