

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 it is the agent's current non-factive and non-historical mental states. The more extreme **Cartesian internalism** further restricts the internal states to the agent's current *conscious* mental states (which I assume to be non-factive and non-historical).¹ In contrast, the less restrictive **diachronic internalism** allows the internal states 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 occupies the end of the continuum opposite to Cartesian internalism.

Because of the natural way of arranging these views on a continuum, it is natural to view our choice from among them 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.² 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.³ 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. To be sure, these views do vary by how narrowly they restrict the supervenience base for justification. But in

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

² Eg., Feldman 2004 and Huemer 2001 and 2006.

³ 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.

terms of motivations and theoretical implications, I doubt that diachronic internalism is *more externalist* than synchronic or Cartesian internalism is. All three views accept that justification depends on an agent's first-person 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 mere 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)**.⁴ 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. One such theory, **transmissivism**, says that a recipient's justification can depend on whether her source was justified.⁵ Another, **reliabilism**, say that it can depend on whether her source is objectively reliable.⁶

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. Since my main aim in this paper is not to refute externalism in general, I will stick to externalism about testimony as representative of the kinds of views rejected by internalists. But I do hope it will be clear how the objection to externalism about testimony I'll discuss could be extended to other externalist views.

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. Not only is this intuitively attractive, it is required by any non-skeptical version of their view. Just contrast Bad Testimony with a "good case", where Tamron instead believes the testimony of an

⁴ Alexander Jackson (2011) calls the same general form of argument the "Argument from Irrationality."

⁵ E.g., Burge 1993, Owens 2000, and Schmitt 2006.

⁶ 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.

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 first-person perspective.

Meanwhile, it is open to the externalist to claim that Tamron's belief is unjustified in Bad Testimony, since the externalist can allow external factors to make a difference to Tamron's justification. Of course, externalism does not entail such a 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. Here I will for simplicity consider how the AFIA applies to a version of externalism that says Tamron's belief is unjustified in Bad Testimony. Elsewhere, I develop a more complicated argument in the same spirit against externalist theories of testimony in general.⁷ I believe that the central philosophical issues at stake are the same, regardless of whether we consider the AFIA or the more general argument discussed in this previous work.

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. It is independently plausible that one can be blameless for for an action or attitude if one's doing so is fully excused. And it is furthermore plausible that we should distinguish reasons from excuses, so that being fully excused is not the same as being justified by good reasons.

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. Everyone can agree that its defectiveness is 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.

⁷ Barnett, 2015.

Here is a natural 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. But 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 intuitively irrational for her to suspend judgment on whether his testimony is accurate.⁸ So belief in Al's testimony must be the justified (or rationally appropriate) attitude, since it is the only option remaining.

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.⁹ The targets of the AFIA are not limited to externalist theories of testimony; there are versions of the AFIA on offer against views 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 the case against externalism. Instead, it is to say that the case for internalism over externalism is not just as well a case for synchronic internalism over diachronic internalism, or for Cartesian internalism over synchronic internalism. But to do that, I should first elaborate the AFIA in a little more detail, to see where the main fault lines are. 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 will 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 intuitively appealing. Tamron's source, Al, has every appearance of being reliable about whether it will rain. And we can suppose that Tamron has no other reason to doubt that it will rain. Of course, Al's testimony is in fact unreliable. But Tamron has no reason to think so. So it seems irrationally stubborn for an agent with Tamron's perspective on the situation to withhold belief for no reason.

Importantly, denying (1) involves more than just denying Blamelessness Sufficient. Maybe 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?

⁸ 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.

⁹ 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.

Can the externalist write this off by distinguishing blameworthiness from justification? If so, she would need to say Tamron is blameworthy but still justified, and thus 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 other situations.¹⁰ 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, if a committed externalist does not accept them. 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)? Let me hereby stipulate that "withholding belief" is just a catch-all term for any doxastic response by an agent who considers a proposition and

¹⁰ This reply is loosely inspired by Maria Lasonen-Aarnio's (forthcoming) views about higher-order defeat, though I do not know if she would apply it as I have to cases like this.

does not believe it. So if Tamron were to consider whether it will rain tomorrow and yet not believe it, Tamron would automatically count as withholding. This means that if we deny both that Tamron can justifiably believe and that she can justifiably withhold, then we are denying Tamron any justifiable doxastic option at all.

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, at least one of one's doxastic options is epistemically permissible.

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.

