

# A Critical Assessment of Internalist Theory of Epistemic Justification

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## *Abstract*

The paper examines Internalism as a theory of epistemic justification. Internalism in epistemology is the view that the basic requirement for knowledge justification is in the epistemic agent internal factor. The paper examines two of the mainstream objections against this theory of epistemic justification which are “The Problem of Stored Belief and The Problem of forgotten Evidence.” The paper then use one of the variants of internalism which is mentalism to provide a way out for internalism as a theory of epistemic justification as these two salient objections.

*Keywords:* internalism, mentalism, justification, internal, external.

## 1. Introduction

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy that is concerned with the nature of knowledge and justified (or reasoned) belief.<sup>1</sup> It is derived from two ancient Greek words *episteme* (Knowledge) and *Logos* (account). Epistemology is concerned with the questions of nature, sources, scope and justification of knowledge. Attempt to discover the means by which knowledge is acquired and the criteria by which the reliability of knowledge claims are judged led to the traditional definition of knowledge as Justified True Belief. The tripartite account of knowledge, acronymically known as J.T.B, is attributed to Plato’s dialogue *Theatetus* which interprets knowledge as true opinion supported by reason.<sup>2</sup> But as the dialogue between Socrates and Theatetus suggests, Plato was not satisfied with the JTB theory. For instances in *Meno*, Plato argues that knowledge is more valuable than justified true beliefs and that knowledge and justified true belief are two different things.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps, Plato’s assertion that justified true opinion is almost knowledge explains why JTB theory is traditionally ascribed to his *Theatetus*. This implies that what distinguishes knowledge from true belief or opinion is justification. Thus, S knows that P if and only if three conditions are satisfied. In other words,

S knows that P if:

P is true

<sup>1</sup> Steup, Matthias. “Epistemology in the Twentieth Century” in the *Routledge Companion to Twentieth Century Philosophy*, Dermot, Moran (ed.) (London: Routledge Publications, 2009) pp. 469.

<sup>2</sup> John, M. Cooper et al. (eds.), *Plato: Complete Works*. (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1997) p. 222.

<sup>3</sup> Salami, Y. K. “Traditional Epistemology with Marxist Paradigm” in *JOPRED*, vol. 3, No. 1 & 2 (2008): 94.

S believes that P: and

S is justified in believing that P.<sup>4</sup>

The assumption of the above traditional analysis of knowledge is that epistemology is a normative discipline that identifies criteria or norms that our beliefs must meet in order to qualify as knowledge. These three criteria for knowledge are truth, belief and justification.

However, in the history of epistemology, Gettier's counterexample serves as a solid basis for a shift away from the internalist conception of justification. Gettier, who re-establishes the insufficiency of such conception of knowledge presents two counter-instances to show how someone can observe the three criteria without necessarily knowing.<sup>5</sup> Gettier's counterexample serve as a solid basis for a shift away from internalist conception of justification<sup>6</sup> towards the externalist mode of justification. The recent problem by scholars against externalism as a theory of epistemic justification can be understood as a way of rechecking the internal condition of an epistemic agent as important and relevant to the epistemic justification of knowledge. Thus, the study examines the internalist approach to problem of epistemic justification, with a view to justify the internalist approach, been adequate enough in resolving the long existing epistemic problem of justification.

## 2. What is epistemic internalism?

Epistemic Internalism can be taken broadly as the thesis that, the justification for any belief must necessarily be derived from the fact that makes the belief true in the internal world. This internal matter consists of memories, perceptions, reflections and so on, irrespective of external factors. Therefore, epistemic internalism holds that these justification-granting factors must necessarily all be "internal" to the epistemic agent's perspective on the world. It is the view that factors that are other than those external to the believer can affect the justificatory status of a belief. Internalism in epistemology can also be seen as the theory that claims that all vital provisions needed for the justification for a belief is directly obtainable to a person's consciousness or at least cognitively accessible to a person without having to recourse to external factors. This means that all knowledge; yielding conditions are within the psychological states of the epistemic agent who claims knowledge. We can understand epistemic internalism by trying to make sense of what it denies, which is namely externalism. David Malet Armstrong and Laurence Bonjour offer a representative statement of this sort of externalism:

"Externalism is the view that what makes a true belief knowledge is some relation (e.g., causal, nomological relation or counterfactual relation) that holds between the belief state and the situation which makes that belief true."

