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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.¹ 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.² 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.³ 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

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

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

³ 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.⁴

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.⁵ Gettier's counterexample serves as a solid basis for a shift away from internalist conception of justification⁶ 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

⁴ Setup, Matthais. "Epistemology in the Twentieth Century" p. 474.

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

⁶ 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.⁷

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

⁷ 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.”⁸

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.⁹

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.”¹⁰

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.¹¹ He envisioned that critics can challenge the assumption that knowledge requires the possession of good reasons.¹² 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

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

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

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

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

¹² 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 Conee¹³, Ralph Wedgwood¹⁴, Laurence Bonjour¹⁵ 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"¹⁶ 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.¹⁷

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."¹⁸

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

almost any belief one might choose, whether stored or not.¹⁹ 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,”²⁰ 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.²¹

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.²² 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.²³

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

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

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

²¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

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

²³ 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.”²⁴

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.”²⁵

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.”²⁶

Several scholars have contributed to the solutions by trying to identify the role of memory in epistemic justification. Looking at Bonjour’s account²⁷, 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 Goldman²⁸ 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.²⁹

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’s³⁰ 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

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

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

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

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

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

³⁰ 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 Feldman³¹ 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.³² For instance, if S is justified in believing that *P* at *t*₁, and retains in memory, that is, stored the belief that *P* until *t*₂, then at *t*₂, S's belief that *P* is *prima facie* justified.³³ 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,³⁴ Alvin Goldman³⁵ and Sven Bernecker³⁶. 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.³⁷ 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

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

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

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

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

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

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

³⁷ 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.³⁸ 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."³⁹

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*.⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹ 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.⁴²

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.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 280.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 281.

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

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

⁴² 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,⁴³ 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.”⁴⁴

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.⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶ 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

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 69.

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

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 269.

⁴⁶ 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”⁴⁷ 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.⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁹

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*.⁵⁰ 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

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

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

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

⁵⁰ 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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Reviewing the Ideological Foundations of Gender Inequality in sub-Saharan Africa

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Abstract

The attainment of gender equality by the year 2030 is one of the primary targets of the sustainable development goals. Efforts to achieve these goals have yielded some positive results in some sectors like educational attainment, economic participation and opportunity, where more women have been absorbed. However, in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, key sectors like political participation have shown very little progress. Curious enough, a good number of countries in this region have put in place some affirmative action plan designed to encourage larger women participation in political administration. In many of these countries, such affirmative action plans have been largely ineffective, with men absolutely dominating the political administration landscape. This paper argues that this failure is owing to certain cultural practices that were dormant within indigenous societies, but amplified with the advent of colonialism. The paper further argues that, even though these practices have a foundation in indigenous societies, they are inconsistent with the metaphysical and ideological belief systems of these indigenous societies. Thus, the paper concludes that, in order to attain gender parity in political participation in sub-Saharan Africa, there is a need to evaluate and re-emphasize indigenous metaphysical and ideological worldviews to properly ground the action plans towards the attainment of equal participation in political administration.

Keywords: Gender equality, sub-Saharan Africa, African cosmology, African communalism.

1. Gender disparities in political space of Sub-Saharan Africa: Background to the problem

The attainment of gender equality by the year 2030 is one of the primary targets of the sustainable development goals agenda. According to the United Nations Development Program, the goal of gender equality is important because “ending all discrimination against women and girls is not only a basic human right, it’s crucial for a sustainable future,” and one of the key targets towards attaining this goal of gender equality is ensuring equal opportunities for full and effective participation of women at various levels of political and economic leadership (UNDP, n.d.). Thus, the task is set for every country around the world to move towards attaining a point where women can occupy, at least, 50% of the political offices in the country. Rishi Goyal and Ratna Sahay note that greater representation of women in management positions has led to increased productivity and improved performance. They note further that there is progress in women representation in parliamentary and ministerial positions, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and the West. However, they note that representation of women in these political positions is far below the desired 50% mark in all regions of the world (Rishi Goyal; Ratna Sahay, 2024).

What the foregoing suggests is that, though gender equality is desirable in political administration, and even though there is progress towards attaining this desirable position in some parts of the world, there are still very significant lapses to be addressed. The fact that there is progress should not be allowed to mask the reality that the current position is far away from the desired goal. According to the United Nations website on the sustainable development goals, “There has been progress over the last decades, but the world is not on track to achieve gender equality by 2030” (UNDP, 2023). If one considers some available reports on the progress achieved in the area of female presence in political positions, what is observed is that, compared to Europe and America, countries in sub-Saharan Africa still lag behind in having women holding political leadership positions. The following statistics is very informative in this regards:

Across the 19 editions of the index, Political Empowerment has seen by far the most improvement, with the gap narrowing by 9.0 percentage points — from 14.3% in 2006 to 23.4 % in 2025 — among the 100 economies continuously included in every edition. At the same time, at the current pace it will still take 162 years to fully close this gap. Northern America has made the most progress in the Political Empowerment sub-index, where it places third in 2025, with a score of 29.7%, narrowing its political parity gap by 19.3 percentage points... In Political Empowerment, Sub-Saharan Africa ranks fifth, with a score of 22.2%. At the launch of the index, the region scored zero for years with female head of state; yet in 2025, this indicator has reached 3.2%. Women now hold 40.2% of ministerial roles and 37.7% of parliamentary seats, although Rwanda is the only economy in the region to achieve full parliamentary parity. (World Economic Forum, 2025)

The statistics presented above shows how far sub-Sahara Africa is from the 50% target in 2030 of the Sustainable development goals. It thus calls for concerted affirmative action from the major political actors in the various countries that make up the region. It is important to note, however, that there are some African countries that are doing pretty well in terms of the progress of gender equality in politics. For instance, the 2025 WEF report indicates that Namibia sits in the 8th position in the global ranking with a 12.2 and 3.2 percent increase in women ministerial and Head of State positions from the previous ranking, even though there was a 10.8 percent reduction in parliamentary parity. But the country sits with a total of 81.1 percent in its general gender parity index. The report shows, for instance, that the percentage of women participation in parliament for the first ten sub-Saharan African countries ranked in the report ranges from 61.25% (Rwanda) to 33.89% (Cameroon). In fact, seven countries out of these first ten already have above 40% women participation in parliament. This makes for good reading and shows the steady progress these countries are making towards achieving the sustainable development goal in terms of gender equality, especially in terms of women participation in parliament. Report shows that Rwanda is the only economy in the Sub-Sahara African region to achieve full parliamentary parity, with South Africa (81%) and Cape Verde (80%) close behind. While countries like Rwanda are moving steadily towards gender equality in political participation, there are other sub-Saharan African countries that are still very far off from achieving this target. For instance, though Nigeria has an encouraging trajectory for workforce parity, the country does not progress in the other three sub-indexes, with the most significant regression occurring in Political Empowerment (-2.9 points) due to diminished representation of women in ministerial positions, which declines from 17.6% in 2024 to 8.8% in 2025 (World Economic Forum, 2025).

2. The challenge for women participation in politics in Sub-Saharan Africa

In a 2015 report for the International Peace Institute, Mireille Affa'a Mindzie identifies some factors that negatively impact the goal of achieving a more balanced ratio of women participation in political administration (Mireille Affa'a Mindzie, 2015). These include economic, political, and cultural factors. Particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, these factors are greatly

pronounced as they create significant obstacles for women and make it more difficult for African women to gain firm standing within the political landscape. For instance, the political terrain in many sub-Saharan African countries is dominated by older men who have a long history of monopoly of political power. Given the fact that these old men have seized the reins of power and continue to perpetuate themselves, it is difficult for women, and even younger men, to break into the political circle. One may think of the likes of Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea (45 years of rule), Paul Biya of Cameroon (42 years of rule), Denis Sassou Nguesso of Republic of the Congo (40 years of rule), Yoweri Museveni of Uganda (38 years of rule), etc., as examples of leaders who have remained in power as heads of government for a very long time (Agence France-Presse, 2022). Even though many of these African countries operate democratic systems of government, these old elites have very significant influence on election processes and they are thus able to keep political power and influence away from new entrants, especially women and younger men.

