

# **We Are (Almost) All Externalists Now\***

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## **I. Introduction**

One of the central debates in contemporary epistemology is the debate between internalism and externalism about justification. As with many other interesting philosophical issues, it is not always clear what the dispute is about, and this is, in part at least, because there are a number of different internalism/externalism distinctions in epistemology. Some internalists hold that whether a given belief is justified is something that can be discovered a priori, or at least from the armchair.<sup>1</sup> Some externalists deny this—for instance, according to some externalists whether a given belief is justified depends on whether it was produced by a reliable belief process, and this is understood to be a paradigmatic case of something that cannot be discovered a priori.<sup>2</sup> But still some other epistemologists think that the best way to characterize internalism is by appeal not to what can be known a priori or from the armchair, but to what is internal to the mind of the subject having the belief.<sup>3</sup>

In this paper I argue against this latter kind of internalism, which I will call, following Conee and Feldman, “mentalism.” More precisely, I will understand mentalism as follows:

**Mentalism:** All the factors that contribute to the epistemic justification of a doxastic attitude towards a proposition by a subject S are mental states of S.<sup>4</sup>

My objection to mentalism is that there is a special kind of fact (what I call a “support fact”) that contributes to the justification of any belief, and that is not mental. My argument against mentalism, then, is the following:

### **Anti-mentalism argument**

1. If mentalism is true, then support facts are mental.
2. Support facts are not mental.

Therefore,

3. Mentalism is not true.

In what follows I explain what support facts are, and then defend each of the premises of my argument. I conclude with some remarks regarding the relevance of my argument for the larger internalism/externalism debate(s) in epistemology.

## **II. What are support facts?**

Let’s consider two typical cases of justified belief. In the first case, Sally believes that the streets are wet (let’s call this proposition  $q$ ) because she justifiably believes that it is raining and that if it is raining then the streets are wet (let’s call the conjunction of these propositions  $p$ ). In the second case, Steve believes that the streets are wet because he is looking at them.<sup>5</sup>

What are the factors that contribute to the justification of the belief that  $q$  for Sally? It seems clear that these factors must include Sally’s being justified in believing

that p. We might say that Sally's being justified in believing that p constitutes her evidence for believing that q.<sup>6</sup> And what are the factors that justify the belief that q for Steve? Here matters are not as clear, but an influential epistemological tradition has it that those factors must include Steve's having a certain visual experience e as of the street's being wet.<sup>7</sup> We might say that Steve's having this experience constitutes his evidence for believing that q. I want to leave this term, 'evidence,' at an intuitive level. Everything I want to say can be said without appealing to it, although in more tortuous ways.<sup>8</sup>

The evidence that Sally and Steve have for their belief that q is part of what justifies each of them in having that belief. Therefore, mentalism entails that the evidence that they have is composed entirely of factors that are mental states of Sally and Steve. I will here grant that mentalism is right as far as evidence is concerned—that is, I will grant that the evidence that Steve and Sally have is composed entirely of mental states of Steve and Sally, respectively.<sup>9</sup>

But the evidence that Steve and Sally have for q doesn't exhaust all the factors that contribute to their justification for believing that q. In Sally's case, there is also the fact that p supports q (in other words, the fact that p is a good reason for thinking that q), and in Steve's case there is also the fact that e supports q (in other words, the fact that if someone has an experience with the same content as e, then that provides the subject with a good reason to think that p). Call facts of this kind, support facts. More generally, whenever a subject is justified in having a belief, there will be some facts in virtue of which the subject is so justified (we can think of these facts as the truth-makers for the claim that the subject is justified in having the belief). We can then distinguish, among

those facts, between those that are of the form the subject is justified in having some other belief(s), or the subject has a certain experience,<sup>10</sup> which we can call evidence facts, and those that are of the form the subject's belief(s) is (are) a good reason for thinking that r or the subject's undergoing a certain experience e is a good reason for thinking that r (support facts).

Could someone doubt that there are support facts so conceived? Hardly so. Surely, if p were not a good reason to believe that q, then Sally's being justified in believing that p would not justify her in believing that q.<sup>11</sup> And all that we are committed to when we commit ourselves to the existence of support facts are facts of that form: p supports q just in case p is a good reason to believe that q. So understood, the intuitive position is that there are support facts, and we need an argument to abandon this position.

I turn now to the defense of my anti-mentalism argument. I start with premise 2.

### **III. Support facts are not mental**

On the face of it, the claim that support facts are mental is false. Take Sally's case: which mental state (or condition) of Sally's is the fact that her being justified in believing p is a good reason for her to believe that q? It cannot be either her believing that p or her believing that q—the support fact in question is a relation between those mental states of Sally's, and this relation doesn't seem to be reducible to either of its relata. But what other mental states of Sally's could possibly be relevant to her being justified in believing p, let alone be the fact that her believing that p is a good reason for believing that q? In this section I first generalize these considerations, and then I apply them to two attempts at “mentalizing” support factors, those of Richard Foley and Matthias Steup.