Understanding internalism as the approval of the regulative strand of cognitive access is a more plausible way of painting a clearer picture of what epistemic internalism entails. That is, internalism as a theory of epistemic justification offers the view that justification involves factors such as memories, perceptions, and introspection to one's internal factor without relation or any connection with the outside world. Evaluation through the objective perspective could also be internalist. For example, some instances show that what the externalists take to heart which is a theory that postulates justifiers which are not internally or cognitively accessible to the epistemic agent, is no less than a version of internalism, and is part of the origin or etiology. But the origin of a belief is an internal matter not external matter according to internalist. It involves similar

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<sup>4</sup> Setup, Matthais. "Epistemology in the Twentieth Century" p. 474.

<sup>5</sup> Gettier, E.L "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge" in *Analysis*, Vol. 23, 1963.

<sup>6</sup> Gettier, E.L "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge" in *Analysis*, Vol. 23, 1963, pp. 3.

issues as the history of the belief and the reason the reason it is held, and these are basically internal to epistemic agent perspective.

Internalism represents a development from the traditional means of epistemic justification. This is a view away from that environment, which dominated epistemology from the time of Rene Descartes until the middle of the twentieth century. It should be noted that some of the traditional means of epistemic justification have been termed internalist in nature but lack some basic features that the recent conception has. An example is the Cartesian internalism, which limits the supervenience base for justification to current conscious states only. The theory as noted in the foregoing sees something other than what is in the external world as the basis of our knowledge as a way of addressing the problem of justification in our knowledge. In the history of epistemology, Gettier's counterexample serves as a solid basis for a shift from the internalists' conception of justification towards the externalist mode of justification where the study of the "knowledge-producing causal processes through which the cognizer acquires her belief is suggested in establishing the truth of her belief and avoiding error. But recently, internalism has been rejuvenated by scholars.

The contemporary shift towards internalism has been variously formulated along some themes which can be classified as Earl Conee and Richard Feldman's "Mentalism" and "Evidentialism" and Carl Ginet's "Perspectival internalism", among others. They in one way or the other, suggest a study into the internal factors of a belief-acquisition process of a cognizer in providing justification for his or her knowledge-claim.

### 3. What is mentalism?

Mentalism is one of the most influential versions of internalism in contemporary epistemology. It is a reformulation of the internalist theory with few modifications to give solution for the difficult cases against epistemic internalism. Many of the criticisms that critics of mentalism as a version of the internalist theory of epistemic justification has evoked, were due to their inadequate understanding of its makeup. Most critics' only claim that it is not appropriate to claim that our mental states justify our beliefs. Several constraints have been designed to make internalism appear implausible, but they do not defeat mentalism. Recent mentalist modifications and refinements have made internalism to survive the criticisms despite all odds. These modifications are targeted at providing a way out of the problems levelled against internalism, which includes, the problem of stored belief problem, Impulsional evidence problem, general argument against internalism, forgotten evidence problem as well as the need for higher order belief problem. Mentalism which is our present focus has the resources to meet the challenges facing internalism, if only the critic can pay attention to the strength that lies within the theory as a well-deserved theory of epistemic justification.

Conee and Feldman's theory of justified belief get to the peak in epistemology and the theory of justification, where mentalism is more embellished with few theoretical amendments to handle tough arguments. In defending mentalism, Conee and Feldman submit that the right justification rule system must establish criteria that focus on internal and mental processes and the truth of beliefs formed by such mental processes.<sup>7</sup>

Conee and Feldman propose further that, the epistemic justification of a person's belief is determined by things that are internal to the person's mental life:

"Their main argument for mentalism is that it yields intuitively plausible verdicts about a range of representative examples. They generalize the conclusion that "every

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<sup>7</sup> Feldman, R. & Conee, E. "Internalism Defended" in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 1, (2001): 2.

variety of change that brings about or enhances justification either internalizes an external fact or makes a purely internal difference.”<sup>8</sup>

Conee and Feldman effectively incorporate the following into mentalism:

S’s belief of P is justified if a person’s belief is determined by things that are internal to the person’s mental life occurrent or dispositional.<sup>9</sup>

There are two varieties of mentalism:

(i) “Strong mentalism: The epistemic justification of a person’s belief is determined by that person’s current conscious mental state that is occurrent mental factors.