Financial constraint is one economic factor that also limits women's participation in politics. This shows why the economic parity between the two gender divides is also essential to attaining political parity. It is not traditional within many African societies for women to have financial autonomy. This economic constraint makes it difficult for women to compete with men who tend to be richer and are more experienced and influential on the political plane. The implication of this is that many women lack the material resources that are required to make them significant players in the political bustles and tussles of their various countries. While more women are getting educated in many African countries, this has not really translated into closing the economic gap between men and women, especially in African countries. Some of the factors responsible for this may include the traditional patriarchal structure of many African countries. This structure usually prevents many women, especially married women, from owning personal properties, or inheriting properties. Culturally speaking, the subjugation of women in many cultures with practices such as early marriages for girls are also inhibiting factors that have to be addressed if the sustainable development goal of gender balance in political participation is to be achieved. For instance, in the tradition of the Igbo people of the South Eastern part of Nigeria, women are not allowed to participate in political gatherings or decision making (Marie Pauline Eboh, 1998; Rachel Kidman et al., 2024).

Even though there is progress in integrating women into decision making and politics generally, the tradition of undermining the relevance of women in political gatherings and decision making still hunts the sub-conscious mind of many African peoples. This is probably why there are still very few women who have succeeded in winning elective positions in African societies. Expectedly, a lot of factors are involved in determining the winners of elective positions. One such factor involves the belief of the people. Besides the factors already identified earlier, there appears to be a sub-conscious presupposition or belief that men are superior to women in many traditional African societies and that leadership positions are the exclusive reserve of men. This sub-conscious belief appears to be grounded on the age-long practice of excluding women from political administration and decision making.

A number of African countries have made conscious attempts to encourage women participation in politics over a long period of time. Shireen Hassim notes that the transition from apartheid to democratic government in South Africa transformed the fortunes of women which was already crumbling at that point. The African National Congress (ANC) created the Women National Coalition (WNC) as a national representative structure to articulate the requirements for equal consideration of women within the party's structure and inclusion of women at all levels of decision making. This opened negotiations between political parties and allowed gender specific claims to be better articulated, ensuring more visible participation of women in politics. The WNC was able to harness the cooperation of various groups in the country to develop the Women's Charter of Equality which was designed to aggregate the demands of individual women and

women organizations and which was adopted in June 1994. Among other things, the Women Charter retained demands for substantive equality such as full participation of women in economic decision making and greater female representation in legislature. This had a significant effect on the drafting of the constitution which established The Commission on Gender Equality to monitor and promote the implementation of Gender equality (Shireen Hassim, 2002).

Mireille Affa'a Mindzie reports that, in Senegal, the adoption of the Parity Law in 2010 contributed to the election of a record number of women into parliament. It further led to the election of a woman as Prime Minister, while some other women were appointed as members of the cabinet. This was a mark of progress, even though parity has not been achieved. In 2022, Rwanda had the highest percentage of women in parliament at 61.25%. This can be taken as the outcome of a series of affirmative actions. Jennie E. Burnet (2008) notes that, in September 2003, the people of Rwanda elected 39 women into parliament, out of the 80 total parliamentarian seats. By so doing, Rwanda overtook Sweden to become the country with the highest percentage of women parliamentarians all over the world (Jennie E. Burnet, 2008). This record shows how well Rwanda had progressed in this regard even in 2022. Similarly, in some other countries, various affirmative action plans such as conventions, rules, compromises have been put in place to formally encourage women participation in politics. While these various plans have yielded positive results in some places, in some other places, the results have been abysmal. Besides, as noted earlier, the few cases of progress should be allowed to mask the reality that many countries in the sub-Sahara African region are very far from the target.

The foregoing revelations raise tons of questions. Why have the various forms of affirmative action adopted towards gender equality had minimal impact in many sub-Saharan countries? What needs to be done to address this challenge? What is the relation between gender equality in governance and the beliefs of the people of sub-Saharan Africa? Why does it seem as if many of these countries traditionally regard women as incapable of holding key leadership positions? Are there ideological foundations for the gender inequalities that characterize the political scenery of these countries? What is the place of women in the indigenous political organization of communities in sub-Saharan Africa? Are women even rated equally with men in terms of personhood within the thought system of these countries? These questions can be linked together, and in order to address them, it is important to examine the philosophical foundation of the beliefs of the African people and use this to develop a theoretical foundation for addressing the challenge of gender inequality in political participation in sub-Saharan Africa.

3. Being and value in an African place

In the primordial account of the nature of being in the universe, various African communities have varying accounts of the nature of the universe as well as the place of human beings within that universe. However, there are some outstanding similarities that have been conceptualized by philosophers who have paid attention to these accounts. One of such similarities is the belief that there is a close relationship among the order of beings in the universe. This relationship is usually presented in a hierarchy with God (The Supreme Being) at the apex, followed by lesser deities or divinities. The deities are followed by ancestors or living dead spirits, and these are followed by human beings. Human beings are followed by non-human animate beings, while inanimate beings occupy the bottom of the hierarchy. All categories of beings in this hierarchy are believed to have valuable roles to play in maintaining the balance of the cosmic order. None of the category of beings is believed to be insignificant, as there is some causal dependency and a relationship of force among them (Edwin Etieyibo, 2017; Placid Tempels, 1945).

The doctrine of the hierarchy of beings in African cosmological thought reveals that there is no hierarchical relationship when it comes to the being of man and woman. In other words, since human beings, both men and women, occupy the same level in the hierarchy of existence as

the doctrine of hierarchy of beings, there is no distinction between the place of men and women in that hierarchy. In effect, there is no cosmologically grounding for inequality between men and women in African thought system. What this suggests is that the political structure within African societies ought to be without gender inequalities. However, despite that there is no cosmological grounding of gender inequalities in African thought system, experiences of people within these communities reveal a lot of gender disparity in access to economic and political positions and benefits.

Some scholars have attributed the rise of gender inequality in Africa to the advent of colonialism. For instance, Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí argues that the introduction of western education and missionary activities marked the rise of gender binary in African societies. This educational system, designed to aid evangelism and the spread of western civilization, targeted men as competent agents for these tasks. Thus, women were educated in a way that prepared them to focus on the domestic space while men were educated to take up available economic and political spaces. This, for her, marked the origin of gender discrimination and gender role ascription in Africa (Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí, 2016). A number of other scholars corroborate this view that blames the origin of gender inequality in Africa on the advent of colonialism. (Olayinka Akanle et al., 2018) In fact, O. W. Ogbomo had expressed this view more emphatically by noting that contemporary gender relations in Africa do not reflect the true nature of the influence and exercise of power by women in the past (Onaiwu W. Ogbomo, 2005: 50). The implication of this view is that gender hierarchy was not a part of indigenous Yoruba social structure. Owing to this perceived lack of gender hierarchy in indigenous Yoruba societies, N. Wane notes that women had independent status and did not contest any role with the opposite gender (Njoki Wane, 2011). With particular reference to Yoruba culture and belief system, scholars have argued variously that women had revered status, equal access to land based on clan and family structures, equal access to political as well as spiritual leadership positions, and that Yoruba language, in contrast to English language, is gender-neutral (Cheryl Johnson, 1982; Mahmood Mamdani, 1996; Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí; 1997, 2002, 2016; Sefina Aliyu Dogo, 2014; Walter Rodney, 1972). It is important to note that this perception of gender structure in indigenous Yoruba societies as neutral aligns with the lack of ontological grounding of gender inequality in African societies.

Contrary to the preceding view, a number of scholars have insisted that elements of gender inequality have been present within indigenous (pre-colonial) African societies, though the advent of colonialism contributed to widening the gender gaps in these societies. For instance, Felix Meier Zu Selhausen and Jacob Weisdorf (2016) note that during the first half of the colonial period in Uganda, gender inequality became more pronounced because the gender norms that were prevalent in the pre-colonial Uganda community allowed men to quickly get access to literacy and, consequently, white collar jobs within the European set-up. Women took a bit longer to access literacy, and thus took longer to access the economic benefits that came with having white collar jobs within the colonial arrangement, and even beyond (Felix Meier Zu Selhausen & Jacob Weisdorf, 2016) Lungiswa Memela (2005) has a closely related view about how culture influences gender inequality in the society. Using the Xhosa culture, she highlights how the processes of socialization, traditional wedding and marriage practices, as well as sexual rights are used to affirm gender disparities with men having the luxury to dominate women within those practices (Memela, 2005).