Any mentalist theory will say that there are mental factors  $M_S$  of a subject  $S$  such that the justificatory status of  $S$ 's doxastic attitudes is determined by elements of  $M_S$ . A mentalist who wishes to claim that support facts are mental, then, will say that they are already included in  $M_S$ . But now consider the fact that, with respect to any such theory, we can ask the following question: is it the case that the obtaining of the facts mentioned in  $M_S$  is a good reason for holding the doxastic attitude in question? For instance, we can ask, with respect to Sally's case, "Is it the case that the obtaining of Sally's mental factors identified by the specific mentalist theory is a good reason for thinking that  $q$ ?" And here a dilemma ensues. If the answer is "No," then it seems that Sally is not justified in believing that  $q$ , and so the theory has a counterexample (because it says that Sally is justified in believing that  $q$ ). And if the answer is "Yes," then the theory fails to recognize a factor that is epistemically relevant, because the fact that the obtaining of all the epistemically relevant mental factors is a good reason for believing that  $q$  cannot itself be a mental factor.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, all epistemic theories according to which support factors are mental are either going to have counterexamples or fail to recognize relevant epistemic factors.

But doesn't this objection show too much? Suppose that I am right and Sally is justified in believing that  $q$  because (i) she is justified in believing that  $p$  and (ii)  $p$  is a good reason to think that  $q$ . Couldn't we then ask: is it the case that the obtaining of the facts mentioned in (i) and (ii) is a good reason for Sally to believe that  $q$ ? And wouldn't then a dilemma similar to the one above arise?

It is true that we can ask, about the factors identified by any theory as necessary and sufficient for justification, the same question that we asked above about mentalist

theories. But it doesn't follow that we will be able to reconstruct the same dilemma over the possible answers. In particular, the problem identified above with the "No" answer is peculiar to mentalist theories. The facts identified by the non-mentalist epistemologist as necessary for Sally's being justified in believing that q include, crucially, the support fact that p is a good reason to believe that q; and this fact doesn't itself support q: that p is a good reason to believe that q is not itself a good reason to believe that q. And this is not because the fact that p is a bad reason to believe that q, but because something's being a good reason to believe that q is itself neither a good nor a bad reason to believe that q. The obtaining of a support fact between some evidence and the proposition that q is not itself a reason to think that q, but this doesn't mean that, therefore, there is no good reason to believe that q, but simply that support facts themselves are not the right category of things to stand as relata of the support relation.<sup>13</sup>

There is an asymmetry, then, between theories according to which support facts are mental and theories according to which they are external: there is an objection to the effect that the conditions posited by the former are not sufficient for justification, whereas there is no parallel objection to the latter. The explanation for this asymmetry is, I believe, that support facts are stubbornly external. What I mean by this is the following: a belief that p will not be justified unless all of the mental factors that would contribute to its justification offer good reasons to believe that p. If this is so, then any attempt to internalize support factors will fail—for, if the theory is right that the internalized version of the old support factor is a necessary condition on justification, then it will be wrong in the identification of the sufficient conditions.

An analogy with Lewis Carroll's tortoise might help explain the predicament that the mentalist finds himself in with respect to support facts, and the asymmetry between the mentalist and the externalist in this respect.<sup>14</sup> Remember that, in Carroll's story, the Tortoise accepts (A) and (B), and yet refuses to accept (Z):

(A) Things that are equal to the same are equal to each other.

(B) The two sides of this Triangle are things that are equal to the same.

(Z) The two sides of this Triangle are equal to each other.

The Tortoise then challenges Achilles to convince him to accept (Z). Achilles tries to get the tortoise to accept:

(C) If (A) and (B) are true, then (Z) must be true.

But by now Achilles is doomed, because the Tortoise will accept (C) as well, and still refuse to accept (Z). The moral that is generally extracted from this story is that there is a crucial difference between premises and rules of inference. Rules of inference have as counterparts statements that can be added as premises to any argument, but any argument is going to use some rule of inference or other, and trying to do without them by adding their counterparts as premises leads to an infinite regress. That is why axiomatic systems need rules as well as axioms.

The mentalist finds himself in a position analogous to the one the Tortoise puts Achilles in. Support facts are the analogous of rules of inference, and just as the Tortoise

forces Achilles to try to replace rules of inference with their counterparts incorporated as premises, the mentalist tries to replace support facts with mental counterparts. And, just as Achilles fails because any argument needs real rules of inference, and not just premises that mirror rules of inference, the mentalist fails as well because, whenever a subject is justified in believing a proposition, that is partly so because of the existence of support facts, and not just mental facts that mirror them.

The externalist, by contrast, doesn't play the Tortoise's game. The externalist recognizes that support facts are needed, and that they belong to a different category from evidence facts, and refuses to try to incorporate support facts as (mental) evidence. Thus, the externalist avoids the regress that dooms the mentalist.

I have argued that if support facts are conceived of in mentalist terms, then they will not be up to the task of providing the necessary link between evidence and the proposition justified. The argument will obviously need to be tested against particular mentalist proposals regarding support facts. In the remainder of this section I discuss the two main mentalist characterizations of support facts that I am aware of, those of Richard Foley and Matthias Steup.<sup>15</sup>

For Foley, what justifies, for instance, Sally's belief that q are: (i) her justified belief that p, and (ii) the fact that, if she were to reflect deeply upon the matter, she would believe that the fact that p is a good reason for her to believe that q. The inclusion of (ii) as a factor relevant to the justification of Sally's belief that q is Foley's attempt to incorporate support facts in a mentalistic framework (although Foley himself does not express the point in this terminology). But now consider the following question: is it the case that the obtaining of the facts mentioned in (i) and (ii) is a good reason for Sally to



believe that  $q$ ? If the answer to this question is “No,” then it seems that Sally is not justified in believing that  $q$  after all, and so the theory has a counterexample. If the combination of the two mental facts mentioned in (i) and (ii) is not a good reason to believe that  $q$ , then why would Sally be justified in believing that  $p$  in virtue of (i) and (ii)? If, on the other hand, the answer is “Yes,” then that fact (the fact that the obtaining of (i) and (ii) is a good reason for Sally to believe that  $q$ ) is also something the obtaining of which justifies Sally’s belief that  $q$ . But this shows that Foley’s theory is inadequate, because it fails to recognize a factor that is epistemically relevant.