(ii) Weak mentalism: The epistemic justification of a person’s belief is determined by that person’s current conscious mental states, as well as whatever that person has retained in memory, that is, dispositional mental factors.”<sup>10</sup>

The above points are the main significant features that strengthen mentalism as a version of internalism and makes it stands against visible objections. One of the main inclusion that emphasize prominently in mentalism is the insertion of (i) and (ii). This successfully provides plausible defenses for internalism from the claws of the opponents of internalism as a theory of epistemic justification. To illustrate this if the two added together, we will have a complete theory of justified belief. The theory implies that, a belief is justified if and only if it is well formed, in a mental operation.

#### 4. Some criticism against internalism as a theory of epistemic justification

##### *The problem of stored belief*

It is vital that we understand what exactly it is about the problem of stored belief that affects mentalism. By showing this, we will be in a much greater position to ascertain the strength of the weakness it purports. The following facts make up the structure of the problem of stored belief.

Mentalism is a term most accurately applied to a mental process; mentalists must identify the relevant mental process that will be assessed for justification. This is not an easy task. Justification can be a product of many mental processes. Mentalists must show the specific mental type process that produces the belief in question.

In his essay in defense of internalism, Richard Feldman proposes that, if we identify the property of epistemic justification with the property of having good reasons, then it follows that epistemic justification is an internal matter, on the ground that what reasons a subject has are solely a function of what mental states the subject is in.<sup>11</sup> He envisioned that critics can challenge the assumption that knowledge requires the possession of good reasons.<sup>12</sup> For Feldman, he claims that there are no interesting concepts of justification that can be classified as internalist. Feldman observe that there are at least two interesting epistemic concepts that are clearly

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<sup>8</sup> Feldman, R. & Conee, E. “Internalism Defended” in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 1, (2001): 3.

<sup>9</sup> Feldman, R. & Conee, E. “Internalism Defended” in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 1, (2001): 1.

<sup>10</sup> Feldman, R. & Conee, E. “Internalism Defended” in Hilary Kornblith (eds) *Epistemology: Internalism and Externalism*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001): 233.

<sup>11</sup> Feldman, R & Conee, E. “Internalism Defended” in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 1, (2001): 1-18.

<sup>12</sup> Greco, J., “Internalism and Epistemically Responsible Belief”, in *Syntheses*, 85, (1990): 245-277.

internalist: Consistently among a subject's beliefs and a belief being supported by good reasons. Mentalists should specify under which conditions that mental state will be considered in cases where the knowledge claim and justification of the belief cannot be accounted for immediately.

Mentalists must be able to identify and describe the relevant steps, i.e. mental states or process in such a way that it will be relevant to avoid the objections of the opponents of internalist theory of epistemic justification. The difficulty in providing such an account that will be current and immediate for any knowledge claim is what is referred to as the problem of stored belief. What this implies is that, if mentalists cannot provide a vivid account of the relevant process (i.e., mental process) to be accessed for mentalists, mentalism as a variant of internalism is hopeless. In providing solution to the problem, mentalists must stay glued to the ethos of internalism; it should not bring into it any other methods contrary to the internalist ethos.

Several scholars have contributed towards solving the problem of stored belief; they have defended the internalist view. Notable among those who have defended the internalists are Richard Feldman and Earl Conee<sup>13</sup>, Ralph Wedgwood<sup>14</sup>, Laurence Bonjour<sup>15</sup> amongst others. They have proposed solutions by trying to specify the suitable way mentalist can employ to provide solution to the problem of stored belief. I will look into some papers that are of importance to the topic at hand and there after come up with my own arguments.

Laurence Bonjour in his paper "The Indispensability of Internalism"<sup>16</sup> tries to solve the problem of stored belief. He tries to show how one can avoid Alvin Goldman's problem for internalism. The problem of stored belief arises when we ask the question can there be an adequate basis that is consciously in the mind at a moment for the justification of almost any belief one might choose, whether stored or not? Based on this, the conclusion is that there is always a problem with justification in this case because there are some things that are not presently presented in the mind for every knowledge claim. Bonjour's main focus and intention in the paper is to challenge the assumption of the problem of stored belief. Bonjour, insists that the problem of stored belief can be easily handled by internalism. He is of the view that while some Internalists seem to accept the limitation to what is available at a moment, there is nothing in internalism that supports it.<sup>17</sup>

Bonjour considers Goldman's problem for internalism which is the problem of stored belief. According to Goldman in his paper "Internalism Exposed":