With particular reference to the indigenous Yoruba society, a number of scholars have argued that gender inequalities were present, and that these inequalities were simply amplified with the advent of colonialism. Some of these scholars consider certain indigenous practices like family structure, marriage practices, political and social arrangement of indigenous Yoruba societies. Based on these practices, these scholars argue that there were clear evidences of male domination over women because of the patriarchal structure of these societies. O. Oladipo puts the description mildly by noting that hierarchical structures create gender roles even though these

gender roles did not necessarily imply the subjugation of women (Olusegun Oladipo, 2023). This view is also corroborated by A. M. Fasiku *et al*, who argue that the patriarchal structure of Yoruba society often positions women in subordinate roles across various spheres of life (Adesola Mercy Fasiku et al., 2025).

Scholars in these two divides do not disagree about the facts of the varying roles that are assigned to different genders in indigenous Yoruba societies. What they largely dispute is the implication of these gender roles. Besides, both sides of the divide agree that colonialism amplified gender inequalities in Yoruba societies to the extent that even gender roles that did not cause dissent and discontentment in indigenous societies became so amplified that dissent began to rise. This has led to various waves of feminist agenda within contemporary Yoruba societies as well as all over Africa. One conclusion that can be drawn from the foregoing is that certain cultural practices within indigenous and postcolonial Yoruba societies have led to gender inequalities in contemporary Yoruba societies, as well as in other African societies. This has created wide distinctions along gender lines in these societies. These distinctions that were tolerated and largely ignored in indigenous societies became largely intolerable as various African nations began the drive towards independence. Thus, for instance, gender issues became central to the democratic transition and issues relating to understanding citizenship in the drive for South Africa to build a decentralized state post-apartheid (Cheryl McEwan, 2001: 49). A similar story may be said about post-genocide Rwanda where, according to Burnet, key members of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) “recognized the need to protect the rights of the thousands of genocide widows and orphans” (Jennie E. Burnet, 2008: 377).

The inconsistency of the gender disparity that is characteristic of the socio-economic and political organization of many African nations with the cosmological account of the place of human beings in reality calls for serious review. This is because gender disparities do not align with the fact that there is no distinction, hierarchical or not, between man and woman in the order of beings in the African thought system. As such, gender disparity in African nations have no theoretical foundation in African belief system. Thus, the socio-economic and political systems in contemporary African nations need to be purged of any structures that places unnatural distinctions and segregation on the basis of gender. This is important because the social relations and social structures within a society is dependent on the metaphysical idea of their being or ontological status (Symphorien Ntibatirwa, 2009: 298). Given the lack of metaphysical grounding of gender disparity in African thought system, it is logical to conclude that gender discrimination is inconsistent with indigenous African cultural beliefs.

Besides the lack of theoretical grounding of gender disparity in African thought system, these disparities are also inimical to the growth and development of African nations. This is because the exclusion of women and some other groups invariably has some grave implications for the growth and development of the societies. On one hand, restricting the participation of women in economic and political activities excludes the contribution of a significant section of the members of the society in the administration of the society. Such inequalities reduce productivity because it reduces the level and quality of human capital available for governance and economic development. It makes women underutilized while men are over utilized, probably to a point of exhaustion (Gaelle Ferrant, 2015). The consequence of this is that the rate of economic development in a nation is further diminished when a significant segment of the population is restricted from getting the chance to contribute to economic and political activities. On another hand, since women constitute part of the society, the rights of women also constitute the rights of some constituents of the society. As such, women, like men, are entitled to participate in the economic and political life of the society. Denying them this is a violation of their rights, and this is an injustice. Thus, it is a duty that society owes women to remove impediments that hinder their participation in the political administration of the society (United Nations ESCAP, 2019).

It is clear from the foregoing that the gains of addressing the gender inequalities, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, are massive. On the one hand, it opens up more chances for growth and development, and on the other hand, it ensures the protection of the rights of a wider range of members of the society. This is what has led to various forms of affirmative actions in many of the countries in the sub-Sahara African region. The establishment of gender parity requires conscious and deliberate attention and activities in terms of policy formulation and implementation. Whether gender disparity is an offshoot of natural processes or not, establishment of gender parity cannot be left to natural processes. This is why Esther Duflo notes that while economic development may help to reduce poverty, reduction in poverty will in turn lead to empowering more women. This will likely lead to a reduction in the inequality gap between men and women. However, while this will not lead to gender equality, policy action is necessary to stimulate further development in the society (Esther Duflo, 2012). Thus, countries like South Sudan, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda, Mozambique, Sudan, Nigeria, etc., have some kind of affirmative policy action plan for gender equality in political participation (Jane Kani Edward, 2014).

While the affirmative action plans in places like South Sudan, Rwanda and South Africa are showing effectiveness in ensuring active participation of women in political administration, countries like Nigeria have a challenge implementing the affirmative action plan that have been drawn in that regard. This suggests that ensuring gender equality in politics requires much more than drawing up affirmative action plans. Certain elements are required at the base of such affirmative actions. In South Africa, for instance, one of the key elements that has ensured the success of the drive towards gender equality is the fact that there is constitutional backing for the action plans in that regards. The South African ANC, noting the importance of women, recognized the need for women to participate in constitutional negotiations. This helped to ensure that the constitution was designed in such a way that it catered to the rights and needs of women along with men. It is important to note that underlying this affirmative action in the South African experience are the philosophical ideals of Ubuntu.

4. The place of Ubuntu in the quest for gender equality

As one of the few sub-Saharan African countries making strides in the enthronement of gender equality in political administration, a lot can be learnt from the South African approach. Following the apartheid experience, and the widening of the gender gap that was evident at that point in the history of South Africa, it was important to address the imbalances in gender relations. This is because women constituted a larger percentage of the population of people who were dispossessed among the rural populations. They also suffered inequalities in access to education, employment, and control over land (Shireen Hassim, 2002: 725). Identifying these gender inequalities required that women were seen as significant members of the society. Thus, addressing the ills of the society at that point required addressing the imbalances that had been meted to every woman as constituents of the society. Detecting this imbalance can be largely traced to the fact that the South African society was guided by the ideals of Ubuntu, which provided a good ideological foundation for the social relations within the society. From this ideological viewpoint, women are viewed as part of the community and their rights and privileges are considered important. Thus, it was important to address the injustices that have been perpetuated against this significant segment of the society. This is largely responsible for the success of the drive towards gender balance in politics. It is equally what may be missing in the approaches of some other nations within the sub-Saharan African region. Rediscovering the Ubuntu ideology, or some similar ideological tool available in various African countries, can help to ground the kind of affirmative action that is needed in the countries in the sub-Saharan African region.

While the origin of the concept of Ubuntu is primarily traced to the Bantu people of South Africa, an identification of the basic features of this ideology will show that many indigenous African societies had similar features within their ideological systems. Matteo Migheli highlights five key features of Ubuntu. These features are the embeddedness of the individual into the community, we thinking, democratic and inclusive leadership, ethical reciprocity, and social inclusiveness (Matteo Migheli, 2017). What the foregoing suggests is that in a community that is governed by the ideals of Ubuntu, individualism is not a prominent ideology. Individuals define and account for themselves in relation to the community. The existence of the individual is defined by their place within the community. As such, the individual is not autonomous but is essentially embedded in social relationships. This sharply contrasts with the individualism that characterizes neoclassical understanding of human beings as autonomous beings. Resulting from this communal understanding of individuals, collective rationality is emphasized. Individual members of the community reason and act based on shared group interests and prioritize group welfare alongside individual goals. Owing to the communal understanding of human beings, Ubuntu entails empathy and sympathy in the relationship with the community and other members of the community. Again, Ubuntu encourages participatory leadership as opposed to authoritarian leadership. Thus, leaders act as mediators rather than sovereign authorities, and decisions reflect consensus rather than individually imposed power. This also implies that the social and political landscape encourages inclusivity where every individual is given a chance to participate in the political administration of the community. As a result, everybody, including men and women, gets a chance to contribute to community building (Matteo Migheli, 2017: 1214-1223).

The communal elements found in the Ubuntu ideology is present in many indigenous African societies. A number of scholars have noted these communal elements among the Yoruba people. According to Oyèwùmí, indigenous Yoruba communities were grounded in family lineage, seniority by age grades, and collective identity. The role of the individual was determined by their position within the kinship structure and community hierarchy (Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyèwùmí, 1997). A similar view is defended by Segun Gbadegesin who argues that moral and political life in Yoruba society was governed by a shared sense of duty to others, exemplified in practices such as communal land ownership, cooperative work, and elder-led consensus decision-making. For Gbadegesin, this outlook is grounded in a cosmology that maintains an active belief in the ancestral presence and collective destiny (Segun Gbadegesin, 1991).