The problem runs deep: similar remarks would apply to any theory that tries to mentalize support facts by identifying them with some mental attitude towards the proposition that the evidence offers good reason to believe in the proposition in question. To do that is, in effect, to identify a support fact with the fact that the subject has a mental attitude towards that support fact itself. Unless support facts are much stranger beasts than we have reason to believe, they do not behave that way.<sup>16</sup>

But there are ways of attempting to mentalize support facts that do not identify them with any propositional attitude. For Steup, what justifies, for instance, Steve’s belief that  $q$  are: (i) his undergoing experience  $e$ , and (ii) the fact that he has a memory impression of a track record of both perceptual and memorial success. The inclusion of (ii) as a factor relevant to the justification of Steve’s belief that  $q$  is Steup’s attempt to incorporate support facts in a mentalistic framework (although Steup himself does not express the point in this terminology). But now consider the following question: is it the case that the obtaining of the facts mentioned in (i) and (ii) is a good reason for Steve to believe that  $q$ ? If the answer to this question is “No,” then it seems that Steve is not

justified in believing that  $q$  after all, and so the theory has a counterexample. If the combination of the two mental facts mentioned in (i) and (ii) is not a good reason to believe that  $q$ , then why would Steve be justified in believing that  $p$  in virtue of (i) and (ii)? If, on the other hand, the answer is “Yes,” then that fact (the fact that the obtaining of (i) and (ii) is a good reason for Steve to believe that  $q$ ) is also something the obtaining of which justifies Steve’s belief that  $q$ . But this shows that Steup’s theory is inadequate, because it fails to recognize a factor that is epistemically relevant.

There is another problem with mentalists theories that arises, too, because of their attempt to make support facts mental. In the case of Foley, the problem has been seen by many commentators,<sup>17</sup> but (although I won’t develop them here) I believe that similar remarks would apply to Steup’s theory.<sup>18</sup> According to Foley, the relevant perspective in evaluating the rationality of a belief is constituted by the subject’s deepest epistemic standards—or, what Foley believes to be equivalent, the epistemic standards that the subject would have if she were to reflect deeply.<sup>19</sup> But consider someone who has totally misguided epistemic standards, like the standard that only necessarily true propositions are likely to be true, or perhaps the standard that only necessarily false propositions are likely to be true, or the standard that no proposition whatsoever is likely to be true.<sup>20</sup> All of these are either too narrow or too broad to capture as justified precisely those beliefs that we would intuitively count as justified. So, for instance, if a subject facing a snowball in optimal snowball-viewing conditions and with no defeaters available were to refrain from believing that there is a snowball in front of him, then that attitude of his would be justified according to Foley provided only that he has a deep epistemic standard that licenses that attitude—for example, if he has the standard that only necessarily false

propositions are likely to be true. But even if the subject has that standard, he would be irrational. Let's say that if a belief satisfies Foley's definition for being justified, then it is Foley-rational. The objection, then, is that Foley-rationality gives the correct results for a subject only when the subject holds the correct epistemic principles.

Foley has addressed this objection.<sup>21</sup> His project, he reminds us, arises from what is essentially a Cartesian standpoint: the standpoint of the believer who has nothing but his own cognitive resources in order to make sense of the world. If that is the question, Foley says, then

it is unhelpful for you to be told to believe some claim only if it is true, and it is equally unhelpful for you to be told to use only reliable methods. Part of your predicament is to determine from your perspective what methods are reliable. In exactly the same way, it is unhelpful for Alston, Feldman and Swain to suggest to you, as each does, that you are to believe only that for which you have objectively adequate grounds, grounds that in fact make probable what you believe. For once again, part of your predicament is that of determining from your perspective what grounds are objectively adequate. And this is something that you can do more or less reasonably.<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, Foley could have added, it is unhelpful for you to be told anything at all, for part of your predicament is that of determining under what conditions to believe what you are told.<sup>23</sup>

Maybe Foley has a point here. If there is indeed such a predicament as the one pictured in the Cartesian standpoint, the predicament of figuring out what to believe on the basis of only your own cognitive resources at that moment, then maybe the most reasonable answer to that predicament is to believe all and only those propositions that are Foley-rational for you. But I doubt that there is any such predicament. We start to believe without trying to figure out what to believe, and thus we learn, not only facts but, crucially, new methods of belief formation (like the fundamental method of asking someone who knows). By the time that we become reflective and try to explicitly figure out what to believe—if that time ever comes—we are already in media res, armed with “epistemic principles” that license not only the use of glasses, but also asking other people, and appealing to science, etc. At that point, the “predicament” no longer seems that pressing.

Even if we grant Foley his Cartesian starting point, though, what is basically the same objection remains. For now Foley would be right with respect to the answer to the question, “What am I to believe if I am in the Cartesian predicament?”, but he would be wrong in thinking that that question has any special epistemological significance. The most reasonable thing to do for someone in the Cartesian predicament and with the deep epistemic principle that only necessarily false propositions are likely to be true is for her to believe those propositions that she thinks are necessarily false. But results like this one show that, in effect, to be Foley-rational in your beliefs is not necessarily to be epistemically justified.