"At any given time, the vast majority of one's beliefs are stored in memory, rather than occurrent or active ...Furthermore, for almost any one of these beliefs, one's conscious state at the time include nothing that justifies it. No perceptual experience, no conscious memory event, and no premises consciously entertained at the selected moment will be justificationaly sufficient for a belief. According to internalism then, none of these beliefs is justified at that moment."<sup>18</sup>

Bonjour goes on to say that, the main problem Goldman and any critic of internalism appears to be concerned with is not really limited to stored beliefs, but has to do rather with whether there can be an adequate basis consciously in mind at a moment for the justification of

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<sup>13</sup> R. Feldman and E. Conee., "Internalism Defended" in *America Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (2001) 1-18.

<sup>14</sup> R. Wedgwood., "Internalism Explained" in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 65(2), (2002): 349-369.

<sup>15</sup> L. Bonjour., "The Indispensability of Internalism" in *Philosophy of Alvin Goldman* (2001): 47-65

<sup>16</sup> L. Bonjour., "The Indispensability of Internalism" in *Philosophy of Alvin Goldman* (2001): 55.

<sup>17</sup> Laurence, B., "The Indispensability of Internalism" in *Philosophical Topics*, Vol. 29, No. 1&2, (2001): 58.

<sup>18</sup> Alvin, G., "Internalism Exposed", in *Journal of Philosophy*, 96, (1999): 278

almost any belief one might choose, whether stored or not.<sup>19</sup> The problem here is that, the critics have failed to understand the fact that, mentalism is not operating on current beliefs alone but also on dispositional ones. While some internalists seem to have accepted the limitation to what is available at a moment. There is nothing about mentalism that will agree with this notion or belief. Like Bonjour, Alla Choifer in his paper “A new Understanding of First-Person and Third-Person Perspective,”<sup>20</sup> concludes that what is directly available from within the first-person epistemic perspective does not cease to be available or somehow become external in character (which is what Goldman was driven at) just because it has to be collected and reviewed and collated overtime. Nor, for that matter, is there anything about neither the idea of conforming to epistemic duty nor the idea of seeking epistemic guidance in the acceptance of beliefs that provides any more support for such an impossible limitation on internalism. He further explains that the problem of stored belief has no serious force against reasonable forms of internalism.<sup>21</sup>

Conee and Feldman’s responses to the problem of stored belief was their focus on the faulty assumptions made by Goldman and any critic of internalism in support of the problem of stored belief. As Goldman says no perceptual experience, no conscious memory event, and no premises consciously entertained at the selected moment will be justificational sufficient for such belief.<sup>22</sup> To them Goldman assumes two propositions from the above quotation that internalists can be rejected. The assumptions are:

- (1) Goldman assumes that virtually all justified beliefs are stored belief.
- (2) Goldman also assumes that internalists must find some conscious event on the mind to serve as their justification.

For Conee and Feldman, there are a number of internalist techniques that can effectively address each of these criticisms, even though certain internalist theories might struggle with some of them. My primary focus is on two methods, one of which restricts the justification of states to the present conscious mental states and one that also includes as potential justifiers whatever is retained in memory. Since theories of each sort surmount all of the objections, the internalist approach is in no danger of a general refutation.<sup>23</sup>

These two assumptions are not valid personally based on my opinion and internalism can provide solution to them. An alternative is to contend that, in the broadest sense, only a small number of beliefs are justified and that those that are usually occurrent. The second option is to argue that other non-occurrent internal states can contribute to the justification of non-occurrent beliefs. They rely on the notion that there are occurrent and dispositional meanings of "being justified," just as there are occurrent and dispositional senses of "belief," which is what mentalism is all about, as the first response demonstrates.

On the second solution their attempts to provide answers to stored belief does not invoke a distinction between occurrent and dispositional justification. They respond that internalists can legitimately argue that if we have many ordinary justified beliefs that we do not consciously consider, then there is no reason to exclude these beliefs from the list of justified beliefs that we do not consciously consider. This is because there is no reason to exclude additional stored beliefs or other memories from the list of justifications for these beliefs. “M: If any two

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<sup>19</sup> Bonjour, L., “Indispensability of Internalism” in *Philosophical Topics*, 29, No.1/2, (2001): 53.