The foregoing suggests that the presence of gender inequality in sub-Saharan Africa societies is inconsistent with the metaphysical and ideological worldviews of these societies. As such, it is important to evaluate and re-emphasize these metaphysical and ideological worldviews in order to ground a proper interrelation between theory and practice in the African sociopolitical landscape. This is why it is important to emphasize the need for consistent reawakening, at every possible forum, of the ideals of indigenous beliefs that can help to shape the reordering of the sub-Saharan African countries. One of such is the cosmological account of the nature and place of human beings within the order of beings in the world, and the implication of this cosmological account for a proper ordering of the society. This alignment of practice to a theoretical grounding is essential for a proper social reorientation that has become necessary in order to address the gender gap that has become persistent in many African societies. This theoretical grounding is essential to ensure an effective implementation of affirmative action plans aimed at eradicating gender disparities in political participation in sub-Saharan Africa.

5. Conclusion

Gender disparities are rife within the political space of many sub-Saharan African countries. While the aim of the sustainable development goals is to eradicate these disparities by the year 2030, available evidence suggests that many of these sub-Saharan African are not on

course to attain that target. It is important to note that this situation cannot be out rightly attributed to a lack of effort on the part of these countries. Available evidence shows that a good number of these countries have made some efforts, many times including constitutionally instituted policies to ensure gender balance in access to education and political positions. As such, the failure on this part cannot be solely attributed to lack of effort. This is why it is important to examine the ideological and metaphysical grounding of the action plans that have been suggested in these countries. This will help to ensure an alignment of this action plans with the ideological and metaphysical beliefs of the people. Following this approach, the discussion in this paper has revealed that while there are a number of affirmative action plans to combat gender inequalities in sub-Saharan African countries, there are inconsistencies between these action plans and the metaphysical and ideological foundations of the belief systems in these countries. Such inconsistencies make it difficult to properly implement any affirmative action plan leading to the ineffectiveness of such plans. This explains why countries like Nigeria, despite the presence of gender-neutral policies, find it difficult to translate the policies into practice.

Given the lack of grounding of gender inequalities in the ideological and metaphysical belief system of these countries, it is important to evaluate and re-emphasize these belief systems to provide a theoretical grounding for the policies and actions aimed at closing gender gaps, especially in political participation within the society. Re-emphasizing this ideological and metaphysical beliefs helps the people of these countries to internalize the goals and actions in a way that it becomes easier to implement them. This is important if these sub-Saharan African countries are to have any close shot at the goal of eradicating gender disparities in political participation as desired by the year 2030.

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Earthrise: A Commentary on Planetary Emancipation and Freedom

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Abstract

Since the invention of mass communication, humans have developed technological advancements that have created non-human elements, enabling humans to physically leave the planet. With these new technological mediums, can one say that humans are experiencing a new level of planetary freedom? While technology allows for virtual engagement, it does not provide true planetary freedom. Therefore, I argue that acts of human defiance in technological environments are essential to challenge Earth-centric perspectives to achieve planetary freedom. To support this argument, I will examine the biblical exodus pattern to highlight the differences between planetary emancipation and freedom, emphasizing the role of defiance- or the refusal to obey a specific command or a chain of command- in driving the possibilities of emancipation. I will analyze significant techno-cosmic events, such as Sputnik, Lunar Orbiter 1, Apollo 8, and the photographic image of Earthrise, to illustrate how acts of human technological defiance have challenged previous Earth-centric views and the exodus pattern. Finally, I will examine the presence of human defiance within global interconnectivity—the noosphere. This investigation explores engagement with global human and non-human agents to reorganize life systems that foster new ways of thinking and shaping identity for humans in the twenty-first century.

Keywords: global consciousness, freedom, Apollo 8, Earthrise, noosphere.

Since the invention of mass communication in the twentieth century, humans have developed technological advancements that have not only created non-human elements but have also enabled humans to physically leave the planet. With these new technological mediums, can one say that humans are experiencing a new level of planetary freedom? While one can virtually engage with images, videos, and various forms of communication at the click of a mouse or explore foreign lands using VR goggles from the comfort of one's couch, simply utilizing technology does not grant individuals or communities true planetary freedom. Instead, relying on technology for its functional capabilities merely adds to the evolution of what it means to be human in a connected world. Therefore, I argue that acts of human defiance in technological environments are essential to challenge Earth-centric perspectives to achieve planetary freedom. To support this argument, I will examine the biblical exodus pattern to highlight the differences between planetary emancipation and freedom, emphasizing the role of defiance – or the refusal to obey a specific command or a chain of command – in driving the possibilities of emancipation. I will analyze significant techno-cosmic events, such as Sputnik, Lunar Orbiter 1, Apollo 8, and the photographic image of *Earthrise*, to illustrate how acts of human technological defiance have challenged

previous Earth-centric views and the exodus pattern. Finally, I will examine the presence of human defiance within global interconnectivity—the noosphere.

The purpose of this investigation is to explore new areas of discovery by engaging with both human and non-human agents on a global scale. Humans can reorganize existing life systems to explore new ways of thinking, acquiring knowledge, and shaping identity. By embracing human defiance in technological environments, humans are empowered to challenge and revise the philosophical discourse of the twentieth century while redefining individual or community life systems to meet the needs of the twenty-first century.

The Cambridge Dictionary defines freedom as “the condition or right of being able to do, say, think, etc., whatever you want, without being controlled or limited,” and emancipation as “the process of giving people social or political freedom and rights.” Based on these definitions, the difference between freedom and emancipation lies in the notion of *from* versus *for*. Freedom, or being *for* something, is associated with oppression, while emancipation, or freedom *for* something, refers to the process through which what is oppressed is restored to those who sought the action. Highlighting this difference addresses a critical distinction in the usage of two words that are typically understood to mean the same thing. In the context of this article, when discussing planetary emancipation and freedom through the *Earthrise* image, it is necessary to define the differences between emancipation and freedom. Despite human advancements in technology, are humans trapped in a cyclical pattern of emancipation *from* and freedom *for* something, also known as an exodus pattern?

Scholar of ancient law David Daube explains in his book, *The Exodus Pattern in the Bible*, that the exodus symbolizes the act of freeing a slave according to social legislation and practice (Daube, 1963: 14). The account of the exodus is recorded in the *Tanakh*, the Hebrew Bible, specifically in the “Book of Exodus,” which states: “A new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, ‘Look, the Israelite people are much too numerous for us. Let us deal shrewdly with them, so that they may not increase’... So, they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor; and they built garrison cities for Pharaoh” (Exodus 1:8-12). As the Jewish people cry out to God, the Exodus model is revealed, demonstrating how God is moved to free the oppressed Israelites (Daube, 1963: 12). By the end of “Exodus 12,” it is recorded, “That very day the LORD freed the Israelites from the land of Egypt” (Exodus 12:51), and later in the “Book of Deuteronomy,” it is noted in the *Tanakh*, “Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the LORD your God freed you from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm” (Deuteronomy 5:15).

While the Jewish people were emancipated *from* the Egyptians, what did their freedom *for* mean? Instead of serving Pharaoh, the Israelites' allegiance shifted to God, as the *Tanakh* claims, “for they are my servants, whom I freed from Egypt” (Leviticus 25:42). In this paradox, service and freedom intertwine into a realm (Daube, 1963: 45), where the exodus is lifted out of the sphere of the “accidental” and linked to successors of eternal validity through God as not only a divine indicator in a biblical sense but “that he would vindicate them again and again, unto the last” (Daube, 1963: 14). However, if service is the fundamental requirement for God's vindication, perhaps defiance is necessary not only to achieve emancipation but also to attain freedom. While the exodus pattern represents a form of salvation, demonstrating how deliverance showcases the certain, eternal relationship between God and His people, human evolution through historical and cultural paradigms has led to a significant shift in allegiance—from God to technology.