As we said before, then, the two notions (that of Foley-rationality and that of epistemic justification) would be coextensive only for those subjects with true deep

epistemic principles. And, for those subjects, part of what justifies them is precisely the fact that their deep epistemic principles are true. For instance, if one of Steve's deep epistemic principles is that anyone that undergoes experience  $e$  is thereby prima facie justified in believing that  $p$ , then a crucial part of what justifies him in believing that  $p$  is the fact that anyone that undergoes experience  $e$  is thereby prima facie justified in believing that  $p$ , and not the fact that he has this deep epistemic principle.<sup>24</sup> That is, what makes Foley-rationality not even coextensive with epistemic justification is Foley's attempt to internalize support facts by making them mental. Foley's deep epistemic principles are not support facts themselves, but only the counterpart of support facts. As such, they can be epistemically effective only if they are the counterpart of true support facts, and in that case their effectiveness derives from the support fact itself.

In this section I have argued that it is hard to make sense of the claim that support facts are mental—in general and in the particular cases of Foley and Steup. I would like to conclude my defense of premise 2 of my argument by pointing out two things. First, some philosophers might believe that support facts are irreducible—that is, that it is not possible to understand facts of the form  $p$  is a good reason to believe that  $q$  in terms that do not already presuppose the language of reasons. I see no special reason for being pessimistic in this way, but what is important to note is that, even if support facts are irreducible in this way, this doesn't at all mean that they are mental. Thus, claiming that support facts are irreducible is no objection to my premise 2. Second, allowing that factive propositional attitudes (like knowing) are mental states will not help either. Of course, if we add to  $M_S$  the fact that the subject knows that the elements of  $M_S$  are good reason to think that the belief in question is true, then, given that knowledge is factive, it

will be true that the elements of  $M_S$  are good reason to think that the belief in question is true. But, first, few epistemologists would be comfortable with such a strong “perspectival” requirement on justification; and second, and more importantly, the same objection to Foley’s theory applies here as well: when the subject knows that a support fact obtains between his evidence and his belief, what is doing the epistemic work, so to speak, is the support fact itself, and not his knowledge of it. I turn now to the defense of premise 1.

#### **IV. If mentalism is true, then support facts are mental**

If I am right so far, then mentalists cannot deny that support facts are not mental. They can still resist the support objection, though, by claiming that mentalism doesn’t entail that support facts are mental. In the rest of this paper I consider one position of that kind, suggested by work by Conee and Feldman.

In “Internalism Defended,” Conee and Feldman consider and address an objection related to, but different from, the support objection.<sup>25</sup> After presenting their definition of mentalism, which is roughly similar to the one we started with,<sup>26</sup> they go on to say:

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.

The second thesis spells out a principal implication of S:

M     If any two possible individuals are exactly alike mentally, then they are alike justificationally, e.g., the same beliefs are justified for them to the same extent.<sup>27</sup>

As I understand them, when Conee and Feldman say that internalism as they characterize it is "committed" to S and M, they mean that mentalism entails S and M—but they don't mean that the converse entailment holds. Indeed, as we shall see, I think that the converse entailment doesn't hold. But I will consider, at the end of this section, what can be said about the support objection if mentalism is taken to be equivalent to M.

Later in the paper, Conee and Feldman consider an objection that is related to the support objection. About a case like the ones used to motivate the support objection, they say

We might then say, as a first approximation, that the justifiers for q are (i) the belief that p together with its justification, and (ii) the fact that p supports q. The fact in (ii) is not itself an internal state, and so it might be thought that internalists

are faced with the difficult task of finding some internal representation of this state to serve as a justifier.

The objection would continue, then, in one of two non-exclusive ways: first, it can be pointed out that the alleged consequence is not intuitive—there are many cases of subjects that are not sophisticated enough or, for some other reason, don't believe that their evidence justifies their doxastic attitudes, and yet we count them as being justified; second, it can be pointed out that not even sophisticated epistemologists agree with each other about specific instances of justificatory relations—some philosophers think, e.g., that merely having an experience as of  $p$  is all the evidence one needs to be prima facie justified in believing that  $p$  (when  $p$  is a simple proposition about the external world), whereas other philosophers think that other beliefs are needed as well. At most one of them is right, and yet surely even those who are wrong are justified in believing some simple proposition about the external world. So, given that mentalism entails that neither the unsophisticated subjects (who don't have beliefs about justificatory relations) nor the sophisticated philosophers (who are wrong about what those relations are) are justified, mentalism is wrong.

The support objection is that mentalism entails that support facts are mental states, and this is clearly false; the objection that Conee and Feldman are considering in the passage quoted is different: it is the objection that mentalism entails that a subject is justified only if she believes that her evidence supports her beliefs, and this is clearly false. Let's call this latter objection the "higher-order requirement" objection. The support objection and the higher-order requirement objection, then, are different;



nevertheless, what Conee and Feldman say about the higher-order requirement objection can be used to try to answer the support objection.<sup>28</sup>

In reply to the higher-order requirement objection, Conee and Feldman say the following:

There is a sense in which  $p$ 's support for  $q$  is a "justifier." It is part of an explanation of the fact that the person's belief in  $q$  is justified. But this does not imply that internalists are committed to the view that there must be some internal representation of this fact. It may be that a person's being in the state described by (i) is sufficient for the belief that  $q$  to be justified. If so, then all individuals mentally alike in that they share that state are justified in believing  $q$ . The fact in (ii) may help to account for the justification without the person making any mental use of that fact.<sup>29</sup>

If both (i) and (ii) are necessary for  $S$  to be justified in believing that  $p$ , then (i) can be sufficient by itself only if (ii) is necessarily true. This is precisely, I think, what Conee and Feldman are hinting at here: that support facts are necessary. In what follows I argue that it is by no means established that all support facts are necessary, and that, even if we grant that they are, the support objection is still fatal.