<sup>20</sup> Choifer, A., “A new Understanding of First-Person and Third-Person Perspective” in *Philosophy paper*, Vol. 47, Issues 3, (2018): 333-371.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>22</sup> Alvin, G., “Internalism Exposed”, in *Journal of Philosophy*, 96, (1999): 279.

<sup>23</sup> R. Feldman and E. Conee., “Internalism Defended” in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (2001): 6.

possible individuals are exactly alike mentally, then they are exactly alike justification ally, e.g, the same belief are justified for them to the same extent.”<sup>24</sup>

##### 5. Bonjour, Conee and Feldman’s assessment of the problem of stored belief

The problem of stored belief can be summoned up in some few components and consists of perceptual experiences, memory, and the justification problem. Assessing both Conee, Feldman and Bonjour’s accounts, one factor that we cannot strike out is the importance of the role of memory in epistemic justification. The solution to the problem of stored belief looking at both accounts proposed implies the recognition of the memory which in turn helps to find a way out and a plausible solution to the problem. It is based on this that the suggested solution has been treated.

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

“S. The justificatory status of a person's doxastic attitudes strongly supervenes on the person’s occurrent and dispositional mental states, events, and conditions.”<sup>25</sup>

The second thesis spells out a principal implication of S:

“M. If any two possible individuals are exactly alike mentally, then they are exactly alike justificationally, e.g., the same beliefs are justified for them to the same extent.”<sup>26</sup>

Several scholars have contributed to the solutions by trying to identify the role of memory in epistemic justification. Looking at Bonjour’s account<sup>27</sup>, we can say that what makes a stored belief justified is an internal process. In Bonjour’s account, we see that his view in providing solution moves away from the strong internalist perspectives that only facts about the agent’s conscious states at a particular time can justify his or her beliefs at that time. We can also see that the opinion by Goldman<sup>28</sup> to subdue all the versions of internalism to this fault is wrong. Mentalism for instance, as Bonjour observes, recognizes the occurrent and dispositional mental state of an epistemic agent to provide solution to the problem.<sup>29</sup>

It must be noted that modest version of internalism like mentalism reduces the danger of the problem of stored belief, because it assumes that the stored beliefs can be verified and accessed just by looking at the account of memory of the epistemic agent and because memory is responsible for our remembering that something is true. This makes mental state and memory important to our epistemic justification. With this Bonjour handles the perceptual experience problem. Conee and Feldman’s<sup>30</sup> response to the problem of Stored Belief is very vital the introduction of dispositionalism is also very important in addressing the problem. It is no doubt that justified stored belief typically are not justified in the most fundamental sense, in the sense in which justified occurrent beliefs typically are, when justified in the most fundamental sense. Not

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<sup>24</sup> Feldman, R. & Conee, E. “Internalism Defended” in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 1, (2001): 6.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> Bonjour, L., “The Indispensability of Internalism”, in *Philosophical Topics*, XXIX, 1 & II, (2001): 65.

<sup>28</sup> Alvin, G., “Internalism Exposed” in *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 96, No. 6 (1999): 23.

<sup>29</sup> BJC, Madison “Epistemic Internalism” in *Philosophy Compass*, Vol. 5, Issue 10 (2010): 844.

<sup>30</sup> Feldman, R. & Conee, E., “Internalism Defended” in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (2001): 5.

all of the justifiers are stored, but rather some justifiers are occurrent and some are dispositional experiences, inferences, and so on. And if this is the case then Conee and Feldman<sup>31</sup> are correct about the agent's dispositional memory or beliefs that can justify his or her stored belief.

My proposal is that, there should not have been the “problem of stored belief” in the first place. The problem arose because, the critics have only misunderstood the way human beings provide reasons for what they claim to know. The memory of an epistemic agent is very important to knowledge claims. Bonjour did not give a devoted attention to the notion of memory, but Conee and Feldman posit that, dispositional mental factors are required for a belief to be justified even if there is no current external or mental factor to do so. Conee & Feldman took a more decisive stance than Bonjour. They claim that our current mental factor may not be able to provide a solution for our stored beliefs but the dispositional ones can.<sup>32</sup> For instance, if S is justified in believing that *P* at *t*<sub>1</sub>, and retains in memory, that is, stored the belief that *P* until *t*<sub>2</sub>, then at *t*<sub>2</sub>, S's belief that *P* is *prima facie* justified.<sup>33</sup> My belief that President Buhari succeeded President Jonathan was justified when I formed it. A credible Wikipedia document says so and I kept the belief ever since. So, my belief can be said to have ever since then be justified. This shows that no matter how long a belief is held it can remain justified as long as memory preserves it. A stored belief can inherit justification from the past and this appears to solve the problem. Opponents of mentalism have failed to come to terms with the facts that, mentalism is an epistemological theory that specifies the necessary conditions under which a belief would be justified. Mentalism therefore does not concern itself in any way with external requirements and occurrent mental factors only as most critics thought. I strongly believe that the reason Goldman treats the problem of stored belief as a vital bone in the neck of internalism is that he fails to recognize the aspect of mentalism that provides a solution to such a problem. If what I have proposed is correct, then the problem is not as severe as it being portrayed. The solution is to look at the dispositional aspect of the memory of the epistemic agent for a way out. The problem of stored belief does not constitute a debilitating problem for mentalism as a theory.