Launched on October 17, 1957, Sputnik became the first artificial satellite to orbit Earth, marking one of the most significant revolutions in information during the twentieth century by creating a new environment for the planet (McLuhan, 1974: 49). Its successful launch by the Soviet Union ushered in a new era of political, military, technological, and scientific competition,

particularly as Sputnik heightened tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. America feared that the Soviets could transport nuclear weapons from Europe to the United States, which ultimately led to the establishment of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, or NASA, in July 1958 (Garber, 2007). With Sputnik enabling mass communication worldwide, alongside the invention of television and radio and the beginning of the Space Age, as “America did not want to be left in the dust by the Soviets’ technological advances” (NASA, n.d.), the twentieth century set out on the mission for human planetary emancipation.

While several philosophers, including Plato, Cicero, Archimedes, and Hildegard von Bingen, speculated about life beyond the confines of planet Earth, the Space Race era transformed perceptions of Earth in incomprehensible ways. Media theorist Marshall McLuhan argued that Earth was viewed as a human-made container and academic circles were eager to explore their universal qualities, or human nature, as assessed by Immanuel Kant (McLuhan, 1974: 49). In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant explains that human beings occupy a unique position in nature (Caygill, 1996: 141-2) and his philosophy of essential morality suggests that humans possess a “proper way of being in the world” (Caygill, 1996: 165). The launch of Sputnik began to challenge conventional ideas about the universal because, as Sputnik departed from the planet, philosopher Gianni Vattimo argues in his book *The Transparent Society*, “the dissolution of the idea of history and the end of modernity is the advent of the society of communication” (Caygill, 1996: 165).

Vattimo illustrates that every human experiences a plurality of lived experiences, and due to the modern era, there is a conscious awareness of this multiplicity of experience (Vattimo 1992: 70). Amplified by mass media, the continuous exposure to information further dissolves any claim of a universal history, and raising awareness of plurality causes a fundamental shift from previous philosophical thought. Machines like Sputnik usher in new possibilities to challenge strict traditional narratives that have dominated geographical landscapes. Additionally, due to Sputnik, McLuhan observes, “Nature ended, and Ecology was born” (McLuhan, 1974: 49). Ecological thinking became unavoidable as Earth took on the status of a work of art, altering human perception of the world, as people “sought to maintain equilibrium among components of [their] environment in order to ensure survival” (McLuhan, 1974: 49). This idea is further supported by critical philosopher Hans Blumenberg, who stated that with the emergence of ecological thinking, “Thinking globally is probably now less our choice than our lot” (Lazier, 2011: 609). With Sputnik and now additional satellites orbiting Earth, “all data influence other data,” people in the electric age exist in a realm of simultaneous information (McLuhan, 1974: 49). With human-made creations in space facilitating mass communication, Sputnik revolutionized global communication; however, on August 10, 1966, the visual perception of Earth underwent a significant transformation.

Pressured by the Soviet Union, the United States launched the spacecraft, Lunar Orbiter 1. This craft was tasked with orbiting the moon and surveying potential human landing sites on its surface for the forthcoming Apollo missions (Byers, 2010: 106). With its deployment on August 10, by August 14, controllers from NASA began sending a series of commands to Lunar Orbiter 1 at 15:22:56 GMT (Byers, 2010: 106), and it started the first operation of the spacecraft’s photographic mission (Byers, 2010: 107). The photographic subsystem on Lunar Orbiter 1 was built by Eastman Kodak and was put together with the precision of a Swiss watch. Every component was tightly placed in an aluminum “bathtub,” which was the size of a watermelon and operated like a thrashing machine. NASA technical manual writer Bruce Byers illustrates the photographic process of Lunar Orbiter 1 in his manual, *Destination Moon: A History of the Lunar Orbiter Program*:

the photo subsystem operated like a thrashing machine. The film, which had to go through three plane changes, was drawn from the supply spool, clamped in a

movable platen, moved and exposed simultaneously, and advanced farther to make room for a new film—all in a matter of a few seconds (Byers, 2010: 107).

By August 29, Lunar Orbiter 1 had completed its photographic acquisition, with 205 exposed frames and photographs of all nine potential Apollo landing sites. While the spacecraft experienced some malfunctions, the mission was considered a success. Nonetheless, with Sputnik and now the Lunar Orbiter 1, human liberation from planetary confinement was becoming increasingly tangible. As human-made machines entered the atmosphere and orbited other celestial bodies, such as the Moon, the exodus pattern reemphasized itself. However, the fundamental validation of the allegiance between humans and technology is achieved through the information from Lunar Orbiter 1 returning to Earth. Nonetheless, Lunar Orbiter 1 marked the beginning of humans challenging and altering the exodus pattern as it ushered in the *Earthrise* era.

The tremor of human disruption occurred on August 23, 1966 (NASA, 2008), when top NASA officials Dr. Floyd Thompson, Clifford Nelson, and Lee Scherer challenged Robert Helberg, Program Manager for the Lunar Orbiter, to purposefully maneuver the Lunar Orbiter 1 from its flight plan and mission objective (Byers, 2010: 110-111). The aim was to reposition the photographic subsystem away from the lunar surface during orbits 16 and 26 to capture images of the Earth (Byers, 2010: 111). This proposal was viewed as a hazardous and unnecessary risk by Helberg, as moving Lunar Orbiter 1 off its mission course could result in its disappearance behind the moon, cutting off communication with ground control. If communication could not be re-established, “the Apollo-oriented mission photography would probably be undone” (Byers, 2010: 110). Fortunately, Lunar Orbiter 1 reconnected with ground control and captured two unprecedented images (Figure 1). The *Earth-Moon* images were the first to depict the Earth at a distance from its nearest neighbor (Byers, 2010: 151). The photograph showcases nearly half of the Earth along with a significant portion of the Moon and its craters (Byers, 2010: 151).

These *Earth-Moon* images were released to the public, accompanied by captions such as “Earth rising above the lunar horizon, the first image ever of the Earth from lunar orbit, a detail of our sixth image, taken Aug. 23, 1966, by Lunar Orbiter 1” (Ashworth & William, 2023). The term *Earthrise* was beginning to enter the global lexicon alongside the Lunar Orbiter 1 images. However, while the human disruption of the exodus pattern was challenged by Lunar Orbiter 1, NASA took the relationship a step further by altering the *Earth-Moon* photographs. The *Earth-Moon* image was rotated 90 degrees to create the visual effect of the Earth rising over the Moon, mimicking familiar views of the sun rising above the Earth’s horizon. Additionally, the Earth was enlarged and cropped within the photographic frame to give it a more prominent presence. While NASA has been transparent about the digital manipulation of the *Earth-Moon* images made by Lunar Orbiter 1, it has not commented on why a horizon was included in these images (NASA, 2008). While Sputnik propelled global mass communication and Lunar Orbiter 1 the visual perception of Earth, the most critical advancement in technology regarding mass communication and visual perception of planetary drama and the exodus pattern unfolded in 1968.

On December 21, 1968, the United States launched the Apollo 8 spacecraft. Aboard Apollo 8 was a crew of three astronauts whose mission was to be the first humans to leave Earth and orbit the Moon. The crew consisted of Commander Frank Borman, who had previously commanded the Gemini VII mission in 1965; Command Module Pilot James A. Lovell, Jr., who had flown with Borman on Gemini VII and also commanded the Gemini XII mission; and Lunar Module Pilot William “Bill” Anders, whose only flight with NASA was Apollo 8. Together, they played a crucial role in this historic journey (NASA, 2020). While their successful mission transformed the world, no one could have predicted the overall impact these individuals would have on the people back home.

Similar to Lunar Orbiter 1, Apollo 8's objective was to photograph the lunar surface through human intervention. This aligned with President John F. Kennedy's aspiration to land humans on the Moon by the end of the 1960s (Bowker et al., 1971). The Apollo 8 astronauts were the first humans to view the far side of the Moon, and with remarkable timing and luck, one of the most significant photographs in human history was captured during the Apollo 8 mission. The photograph *Earthrise* was taken by astronaut Bill Anders from the Apollo spacecraft on Christmas Eve in 1968 (Figure 2). At approximately 10:30 AM Houston Time, Apollo 8 was coming around from the far side of the Moon for the fourth time. Bill Anders was in the right-hand seat, observing the Moon through his side window. He was taking pictures with his Hasselblad still camera fitted with a 250mm Zeiss Sonnar telephoto lens. Mission commander Frank Borman was in the left-hand seat of the Apollo spacecraft, preparing to turn the spacecraft to a new orientation according to the flight plan.