First, then, it is by no means established that all support facts are necessary. In this regard, it is interesting to note that mentalists who wish to mentalize support facts will, in general, have to think that support facts obtain contingently. This is obviously so in the cases of Foley and Steup discussed above: it is contingent whether or not Sally has

a deep epistemic principle that licenses the move from  $p$  to  $q$ , and it is contingent whether or not Steve has a memory impression of a track record of both perceptual and memorial success.<sup>30</sup>

Conee and Feldman would likely reply “So much the worse for mentalists who want to mentalize support facts.” And, indeed, in the specific cases under examination it is hard not to sympathize with Conee and Feldman on this issue. It seems that our subjects are justified in believing  $q$  no matter what worlds they are in, as long as they are justified in believing that  $p$  (in Sally’s case) or as long as they are undergoing experience  $e$ . That is, it seems that, in this case, Conee and Feldman are right to say that (i) is sufficient for the belief that  $q$  to be justified for  $S$ .<sup>31</sup>

But take a different case. Suppose that, in this case,  $q$  is the belief that all swans are white, and  $p$  is a conjunction of beliefs of the sort swan<sub>1</sub> is white, swan<sub>2</sub> is white, ..., swan<sub>n</sub> is white, for some fairly large number  $n$ . In fact, pick  $n$  so that the inductive argument from  $p$  to  $q$  is a very good one in our world. It seems that, in this case as well, the subject (let her be Sally again) is justified in believing that  $q$  because of (i) the belief that  $p$  together with its justification, and (ii) the fact that  $p$  supports  $q$ . But in this case it is far from clear that Sally’s being in the state described by (i) is sufficient for her belief that  $q$  to be justified, for it is far from clear that (ii) states a necessary fact. Therefore, it is far from clear, in this case, that all individuals mentally alike in that they all satisfy (i) will be justified in believing that  $q$ . Take, for instance, Steve, an individual in a world where most swans are black. He is still, somehow, justified in believing  $p$  (for instance, the region of the world where he acquires information is a region where most swans are white)—but is he justified in believing  $q$ ? Of course, he doesn’t know  $q$ , if only because  $q$

is false. But it is plausible to hold that Steve is not even justified in believing  $q$ —precisely because  $p$  doesn't support  $q$  in his world, that is, precisely because (ii) doesn't obtain. In other words, the suggestion is that (even though the subject need not be aware of this) a sample must be representative if an inductive inference is going to justify belief in its conclusion, and that whether a sample is representative is a contingent matter.

Conee and Feldman could reply in one of two ways. First, they could say that Steve is justified after all. The only obvious way to do this would be to say that the inductive argument on which he relies is still a good argument in his world. But this is something hard to say if we choose the example carefully, so that the argument is, intuitively, very bad indeed.

Second, they could say that Steve is not justified in believing that  $q$  in a world where almost all swans are black, but this doesn't affect mentalism because Sally is not justified in believing  $q$  in our world either. Being justified in believing  $p$  is not, in this case, good evidence for a subject to believe that  $q$ : in addition, the subject must justifiably believe that her world is a normal one, or that the principle of uniformity of nature is true, or some other proposition to the effect that there are no obstacles to moving from  $p$  to  $q$ . If she does have such a belief, then she is justified in believing that  $q$ , but so will be any mental duplicate of hers.

But it seems to me that this is not a clearly good answer either. What is suggested is that even though (ii) (the fact that  $p$  supports  $q$ ) might be a factor that justifies  $S$  in believing that  $p$ , this is not a counterexample to mentalism. It is not a counterexample, the suggestion is, because the obtaining of (i) (that  $S$  is justified in believing that  $q$ ) is, together with a further condition (namely, that  $S$  is also justified in believing, say, that the

principle of the uniformity of nature is true), sufficient for S's being justified in believing that p—and, so, every subject mentally like S in that she also satisfies (i) and is justified in believing in the principle of the uniformity of nature is such that she will be justified in believing that p. But is this last claim true? Remember Steve. He might also be justified in believing in the principle of the uniformity of nature—the belief is, to be sure, false, but, after all, the world around him is uniform. However, the argument from p plus the principle of the uniformity of nature to q is still very bad. In fact, all that has changed in the argument is that we have included as a premise a statement of the rule that took us from the original set of premises to the conclusion. If the original argument is bad, then any argument obtained by this transformation is also going to be bad.

I don't think that these are knockdown arguments against Conee and Feldman's claim that all support facts are necessary. Indeed, I think that some version of the first answer—the one that consists in insisting that Steve is justified—could, perhaps, be developed in a promising way. But it is important to point out that Conee and Feldman's defense against the higher-order requirements objection works only if all support facts are necessary, and this is a debatable claim that they haven't argued for.