## 6. The problem of forgotten evidence

The problem of forgotten evidence is also known as the original evidence problem, it has recently been a great focus in the interest of epistemology. This objection is championed by John Greco,<sup>34</sup> Alvin Goldman<sup>35</sup> and Sven Bernecker<sup>36</sup>. Alvin Goldman in his paper “Internalism Exposed” defines the problem of evidence as a condition where by “S has knowledge of *P*, but S has forgotten the original evidence for *P*, but the belief still remains justified to S. This conflicts with the basic tenet of internalism, therefore S knowing *P* is unreliable i.e. not justified.<sup>37</sup> Goldman explains further that, the problem of forgotten evidence arises for theories that depend on what he refers to as current original evidence. Our knowledge has an original evidence structure just in case we have original evidence and we come to know that our faculties are important on the basis

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<sup>31</sup> Feldman, R. & Conee, E., “Internalism Defended” in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (2001): 7.

<sup>32</sup> Feldman, R. & Conee, E., “Internalism Defended” in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (2001): 8.

<sup>33</sup> Feldman, Richard. ‘*Justification Is Internal.*’ *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*. Ed. Steup and Sosa. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005): 270-284.

<sup>34</sup> Greco, J. “*Justification is not internal*” in *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, ed. Mathias Steup and Ernest Sosa (Blackwell Publishing Press, 2005), pp. 256-270.

<sup>35</sup> A. Goldman., “Internalism Exposed” in *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 6, No. 6 (1999): 271-293.

<sup>36</sup> Bernecker, S., “Memory: A Philosophical Study”, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 474-478.

<sup>37</sup> A. Goldman., “Internalism Exposed” in *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 6, No. 6 (1999): 285.

of the evidence. Goldman raises a cogent point that, once we allow for original evidence it becomes obvious that knowledge requires current evidence needed for knowledge justification.<sup>38</sup> This creates a loophole as to whether we actually had the knowledge as initially claimed since we do not remember the original evidence for the knowledge in most cases.

In his response to Conee and Feldman's argument that the forgotten evidence problem does not affect any internalist theory, Goldman was able to point out clearly that the forgotten evidence problem arises in same ways. Goldman gives an illustration that depicts the closure problem for internalism and its variants. I for example know that I have a Facebook account but forgot its password or I cannot recall how I learned that Chief Obafemi Awolowo was born in 1909, maybe I read it in an Encyclopedia or from a history book. I know that my password is "asaju443" but cannot remember choosing it. The password just seems familiar and using it works. To put the argument of Goldman in his own illustration, it goes as follows:

"Last year Sally read about the health benefit of broccoli in a New York Times paper Science-section story. She then justifiably formed a belief in broccoli's beneficial effects. She still retains the belief but no longer recalls her original evidential source (and has never encountered either corroborating or undermining sources). Nonetheless, her broccoli belief is still justified, and, if true qualifies as a case of knowledge."<sup>39</sup>

From the above, Goldman says internalism is faulty. According to him, only externalism can provide solution to such a case. Externalists might argue that the contingent merit of external sources of this belief is enough to account for its justification. They will say Sally does not have the original evidence for the knowledge claim, and how she comes about the belief. Thus, for them, internalism as a theory of justification is defective, it makes knowledge acquisition hard to come by. Goldman and other externalists argue that looking for original evidence is the source of the forgotten evidence problem.