The timing of the rotation and the appearance of the Earth allowed astronaut Bill Anders to capture *Earthrise* as the planet came into view from his window. Before the fourth orbit of the Moon, the astronauts were unable to see Earth. Once released to the public, the image adorned the cover of *LIFE Magazine's* January 10, 1969, issue, titled "The Incredible Year '68 Special Issue." While the title acknowledges the remarkable achievement of humans traveling to space and returning safely, one might question whether the title truly reflects the image on the cover. When analyzing the *Earthrise* photograph, particularly in conjunction with the images from Lunar Orbiter 1, discussions about technology and art reveal how images meant to expand global awareness can be used to evoke critical questions regarding emancipation and freedom within a cosmological framework.

In the book *The Obsolescence of Man, Volume II*, philosopher Guenther Anders creates a Socratic dialogue between himself and an artist in chapter twenty, titled "The Obsolescence of Fantasy." In this section, the philosopher visits the artist at his studio, and they engage in a debate when the artist declares his intention to paint the atomic bomb over one of his landscapes (Anders, 2015: 223). While the philosopher attempts to persuade the artist that painting the atomic bomb is "too insignificant," his main argument is to illustrate that the bomb itself is too fantastic in that no depiction can capture its reality (Anders, 2015: 223).

As the philosopher and artist exchange ideas about the depiction of the atomic bomb in a landscape, one critical point raised by the philosopher concerns the painting's horizon (Anders, 2015: 232). The philosopher argues that if the atomic bomb is to be painted, it should be represented through the perspective of a cartographic aerial photograph. He supports this proposition by illustrating how, when viewed from above, this method of perception liberates images from their constraints imposed by horizons. In doing so, the artwork, enabled by the ability to soar in the air, dialectically transcends the viewpoint found on the surface of the Earth. Rather than merely presenting the perspective of a tree, as seen in the artist's landscape pictures, cartographic aerial images resonate with "the fact that today our world has become *without a here into a sensory event*" (Anders, 2015: 235).

After astronaut Bill Anders had photographed what would later be known as *Earthrise*, five days had passed before the astronauts returned to Earth. The film was retrieved and developed by Richard Underwood, the Apollo director of photography. In Robert Poole's book *Earthrise: How Man First Saw the Earth*, he carefully articulates the development of the Apollo 8 photographs. The images were processed at NASA's Manned Spaceflight Center in Houston — home of Mission Control — by Underwood. Since these images were of critical importance, Underwood decided to manually process the rolls of film instead of using automatic machinery. This method took him five hours, and after the negatives were developed and prints made, Underwood recalled, "I had a pretty good idea of what it [*Earthrise*] was going to look like...but when I actually saw the picture, after they returned, it was even better than I had anticipated" (Poole, 2008: 28). As articulated by British English Professor Joe Moran in his article *Earthrise*:

The Story Behind Our Planet’s Most Famous Photo, Underwood took the liberty of editing the *Earthrise* photo by flipping it so that Earth would give the perception that it was rising over the Moon’s horizon. He cropped the image to make the Earth look bigger and more focal. Underwood manipulated *Earthrise* to conform to an Earth-centric point of view (Figure 3).

As Poole reinforces, “there was something not quite right about the picture” (Poole 2008, 28). He continues to describe how Apollo 8 was in an equatorial orbit with respect to the Moon and the Earth. The spaceship then orbited around the Moon in the same plane, going clockwise. The astronauts would not have seen a “rising Earth,” but an Earth appearing around the left side of the Moon, which would make the image’s orientation vertical (Poole, 2008: 28). Poole also critiques *Earthrise* by stating:

In the original photo, too, the Earth had been a much smaller part of the dark sky; this was cropped in the version released to the public, making the Earth seem larger. Instinctively, the photograph had been altered from a Moon to an Earth perspective (Poole, 2008: 28).

Moran then proceeds, “*Earthrise* was edited for anthropocentric ends.” The Apollo 8 crew saw Earth to the side of the Moon, not above it, and the astronauts described Earth as tiny. Astronaut Anders compared the Earth to being “in a darkened room with only one visible object, a small blue-green sphere about the size of a Christmas-tree ornament” (Moran, 2018).

When a *here* is placed in an artwork, such as the addition of a horizon, the philosopher Anders describes these “amateurs with their images,” trying to convince themselves that the world has a normal aspect. Even those who practice cartographic aerial images try to subscribe to the elements of normalcy by extending horizon narratives into faraway photographs. By manipulating images that should enhance global consciousness, adding a *here*, or a horizon, restricts the advancement of reality because “today’s world, without a horizon, has become a world *without a here*” (Anders, 2015: 233). Additionally, the philosopher concludes by stating:

In short: *the optical detail as such*, which simulates a world that is too constrained, is not real, insofar as today every point on the Earth can be reached and threatened—and is in fact in danger—from any other point. And this applies to the photo and the painted image: the peaceful character of your landscape, which is simply there by *itself*, painted in the impressionist manner, results in pure falsification (Anders, 2015: 233).

If Guenther Anders is correct in asserting that *Earthrise* is pure falsification, then Underwood’s manipulation of *Earthrise* undermined one of the most critical images by giving it an Earth-centric perspective.

Despite being in a pre-digital age during the Apollo 8 mission, the instruments used—such as Anders’ Hasselblad still camera and Underwood’s equipment for developing the film rolls and creating prints for mass consumption—serve as intermediaries between the Earth and the human eye. Images of reality, like the atomic bomb and *Earthrise*, become something fantastical when the artist adheres to an Earth-centered ideology. Specifically, when choosing to superimpose a horizon on the atomic bomb or *Earthrise*, philosopher Anders asks, “So, you call[ed] upon your fantasy for help. Do you think that this will help you represent the real object?” (Anders, 2015: 229). When fantasy is imposed, the image becomes implausible. *Earthrise*, an image that could have contributed to global consciousness, was reduced to a *shock effect*, soon overshadowed by Apollo 17’s image of the *Blue Marble* (Anders, 2015: 237) (Figure 4).

In addition to Underwood’s manipulation of the photographs, the Public Affairs Office contributed to his fantastical idea. In crafting the image caption for the *Earthrise* photos, the Public Affairs Office released the following text to the public: “This view of the rising Earth greeted the Apollo 8 astronauts as they came from behind the Moon after the lunar orbit insertion burn” (Poole, 2008: 29). According to Poole, the term *Earthrise* had not yet been coined when the

caption was revised; therefore, as Anders articulates, the image has “a double falsehood, a double appearance” (Anders, 2015: 228). Not only was the term *Earthrise* fabricated, but almost the entire narrative surrounding the image was recreated.

In Anders’ final remarks about the conversation with the artist and the atomic bomb, the artist “stubbornly introduced his atomic bomb into his impressionist landscape, anyway” (Anders, 2015: 238). While Anders appreciated the artist’s stubbornness, it is worth reflecting on astronaut Anders’ comments about Underwood’s altered image of *Earthrise*:

My favorite picture was not *Earthrise*. It’s one where the Earth is sort of blurry and small. The smaller the Earth gets, the more it substantiates my new view that here we are, a kind of physically inconsequential planet, going around a not-particularly-significant star, going around a galaxy of billions of stars, that’s not a particularly significant galaxy, in a universe where there’s billions and billions of galaxies. And so, I mean, are we really that special? I don’t think so. And yet, we act like it (Seattle Times Staff, 2012).

After the fantastical image of *Earthrise* was released to the public, twenty million people took to the streets across the United States to protest environmental destruction. This moment led to the creation of Earth Day, which now boasts more than one billion participants (Gerretsen, 2023). Despite astronaut Anders’ preference for the unaltered image of *Earthrise*, the exodus pattern thus reemerges. The Apollo 8 astronauts were emancipated *from* Earth; however, what was their freedom *for*? Not only was *Earthrise* altered through Underwood’s imaginative lens, but the image was also an act of defiance, reminiscent of Lunar Orbiter 1.

Before the monumental photograph was taken, Apollo 8’s onboard tape recorder captured the astronauts’ voices right before *Earthrise*. As the Earth peeks into Anders’ window, he exclaims, “Oh my God, look at that picture over there! There’s the Earth comin’ up. Wow, is that pretty?” (NASA, 2018). The following audio clip features Commander Borman, in a demanding tone, stating, “Hey don’t take that, it’s not scheduled” (NASA, 2018). However, while watching the “*Earthrise* in 4K” video produced by NASA and released on December 21, 2018, one can see the image of *Earthrise* appear on the screen, indicating that Anders snapped the picture with his Hasselblad still camera. Anders then calls on astronaut Lovell to load color film into his camera for another shot. Although the sequence of events that led to the famous image seems systematic, the tape recording provides further insights into whether Apollo 8 and the taking of *Earthrise* represented the first human planetary acts of freedom.