Be that as it may, I want to grant, for the sake of argument, that all support facts are necessary. There is a much more serious problem for mentalism. The claim that support facts are necessary allows Conee and Feldman to say that, even though (ii) is a factor that plays a role in the justification of p for S, this is not a counterexample to M—that is, to the claim that two mental duplicates must be epistemic duplicates as well. But, as the support objection shows, acceptance of the italicized claim is already a

refutation of mentalism—not of M, which is a consequence of mentalism, but of mentalism itself.<sup>32</sup>

Remember that (ii) is the claim that  $p$  supports  $q$ . This fact, Conee and Feldman agree, is not a mental state of S. So, given that (ii) is a factor that contributes to the fact that  $p$  is justified for S, then something that is not a mental state is a factor that contributes to the fact that  $p$  is justified for S. But mentalism is the claim that if something is a factor that is relevant to the justificatory status of a belief for a subject S, then that factor is a mental state of S. So mentalism is false. And whether M itself is shown to be false or not is completely irrelevant. Remember that, after granting that (ii) does play a role in justifying  $p$  for S, Conee and Feldman remark that “this does not imply that internalists are committed to the view that there must be some internal representation of this fact.” Indeed it doesn’t, but it surely implies that mentalists are committed to the view that the fact itself is mental.

## **V. Conclusion**

Mentalism is refuted by these considerations only if I am right that mentalism entails M but is not in turn entailed by M. So Conee and Feldman could say, in reply, that I interpreted them incorrectly: when they say that mentalism is “committed” to M they mean not only that mentalism entails M, but that it is equivalent to M. There is some textual evidence that supports this alternative interpretation.<sup>33</sup> For instance, when considering Alston’s theory that a belief is justified for a subject only if the evidence on which the subject bases that belief makes it objectively probable that the belief is true, Conee and Feldman say:

If actual frequencies of association, or something else external to the mind and contingent, can make Alston's objective probability vary while the internal grounds remain the same, then his theory is a kind of externalism by our standards. But if it is necessary that the same grounds make the same beliefs objectively probable, then Alston's theory conforms to M and qualifies as a version of internalism. This seems exactly right: it is internalism if and only if contingent factors external to the mind cannot make an epistemic difference. (Conee and Feldman "Internalism Defended," p. 234, my emphasis.)

There is, of course, nothing preventing Conee and Feldman from stipulating that mentalism is to be equivalent to M—after all, they introduced the term in the epistemological literature! But there is still a substantive question in the background that cannot be dissolved by linguistic stipulation: which version of mentalism is worth arguing about, one according to which it is equivalent to M or one according to which it is stronger? To some extent, of course, it is worth getting it right with respect to both varieties of mentalism. A central issue regarding whether M is true is whether support facts obtain necessarily or not—an issue that received a preliminary discussion in the last section but that will, I believe, repay further scrutiny.<sup>34</sup> But mentalism is supposed to be a kind of internalism, and whether M is true or not is a tangential matter with respect to whether an interesting kind of internalism is true. No theory that allows an external factor such as (ii) to play a justificatory role is going to be internalist in any interesting sense. If internalism were simply the claim that all the factors that justify a belief are internal

factors except those that are external, then it wouldn't be a theory worth considering. And M comes awfully close to saying exactly that, for it allows external factors to play a role in the justification of beliefs, as long as those external factors obtain necessarily.

The failure of M to capture an interesting sense of internalism is related to the general failure of supervenience theses to capture interesting dependence relations. Suppose that we want to be physicalists about mental states. If we try to capture our physicalism in terms of a supervenience thesis, we might try something like this:

P      If any two possible individuals are exactly alike physically, then they are alike mentally.

But now consider what would be the case if there were a ghostly (purely non-physical) mental state that is necessary for every subject to be in. That is a situation that no physicalist should be happy to countenance, and yet it is compatible with P. For that reason, P doesn't adequately capture physicalism. Similarly, it is precisely because M is compatible with (necessarily obtaining) external factors affecting the justificatory status of a belief that M doesn't adequately capture internalism.

For those reasons, I think that the interesting internalism/externalism dispute is about whether mentalism as I have defined it is true—and not about whether M is true.<sup>35</sup> I have been arguing that, with respect to this dispute at least, we should all be externalists now. But I also suspect that, once it is made clear what support facts are and why a mere supervenience thesis cannot capture an interesting sense of mentalism, we are (almost) all externalists now. To be sure, there might be some (Foley and Steup among them,

perhaps) who will still wish to defend mentalism even in this sense. But my suspicion is that some mentalists (like Conee and Feldman) are such only in name, and that once the difference between M and mentalism is clearly made, they too will realize that externalism is true. One can only hope.

## NOTES

\* Thanks to Manuel Comesaña, Earl Conee, Carolina Sartorio, Larry Shapiro, Elliott Sober and Ernest Sosa for helpful comments on a draft of this paper.

<sup>1</sup> Ernest Sosa calls this kind of internalism “Chisholmian Internalism of Justification” in his “Skepticism and the Internal/External Divide,” in Greco and Sosa (eds.), The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology (Blackwell), 1999, pp. 145-47. Richard Feldman and Earl Conee call it “Accessibilism” in their “Internalism Defended,” in Hilary Kornblith (ed.), Epistemology: Internalism and Externalism (Blackwell), 2001, pp. 231-60. Proponents of this kind of internalism include Roderick Chisholm, Theory of Knowledge, 3<sup>rd</sup>. ed. (Prentice Hall), 1989 and Richard Fumerton, Metaepistemology and Skepticism (Rowman and Littlefield), 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Alvin Goldman, “What is Justified Belief?,” in George Pappas, ed., Justification and Knowledge (D. Reidel), pp. 1-23 and Epistemology and Cognition (Harvard University Press), 1986. Recently, John Hawthorne and Brian Weatherson have argued that maybe we should think more carefully about whether we can know a priori that our



belief-forming methods are justified—cf. John Hawthorne, “Deeply Contingent A Priori Knowledge,” Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, September 2002, pp. 247-69, and Brian Weatherson, “Scepticism, Rationality and Externalism,” unpublished.