The second way by which the forgotten evidence problem arises is re-emphasized by Sven Bernecker in his work *Memory: A Philosophical Study*.<sup>40</sup> The most widely discussed variant of internalism is mentalism, which makes the processes that cause and sustain belief epistemically vital. Mentalism posits that, a belief is justified if and only if it is produced by or the belief is determined by things that are internal to the person's mental life.<sup>41</sup> Bernecker objects to this process because it allows for a pattern of reasoning, he calls original evidence, which generates some problem for internalism as a theory of epistemic justification.<sup>42</sup>

Bernecker offers the following example to buttress his argument: As human beings we acquire or learn so many things, we acquire so many things from our environment, we acquire things and believe them by reading books even though we do not personally witness it. Based on the above we come to know and in so doing have what we called a justified belief about things. According to Bernecker, based on mentalism, which is a version of internalist theory of epistemic justification, a belief in the above example is justified because if the question is asked how, we keep the above beliefs the natural answer will be by memory. But in epistemology there are key questions to be answered. Questions like: how does memory make us to retain knowledge and reasons for our belief? Because it is argued that learning is largely a matter of acquiring reasons for the views we keep. When it comes to epistemology and Memory it focuses on addressing knowledge and justification over-time. But as human beings we repeatedly rely on our knowledge.

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 280.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 281.

<sup>40</sup> Bernecker, S., *Memory: A Philosophical Study*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 65.

<sup>41</sup> Philip, I., "Review Work: Memory: A Philosophical Study" in *Mind*, Vol. 121, No. 482, (2012): 475.

<sup>42</sup> Bernecker, S., *Memory: A Philosophical Study*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 65-68.

Even things we do presently have a clear justification for or have forgotten the original evidence or mental process which give us this courage to still hold on to the belief.

This entire procedure is what Bernecker refers to as just the problem of memory,<sup>43</sup> and Goldman refers to as “original evidence.” They both contend that one can apply the forgotten evidence problem to many mental or non-mental underlying processes. Forgotten evidence is a problem and since internalism support it, internalism is in trouble. To show that the problem of forgotten evidence is a dangerous problem for internalism, John Greco goes further to give another illustration whereby, an epistemic agent lacks what he calls “epistemic responsibility” which to him is closely related to the notion of blame and praise in epistemic justification. According to the illustration:

“Maria believes that Dean Martin is Italian. She believes this because she seems to remember clearly that it is so, and she presently has no reason for doubting the belief. But suppose also that Maria first came to his belief carelessly and irresponsibly (although she has now forgotten this) many years ago. She formed her belief on the basis of testimony from her mother, who believes that all singers are Italian. At all-time Maria knew that her mother was an unreliable source in these matters, and she realized that it was not rational to accept her mother testimony.”<sup>44</sup>

For Greco in the first case, it seems Maria is justified in believing Dean Martin is an Italian. But two issues arise which is that we make a distinction between (i) having good reasons for what one believes and (ii) believing for good reasons. A good mathematician should know the axioms of mathematics, with this he or she has a good reason for believing that a mathematical equation is right. But for Greco one must still work it out for the right reasons.<sup>45</sup> Based on this Greco concludes that believes are justified or, in his own words, “praise worthy” only if it is believed for the right reasons. He goes further to give another illustration; he claims that a logic student knows all the relevant axioms but doesn’t see how the axioms support a theorem that must be proven on the logic examination question. Eventually, he reasons in a fallacious way to the theorem and believes it on the basis of that reason which is an illogical reasoning.

What Greco is pointing out here is that “etiology” matters in epistemic responsibility or justification. In other words, whether a belief counts as epistemically responsible or justified depends, on how the belief is formed. And since the belief is not formed from reason that is, not the right evidence and the original evidence is forgotten then it is not justified. And for him the etiology of a belief concerns factors that are external to the believer’s perspective. Putting all this together, Greco concludes that epistemic responsibility is not entirely a matter of factors that are internal to the epistemic agent’s perspective. Consequently, understanding epistemic justification in term of epistemic responsibility does not support internalism about epistemic justification. For him, what this does is that it motivates externalism about epistemic justification.<sup>46</sup> Greco and Bernecker raises the argument of forgotten evidence as an objection to the internalist account of epistemic justification, they assume that it is “illegitimate” so it must be rejected.