In his landmark essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Walter Benjamin explored “how the age of mass media means audiences can listen or see a work of art repeatedly and access new meanings each time (McLuhan, 2014, p. *lii*). After listening to the audio recording from Apollo 8 of *Earthrise* multiple times, I overlooked the most subtle and human aspect of defiance that philosopher Howard Caygill, my advisor, initially highlighted. Whether Commander Borman responded instinctively or physically observed astronaut Anders raising his camera to capture the Earth after noting its beauty, he barked the order, “Hey, don’t take that, it’s not scheduled.” Nonetheless, as demonstrated by Benjamin’s essay, upon careful listening to the audio recording, one will undoubtedly hear astronaut Anders let out a grunt-like laugh before disobeying Commander Borman and capturing the *Earthrise* image. Anders further disobeys by pulling astronaut Lovell in and asking, “You got a color film, Jim?” While some sources suggest Borman was “joking,” I completely disagree (Chaikin, 2018). Having served in the United States Army National Guard, I can confirm that astronaut Anders, as a subordinate to Commander Borman, indeed disobeyed a direct order from his superior, which is codified in the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) as *Article 92*, or insubordination (“Article 92 Failure to Obey an Order,” 2025). Astronaut Anders was aware that images were to be taken according to the mission log, and he was certainly instructed not to take the picture by his commander. Although Richard Underwood made trips to Cape Canaveral to brief the astronauts on how to photograph the Earth

to recreate the Lunar Orbiter 1 image with humans instead of a machine, the official photographic operations plan states that taking pictures of “the Moon and Earth from various translunar/transearth distances...[was] among the lowest priority” (Poole, 2008: 23-4).

While one might say I am speculating about astronaut Anders's planetary act of freedom from earthly constraints, military hierarchy strengthens my perspective, especially since it took until 2013 for Anders to receive proper credit for taking *Earthrise* instead of Borman (Chaikin, 2018). This moment, set against the backdrop of the iconic *Earthrise* image, is crucial because Apollo 8 not only liberated humans from Earth but also highlighted Anders's act of defiance as an integral part of this newfound freedom. It challenges society's outdated perceptions that cannot accommodate the realities of non-planetary confinement, a concept previously examined with Sputnik and Lunar Orbiter 1 but fully realized with Apollo 8. However, as the astronauts returned to Earth and the *Earthrise* images were altered, this upholds an Earth-centered viewpoint. Therefore, the question arises: What is the significance of this episode of emancipation and freedom? Is it merely to wander the metaphorical desert for forty years, or does it demonstrate that humanity is beginning to transcend a repetitive exodus pattern?

NASA still circulates the fantastical images of *Earthrise*. Before researching *Earthrise* for this article, the only image I had encountered was the iconic manipulated version. If you were to Google *Earthrise* and click on the “Apollo 8: *Earthrise*” hyperlink from NASA, the manipulated photo would appear on your screen. Below the image, the caption states, “This iconic picture shows Earth peeking out from beyond the lunar surface as the first crewed spacecraft circumnavigated the Moon” (Wright & Gallagher, 2018). While it is toned down compared to the earlier mentioned caption, it does not indicate that the image has been altered in any way, which is misleading for general audiences like me, especially given the description reads, “Taken aboard Apollo 8 by Bill Anders, this iconic picture shows Earth peeking out from beyond the lunar surface as the first crewed spacecraft circumnavigated the Moon, with astronauts Anders, Frank Borman, and Jim Lovell aboard” (Wright & Gallagher, 2018).

Furthering the misconception, the “*Earthrise* in 4K” video produced by NASA’s Scientific Visualization Studio initially shows Earth appearing vertically to the spacecraft in the first video. However, digital artists incorporate Underwood by adding a horizon to what is intended to be astronaut Anders's view from his window (Wright & Gallagher, 2018). To see a video with the correct vertical view, one must scroll to at least the third video on NASA’s website. With this “double falsehood, a double appearance” (Anders, 2015: 228), still prominent in the twenty-first century, fifty-seven years after astronaut Anders captured *Earthrise*, what do acts of defiance mean, even when removed from the planet?

As observed through space exploration, reliance on technology alone is insufficient to overcome the pattern of exodus. Something more is needed—something that embodies both human spirit and technological innovation, allowing for constant defiance. This requirement is characterized by interconnectivity that transcends a Cartesian binary. It is not a separate entity but rather exists harmoniously alongside existing systems. It is not an apex of achievement but something that operates in tandem with other elements. This concept is known as the noosphere.

The term “noosphere” refers to the “sphere of the mind or intellect” (Samson & Pitt, 1999) and provides a broad framework for understanding information-based realms (Ronfeldt & Arquilla, 2020: 7). The noosphere has deep etymological roots, coming from the Greek word “noos,” which means “mind,” and the Latin word “sphaera,” meaning “sphere.” The pre-Socratic philosopher Anaxagoras was one of the first to recognize that mind and intelligence (nous) are distinct forces separate from matter. The term “noetic,” which pertains to matters of the mind, has been in use since the seventeenth century. In 1834, French scientist André-Marie Ampère referred to “sciences noologiques,” distinguishing these fields from cosmological sciences that focus on physical laws. The concept of the “noosphere” emerged in the 1920s and is credited to Pierre

Teilhard de Chardin, Edouard Le Roy, and Vladimir Vernadsky. Teilhard de Chardin considered it his invention, while Le Roy promoted the idea. This concept arose during discussions among these thinkers following the devastation of World War I, reflecting a strong belief in human potential and science despite the surrounding horrors (Samson & Pitt, 1999: 4). While the term, particularly in the United States, has been applied to cyberspace, the noosphere, if anything, encompasses the cybersphere while maintaining “its own technological, organizational, and ideational levels” (Ronfeldt & Arquilla, 2020: 13). The noosphere is the thinking envelope that surrounds the Earth, where new social technologies empower individuals to think critically and explore their identities within institutions, non-institutions, or hybrids.

While Teilhard de Chardin conceptualized the noosphere as a way to connect the divine with the evolving technological world, it does not relate to sacred or sublime nature. Instead, the noosphere represents a medium characterized by cosmic pluralities where no universals exist, allowing individuals to express their uniqueness in a global context. Although Teilhard de Chardin asserted that personal identity and individualism would not be lost within the noosphere, this claim is contradictory because he advocates for a form of planetary “mono-culturalism” (Ronfeldt & Arquilla, 2020: 8). Due to the global scale of mass communication, “an electronic membrane cover[s] the earth...[wiring] all humanity together in a single nervous system” (Ronfeldt & Arquilla, 2020: 13). While one may oversimplify the idea of a single technological nervous system, this interconnectedness is achievable only through disruptions in the exodus pattern. Unlike the infosphere, which encompasses the fusion of all the world's communications networks, databases, and information sources (Ronfeldt & Arquilla, 2020: 11), and the cybersphere, or the domain of the Net (Ronfeldt & Arquilla, 2020: 10), the noosphere is built on a spirit of human defiance that emerged during the space race era.

When revisiting the exodus pattern in relationship with the planetary emancipation and freedom, the exodus pattern was successful in maintaining a “service for freedom” (Daube, 1963: 45) relationship because the globe adopted universals, grand narratives, and metaphysical thinking where emancipation and freedom were interlocked in a cyclical motion throughout humanity. With the launch of Sputnik, humans began to shake the establishment of the human hierarchy, and society began to shift on a global level. However, this shift became catastrophic as more satellites entered the atmosphere and started to redefine how the Earth was conceptualized, especially with the creation of new technologies such as radio and television.

As humans proceeded to further move towards planetary emancipation, it became a reality due to Apollo 8. Not only were humans unbound from the Earth, but while in orbit, Borman also tried to impose earthly societal concepts on Anders, who laughed at him and literally redefined how all humans conceptualized Earth through the capture of *Earthrise*. However, when he returned to Earth, Anders and his *Earthrise* image, despite its fame, were shoved into the Earth-centric confines when Underwood placed a horizon on his image, similar to NASA's manipulation of Lunar Orbiter 1's image. As long as human plurality could be snuffed on a global scale, the infosphere and cybersphere could maintain the status quo because there was a layer of human dominant superiority controlling and hardwiring these two spheres. However, as technology and space exploration increased, the balance shifted when the thinking sphere, or noosphere, emerged.