<sup>3</sup> Sosa calls this “Cartesian Internalism of Justification,” and Conee and Feldman call it “mentalism,” the label that I adopt. The foremost defenders of mentalism in contemporary epistemology are Conee and Feldman themselves—cf. also Ralph Wedgwood, “Internalism Explained,” Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 65 (2002), pp. 349-69, and Richard Foley and Matthias Steup, whose work I discuss below. As will become clear in what follows, one can be an externalist in the sense of not being a mentalist and yet be neutral regarding accessibilism (that is why I said that only some externalists deny the armchair character of epistemology). See note 32.

<sup>4</sup> I understand “mental states” broadly, so that dispositions and, more generally, mental conditions of a subject count as mental states. In what follows I limit my attention to belief, although what I said can be generalized to disbelief and suspension of judgment as well. My argument against mentalism still applies even if, with Williamson, we consider factive propositional attitudes (such as knowledge itself) as mental states—cf. Timothy Williamson, Knowledge and Its Limits (Oxford University Press), 2002, chapters 1-3. I deal with Conee and Feldman’s official definition of mentalism below, in section IV, and in the conclusion I deal with the question whether it is (or it should be) equivalent to my definition.

<sup>5</sup> Sally's case is a case of non-basic justification, because she is justified in believing a proposition only because she is justified in believing a different proposition, whereas Steve's case is a case of basic justification, because he is justified in believing a proposition but not because he is justified in believing a different one. It is also usual to distinguish between doxastic and propositional justification. A rough characterization of the distinction could go as follows: for the proposition that p to be justified for you it is enough for it to be the case that belief would be the appropriate doxastic attitude for you to have with respect to p if you were to consider the matter, independently of whether you believe that p or not (and, if you do, independently of the reasons for which you believe it); to be doxastically justified in actually believing that p, however, more is needed—intuitively, your belief has to be sustained for reasons which justify the proposition for you. The distinction is compatible with different accounts of doxastic and propositional justification, and with different accounts of the relations between these notions. It is also important to note that I am talking here about prima facie justification, which can be defeated by contrary evidence.

<sup>6</sup> I leave it open whether what is part of Sally's evidence is the fact that her belief that p is justified or just her belief that p, but only in virtue of the fact that it is justified—deciding between these two options would be important for the issue discussed in note 9.

<sup>7</sup> One alternative here is to say that there is nothing that justifies Steve in believing that the streets are wet that is different from the fact that he sees that the streets are wet—something like this is what some disjunctivists might have in mind. Along similar lines, Williamson has argued that beliefs can justify further beliefs only if they amount to knowledge (Knowledge and its Limits, chapter 9). I argue against one main motivation for disjunctivism in the case of perceptual knowledge in my “Justified vs. Warranted Perceptual Belief: A Case Against Disjunctivism,” forthcoming in Philosophy and Phenomenological Research.

<sup>8</sup> What I do say about evidence here is compatible with Conee and Feldman’s construal of the notion in “Evidentialism,” Philosophical Studies 48 (1985), pp. 15-34.

<sup>9</sup> In Steve’s case, it seems obvious that his evidence is mental, at least if we have identified the evidence correctly. Sally’s case is complicated by the distinction mentioned in note 6. If her evidence for believing that q is her belief that p (in virtue of the fact that it is justified), then it is obvious that her evidence is mental. But if her evidence is the fact that her belief that p is justified, then Sally’s case is compatible with mentalism only if the fact that Sally is justified in believing that p is a mental state of Sally’s. Now, of course, if mentalism is true, then the fact that Sally is justified in believing that p is a mental state of Sally’s. But if this is all we can get from the example, we haven’t advanced much. In fact, I think that we can get more from the example, but not by

concentrating on Sally's evidence. So I am going to grant, for the sake of argument, that mentalism gets it right regarding both Steve's and Sally's evidence.

<sup>10</sup> For simplicity's sake I talk as if only justified beliefs and experiences could be evidence, but one might also add having certain (ostensive) memories, or having certain "intellectual seemings," as belonging to this first kind of fact.

<sup>11</sup> If support facts obtain necessarily (a possibility that I consider below), then if p supports q, it couldn't have been the case that p was not a good reason to believe that q, in which case the counterpossible "if p had not supported q, then q wouldn't have been justified" is, one might think, trivially true. But (a) it is highly debatable whether conditionals with impossible antecedents are all trivially true; and (b) we can state the fact that p's being a good reason to believe that q is a factor that contributes to the justification of q in terms other than counterfactual conditionals—for instance, by saying that any explanation of why Sally is justified in believing that q that doesn't mention the fact that her being justified in believing that p is a good reason for her to believe that q is thereby incomplete.

<sup>12</sup> One of the reasons for thinking that the support fact cannot be already included in  $M_s$  can be taken care of if support facts are partly self-referential, perhaps of the form "Evidence E plus the proposition expressed by this sentence support the proposition that

q.” But it is not clear that such sentences are even well-formed, and even if they were they certainly don’t look like they refer to mental states.