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 would reject. Others might even 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.¹¹ 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 that means one is both obligated not to believe and also obligated not to withhold belief. 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 genuinely *normative*, in a sense tied directly to the guidance of one's actions and attitudes. If we say that an agent is prohibited from doing something, for example, that in some sense goes along with telling the agent not to do it. Now I do not know exactly what the relationship is between normative propositions and imperatives, and I don't mean to claim that asserting a normative proposition *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 that is right, we cannot consistently say that an agent is both prohibited from doing something and also prohibited from refraining from doing it. That is like offering inconsistent guidance, as if we'd both told the agent not to do a thing and also told them to do it. More generally, it seems inconsistent to say that each one of an agent's available options are prohibited. So allowing that at least one of an agent's options is permitted is necessary to avoid a kind of inconsistency in the guidance we endorse.

¹¹ E.g., Williams 1966 and Marcus 1980.

That is the idea, anyway. But I admit the question of consistency here is a fraught one, and I am ambivalent about it myself. It is of course open to the externalist to reject the claim that consistency is incompatible with genuine deontic dilemmas, as some ethicists have done.¹² But I won't explore that here, because I think there is an easier way for the externalist to resist premise (2) of the AFIA. Instead of rejecting No Dilemmas, she can simply refuse to understand justification in terms of deontological notions like epistemic permission and obligation in the first place. This option will not be open to all externalists. Those who help themselves to talk of epistemic rules or norms or obligations will have to resist the AFIA in some other way. But many externalists could find this option more congenial. For a number of externalists have expressly rejected a deontological conception of justification. These externalists might understand justification to be an evaluative but not genuinely normative, attitude-guiding notion. That is, they might say that justification is a positive epistemic status, or that 'justification' is a term of positive epistemic appraisal, without thereby linking justification (or 'justification') directly to (claims about) what one ought to believe, or to guidance as to what to believe. There are plenty of positive moral statuses such that, in many situations, none of one's available options would exhibit that status. For example, while deciding whether to buy a pair of sneakers, neither option would be particularly courageous. And similarly, there might be some positive epistemic statuses that none of one's doxastic options might have in a given situation. For example, there might be propositions for which I am not now in any position to adopt an attitude that is *adroit* in Sosa's sense. No Dilemmas is attractive because we think of notions like permission and obligation as action-guiding. Deny that the notion of justification is likewise action-guiding, and the motivations for No Dilemma are no longer relevant to matters of justification.

At the same time, the externalist who takes this line should not stack the deck in her favor, by building more into the deontological conception of justification than is necessary to get the AFIA off the ground. She should not build in doxastic voluntarism, for example, nor implausibly strong requirements for what it takes to be guided by an epistemic norm or rule.¹³ All it takes to motivate No Dilemmas is for there to be epistemic norms or rules, and for these rules to be consistent in the guidance they offer. And if we accept No Dilemmas, then the second premise of the AFIA will follow from the following:

Deontological Conception: If one is epistemically permitted to hold a doxastic attitude, then one is in a position to justifiably hold it.

By Deontological Conception, if Tamron cannot justifiably believe that it will rain, then she is not permitted to believe it. By No Dilemmas, if she is not permitted to believe it, then she must be permitted to withhold belief. And again by Deontological Conception, if she is permitted to withhold, then she is justified. It follows that if Tamron cannot justifiably believe that it will rain, then she is justified in withholding, as premise (2) of the AFIA maintains.

Can an externalist reject Deontological Conception? She might do so by claiming justification is an evaluative notion, rather than a normative, attitude-guiding one. But again, it will not do simply to reject excessively strong internalist claims about the sense in which

¹² Cf. Marcus 1980 and Sinnott-Armstrong 1988, Ch. 6.

¹³ 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.

justification is attitude-guiding. In particular, 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.¹⁴

More concretely, 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, it is no good saying Tamron is permitted to hold an attitude that she has no way of holding justifiably. Externalists can deny this, but it means rejecting even a fairly weak conception of justification as an attitude-guiding notion.

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 as employed by the AFIA, ought to see them as likewise motivating more extreme forms of internalism over more moderate ones. I will argue that 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 one’s own memory.¹⁵ 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*.

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.

¹⁴ See, e.g., Boghossian 2003 and 2008.

¹⁵ Barnett 2015.

The Cartesian internalist's verdict that Kim's belief is justified defies ordinary intuitive judgments. We do not ordinarily think the justificatory status of an agent's beliefs changes dramatically from one moment to the next, as he merely shifts the objects of his attention. If Kim's only basis for believing that *q* is fallacious reasoning, then simply refraining from consciously entertaining it 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) It is irrational for Kim to reopen inquiry regarding *q*.
- (ii) Kim cannot revise his belief that *q* unless he re-opens 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 for his conclusion as unsound.