The noosphere represents the fusion of technology, science, and spirituality through a global network where defiance is unstoppable. Thus, the noosphere can continuously disrupt the exodus pattern and address the question: what is planetary freedom *for*? It exists to facilitate the emergence of the noosphere—a planetary society where the global village thrives, allowing individuals to connect with other humans as well as non-human entities or extraterrestrials (Ronfeldt & Arquilla, 2020: 14). In this space, the limits imposed by our planet are overcome, and new ideas and creativity flourish, leading to innovative systems of life. Despite the singularity of the nervous system, it is not a place of confinement. Instead, it embodies a holistic, life-affirming

philosophy in which planetary freedom is in harmony with the universe. In the twenty-first century, planetary emancipation is only a mouse click away. The ability to surf the internet and explore various hyperlinks and websites creates a sense of emancipation. However, true planetary freedom comes from sharing ideas, which disrupts the “web of living thought” due to the noosphere (Ronfeldt & Arquilla, 2020: 7).

In conclusion, in Martin Heidegger’s essay, *The Question of Technology*, the invention of the radio, television, and the emergence of satellites due to Sputnik caused him to speculate and question the free relationship between human existence and the essence of technology (Heidegger, 1997: 311). Throughout his discourse, Heidegger states, “Technology is the mode of revealing...it expedites in that it unlocks and exposes,” and from this revealing, the realm of truth is exposed (Heidegger, 1997: 318-21). Contemplating Sputnik caused uneasiness for Heidegger, but nothing prepared him for when Lunar Orbiter 1’s *Earth-Moon* image surfaced. In September 1966, Heidegger reflects on Lunar Orbiter 1’s images of the Earth in an interview for *Das Spiegel*:

Everything is functioning. This is exactly what is so uncanny, that everything is functioning and that the functioning drives us more and more to even further functioning, and that technology tears men loose from the Earth and uproots them. I do not know whether you were frightened, but I at any rate was frightened when I saw pictures coming from the moon to the Earth. We don’t need any atom bomb. The uprooting of man has already taken place. The only thing we have left is purely technological relationships. This is no longer the Earth on which man lives (Lazier, 2011: 609).

A terrified Heidegger, who was alive to see the *Earthrise* and *Blue Marble* images but did not comment on them publicly, viewed Lunar Orbiter 1’s images as an undoing of phenomenology (Lazier, 2011: 610). One of the presuppositions of phenomenological analysis is that the body has a customary orientation in space: up and down, front and back, above and below, before and behind (Lazier, 2011: 610). As he stated in *The Question of Technology*, the technological revolution allowing pictures like *Earth-Moon* revealed the truth about Heidegger’s ontological philosophy- that his *Dasein* does not work on a planetary level since it presumes a local, situated, and finite *being-there* (Lazier, 2011: 611).

Heidegger believed that planetary emancipation was synonymous with earthly demise. While this view is not entirely incorrect, it is essential to disrupt how humans are tethered to the Earth through concepts like *Dasein*. This disruption is vital for understanding how other social constructs, such as the exodus pattern, require liberation if humans are to move beyond life systems that have plagued humankind, as documented in human writings throughout space and time. Here, space refers to the geography of Earth, and time equates to recorded human history. Emancipation *from* the Earth, to achieve freedom *for* humankind, involves moving past the “old man who refuses to believe that the great world outside his village is any different from the one which he has always known” (Rovelli, 2016: 61). This realization was evident during the Apollo 8 mission and in the capturing of the *Earthrise* photograph.

The manipulation of *Moon-Earth* and, more critically, *Earthrise* by adding a horizon to the images represented an attempt to revert to Earth-centric philosophies that align with Heidegger’s *Dasein*. However, with the rise of global mass communication, the emergence of the noosphere collaborates with technology and humanity to foster a thinking sphere where Earth-centric perspectives are scrutinized, challenging the Enlightenment universals encountered in modernity. While government agencies like NASA still circulate images of the manipulated *Earthrise*, global villages within the noosphere provide spaces where human defiance can share the pictures in their proper context, as astronaut Bill Anders observed. This ongoing movement of disruption shatters the exodus pattern and defines the purpose of planetary freedom. As emphasized by physicist Carlo Rovelli:

Communication between ourselves and the world is not what distinguishes us from the rest of nature. All things are continually interacting with one another, and in doing so each bears the traces of that with which it has interacted: and in this sense all things continuously exchange information about one another (Rovelli, 2016: 70).

Due to this continual exchange of information, the noosphere—a global village enveloped by a web of living thought—reveals the cosmic pluralities to Earth and beyond.

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Appendix

List of Images

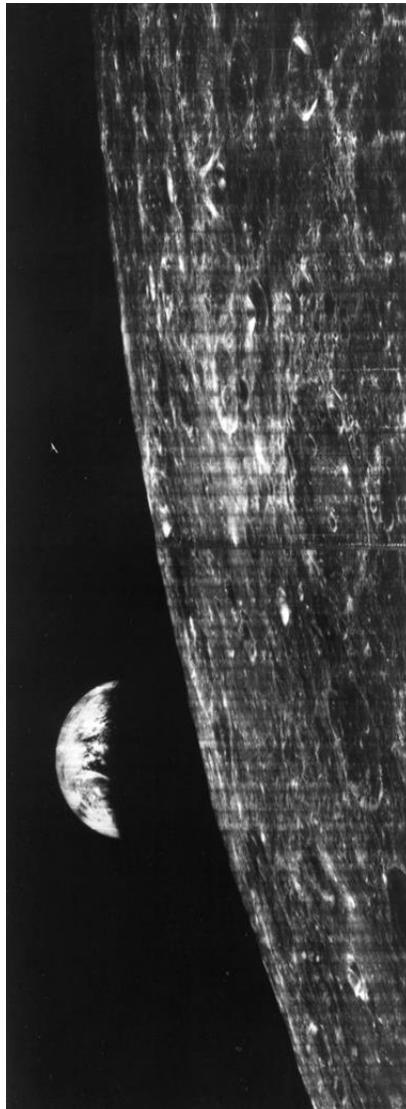


Image Source: NASA via Wiki Commons

Figure 1. Lunar Orbiter 1's image of the Earth and Moon taken in 1966

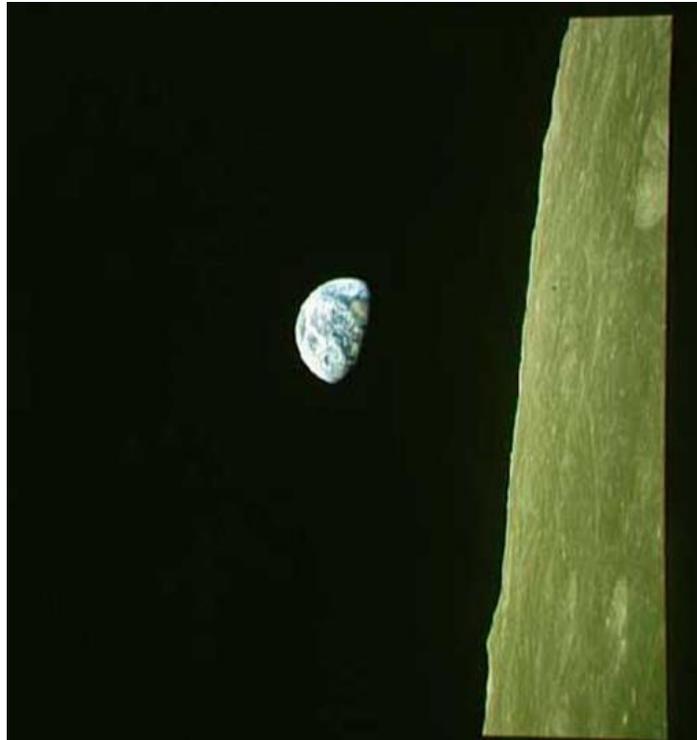


Image Source: Apollo Image Atlas

Figure 2. Earthrise by Astronaut Bill Anders



Image Source: NASA

Figure 3. Earthrise by Astronaut Bill Anders, edited by Richard Underwood and published by NASA as the official Earthrise image to the general public



Image Source: NASA

Figure 4. Blue Marble by Apollo 17



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