Their view and line of thought and reasoning on forgotten evidence is often viewed as presenting a dilemma for mentalism which is a variant of internalism. Greco, Bernecker and Goldman argue that internalism is not a plausible theory of epistemic justification because, it makes knowledge claim plausible on no evidence or illogical reasoning. Greco argues further that

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>44</sup> Greco, J. “Justification is not internal” in *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, ed. Mathias Stepup and Ernest Sosa (Blackwell Publishing Press, 2005): 261.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>46</sup> Greco, J., “Internalism and Epistemically Responsible Belief” in *Synthese*, 85 (1990): 245-277.

there should be a bay on knowledge claim that lack “epistemic responsibility”<sup>47</sup> He argues that an epistemic agent that lack epistemic responsibility are guilty of error of reasoning, they violate the principle that, a belief that an epistemic agent must have should be based on epistemic responsibility that is, the epistemic agent should be ready to provide external evidence when challenge about it. Greco’s suggestion here can be applied to the illustration he gave above; the process the logic student use to believe that she got the logic question makes knowledge to be based on lack of epistemic responsibility therefore making knowledge to be easily accessible.

Conee and Feldman offer solution on how to avoid the problem of forgotten evidence by arguing that, we know a priori that our belief sources are reliable, that is, it will allow for the possibility of knowing. They argue that vivacity that accompanies our belief such as memory belief can provide justification for the belief therefore, avoiding the problem.<sup>48</sup> The second option is to hold that epistemic support to a certain extent is holistic. Under this view, our philosophical beliefs do not count as knowledge, same goes for any belief we may have regarding the reliability of our faculties. Our initial sensory evidence is not itself sufficient for us to know things about the world, we need the set of beliefs that we acquire. We acquire more and more sensory evidence, thereby accumulating a relatively large and coherent set of beliefs. These set of beliefs, including that of our cognitive faculties i.e. (perception, memory, reasons), become a reliable knowledge.<sup>49</sup>

Forgotten evidence is motivated by the memory problem in epistemology. If indeed we must always have evidence in order to have knowledge or be justified to have knowledge, the problem of memory is launched. Therefore, rejecting mentalism is not a proper way of addressing the problem of forgotten evidence or original evidence. Other theories might be prone to the forgotten problem too, because once the theory allows for evidence the problem sets in. The problem of evidence also affects some variants of externalism. One attractive variant of externalism is the “Causal Theory of Knowledge,” which is based on the fundamental idea that a person knows some proposition, *P* only if there is an appropriate causal connection between the state of affairs that make *P* true and the person’s belief in *P*.<sup>50</sup> Goldman the proponent of “Causal Theory of Knowledge” claims that knowledge can be acquired by a combination of perception and memory. Memory is about remembering stored facts and can only be said to have taken place if someone’s remembrance of *P* at time *T* is caused by an earlier belief of *P*. This version of externalism is linked with the internalist peculiarity when it comes to justification. There is the possibility of forming a knowledge claim for example without remembering the source or evidence for the knowledge claim.

My argument goes thus, if a belief according to causal theory which is another source of epistemic justification but different from that of epistemic internalism is based on perception and memory, this theory also falls into the forgotten evidence too. This theory also allows us to ask the question “what is the original evidence for such knowledge claim?”. The causal connection of a belief does not make it justified. If we are to rule out forgotten evidence, how then can we account for things that we know? The only available solution is to claim that we cannot know nor have any justification for our knowledge claim, and I don’t think any epistemologist wants that as a better alternative. I strongly believe that we cannot rule out the forgotten evidence problem without leading to unacceptable skeptical consequences. And this will not be in the interest of epistemology at large. It turns out that the problem is not one that affects internalism alone. All other theories

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 266.

<sup>48</sup> Feldman, R. & Conee, E., “Internalism Defended” in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 1, (2001): 5.

<sup>49</sup> Feldman, R. & Conee, E., “Internalism Defended” in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 1, (2001): 8.

<sup>50</sup> Goldman. A., “What is Justified Belief” in Sosa Ernest & JaeGwan Kim, *Epistemology: An Anthology*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publisher Lit, 2000), p. 350.

are susceptible to it. Any theory will have its evidence structure, do we now count them as unreliable because they are forgotten for the moment?

## 7. Conclusion

The essential focus of this paper is the inadequacies of the arguments against internalism, and a case for mentalism as an adequate variant of internalism. Solution offered by epistemologist in defense of internalism was critically examined. The paper discussed necessary conditions for a belief to be justified and these conditions strengthened internalism against the argument leveled against it. Mentalism was discussed more in details and reasons for stating that the Internalist and its critics have not paid enough attention to it was re-emphasized.

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