First consider (ii). Roughly speaking, 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 if one could simply forget the belief intentionally. But I hereby set aside other ways of getting rid of a belief by stipulating that they do not count as ways of *revising*. Even in this restricted sense of the term, I still want to claim that—*contra* (4)—Kim can rationally revise his belief. And 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. First, it might be objected that it is rational for Kim to reopen inquiry, since Kim *has good reasons* to. Here is one proposal for what they might be: the fact that the reasoning on which Kim's belief that *q* is based is fallacious. This is surely a good reason to reopen inquiry regarding *q*. And moreover, it arguably is a reason that is in some important sense available to Kim.

But Weatherson can plausibly claim that it still is irrational for Kim to reopen inquiry regarding *q*. Even if Kim has good reasons to reopen inquiry, rationally reopening inquiry requires reopening inquiry *for* those reasons. And Kim cannot do this. He could only reopen inquiry for the reason that his belief is based on fallacious reasoning if he recognized that the reasoning was fallacious. But he cannot come to recognize that the reasoning is fallacious

without reexamining that reasoning. So Kim is in a catch-22 situation. He cannot rationally reopen inquiry unless he already recognizes his reasons for doing so, and he cannot recognize his reasons for doing so unless he has already reopened inquiry.

A second objection holds that (i) is ambiguous. This objection says that while there is indeed a sense in which it is ‘irrational’ for Kim to reopen inquiry, this is a prudential sense of ‘irrational’. In contrast, it is not epistemically irrational for Kim to reopen inquiry—perhaps simply because the act of reopening inquiry, unlike doxastic attitudes like belief, is not subject to genuinely epistemic evaluation in the first place. This is important, because Weatherson hopes to draw the conclusion that Kim is in no position to rationally revise his belief—and presumably here, the operative notion of rationality is an epistemic one. So it might be worried that Weatherson is guilty of equivocation.

Although I am sympathetic to this objection, I don’t think it tells the whole story. This is because Weatherson offers us 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 it is irrational for Ned to 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.

The central problem with Weatherson’s argument, in my view, is that it relies on a suppressed premise that should be rejected. For even waiving any concerns about equivocation, (i) and (ii) alone do not logically entail the conclusion that Kim cannot rationally revise his belief. They do so only with the help of a suppressed premise along the following lines:

(iii) If an agent cannot rationally 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 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, even if justified in the good case. This is because the diachronic internalist can allow 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 take cases like Forgotten Evidence to be counterexamples to internalism.¹⁶ Some internalists have suggested in response that diachronic internalism might be a viable option for internalists.¹⁷ 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 reject diachronic internalism.

Section 3 argued that an AFIA regarding memory can be resisted by rejecting (4), and claiming that 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. For unlike Kim, she has forgotten her original reasons, and has no way now of recognizing their badness.

Opponents of the AFIA for memory thus need to reject (8). Is this available to the diachronic internalist who supports the AFIA against externalism? Despite what many assume, I think so.

One option for the diachronic internalist 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.¹⁸ 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.

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,

¹⁶ E.g., Goldman 1999 and Greco 2005.

¹⁷ E.g., Feldman 2005.

¹⁸ 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.

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 grant that 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*. 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 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.¹⁹ 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 (vi) and (ix) are 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). These premises concern what Chisholm (1963) called “contrary-to-duty” obligations, because they say what an agent should do in one regard given that she is acting contrary to her duty in another. For example, (v) says Jones should accelerate if she acts contrary to her duty to stay in her lane. Understood in the right way, this premise is very plausible. Even though the best of Jones's options overall is (h), if we focus only on (e) and (f), the options where she changes lanes, it seems that (e) is clearly preferable to (f). So there seems to be some sense in which, *given* that she is going to take option (e) or (f), the one she should take is (e). That is, given that she will change lanes, she should change lanes and accelerate. So if she should change lanes, she should accelerate—as premise (v) holds.

Since (iv) is true by stipulation, the opponent of (vi) had better deny the argument's validity. But this does not implausibly commit us to denying the validity of *modus ponens*. For the

¹⁹ E.g., Jackson and Pargetter 1986.

argument would only be an instance of *modus ponens* if (v) were given the narrow-scope reading:

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

But as John Broome (1999) and others have urged, we could instead give (v) the following wide-scope reading:

(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, its surface syntax notwithstanding. But I see no reason to suspect that an alternative reading would make the argument for (vi) out to be an instance of some straightforwardly valid argument form like *modus ponens*.

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, given that 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 in any obvious way 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.²⁰ 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

²⁰ 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.

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 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.²¹ 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.²²

²¹ See Jackson 1988 for related thoughts, and Moss 2015 and Hedden 2015 for opposition.

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