<sup>13</sup> It wouldn’t help the internalist to say that the relation of epistemic support is monotonic—so that, if some evidence supports a proposition q, then that same evidence plus any proposition (including the proposition that that evidence supports q) supports q. Besides the fact that this just seems plain wrong, if we went along with it then the externalist would have to admit that the obtaining of evidence e plus the obtaining of a support fact between e and the belief that q is a good reason to believe that q, but the truth-maker for this claim will be the fact that e supports q, which is already included among the factors that determine the justificatory status of the belief that q. In other words, if the epistemic support relation is nonmonotonic (as it surely is) then the externalist will have no problem with the “No” answer, whereas if it is monotonic then he will have no problem with the “Yes” answer.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Lewis Carroll, “What the Tortoise Said to Achilles,” Mind 4, No. 14 (1895), pp. 278-80.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Richard Foley, The Theory of Epistemic Rationality (Cambridge: MA, Harvard University Press), 1987, Working Without a Net (New York, Oxford University Press), 1993, and, for a particularly perspicuous presentation of the issue, “Chisholm’s Epistemology,” in L. Hahn (ed.), The Philosophy of Roderick Chisholm (Library of

Living Philosophers), 1997, pp. 475-98; and Matthias Steup, "Internalist Reliabilism," in Ernest Sosa and Enrique Villanueva (eds.), Philosophical Issues, Vol. 14, pp. 403-25.

<sup>16</sup> Maybe in some cases one can identify a proposition with the fact that some attitude is had towards that same proposition: take the case of a subject whose only belief has the content that he believes something—in this case, it could be argued that both the content of the belief and the fact that the subject believes it have the same truth-maker. As I say in the text, there is no reason to think that support facts are like this.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Richard Feldman, "Foley's Subjective Foundationalism," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research (1989), Vol. 50, No. 1, pp. 149-58.

<sup>18</sup> The key in applying the criticism to Steup's theory lies in noticing that the same reasons that he gives in order to require that the subject have a memory impression of a track record of both perceptual and memorial success for her sense experiences to be sources of justification for her also indicate that the memory impression in question should be accurate.

<sup>19</sup> In "Foley's Subjective Foundationalism," Feldman argues convincingly that the two things are not actually the same—the counterfactual test need not give us the subject's deepest epistemic standards. As Feldman himself notes, this is not fatal to Foley's

program, for he need not give us a way of knowing what our deepest epistemic standards are.

<sup>20</sup> Or, indeed, consider Foley's own epistemic standards, which include the "no-guarantees" thesis: that, no matter what belief we form, there is no guarantee of any sort that the belief will be true.

<sup>21</sup> In his "Reply to Alston, Feldman and Swain," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research (1989), Vol. 50, No. 1, pp. 169-188.

<sup>22</sup> Foley, "Reply to Alston, Feldman and Swain," p. 171.

<sup>23</sup> But then, how would what Foley tells us be helpful?!

<sup>24</sup> Indeed, I would argue that this latter fact is not even necessary, but I don't need to argue this in order to make my point.

<sup>25</sup> Earl Conee and Richard Feldman, "Internalism Defended," in Hilary Kornblith (ed.), Epistemology: Internalism and Externalism (Blackwell), 2001, pp. 231-260.

<sup>26</sup> They say that mentalism "is the view that a person's beliefs are justified only by things that are internal to the person's mental life," "Internalism Defended," p. 233.

<sup>27</sup> “Internalism Defended,” p. 234.

<sup>28</sup> One might take the higher-order objection to be a further move in the dialectic: if the internalist tries to deal with the support objection by internalizing support facts, then he must face the higher-order objection. This would be overkill, however: as I have argued in the previous section, the attempted mentalization of support facts fails in its own terms.

<sup>29</sup> Conee and Feldman “Internalism Defended,” pp. 251-2.

<sup>30</sup> Steup explicitly recognizes that support facts are contingent—see his “Internalist Reliabilism,” p. 408.

<sup>31</sup> Remember that the justification in question is prima facie.

<sup>32</sup> An externalist who grants that support facts are necessary can leave it open whether they can be known a priori or not, and thus externalism in this sense is perfectly compatible with accessibilism. See note 34.

<sup>33</sup> For what is worth, in personal communication neither Conee nor Feldman reported any strong feelings regarding whether they meant mentalism to be equivalent to M or to merely entail it.



<sup>34</sup> For what is worth, I think that support facts do obtain necessarily, but only in virtue of the (contingent) fact that our belief-forming practices are reliable—much like water is necessarily H<sub>2</sub>O, but only in virtue of contingent chemical facts. More cautiously, I think that a necessary (but probably not sufficient) condition for the obtaining of a support fact between some evidence and the belief in question is that the obtaining of that evidence be an actually reliable indicator of the truth of the belief in question—cf. my “The Diagonal and the Demon,” Philosophical Studies 110 (2002), pp. 249-66, and my “A Well-Founded Solution to the Generality Problem,” Philosophical Studies, forthcoming. I do not know whether this means that support facts are knowable only a posteriori or not—cf. the articles by John Hawthorne and Brian Weatherson mentioned in note 2.

<sup>35</sup> There are, of course, other interesting internalism/externalism disputes in epistemology, most notably the one regarding whether all the factors that determine the justificatory status of a belief are knowable a priori or not, but that dispute is beyond the scope of this paper.