

IS THERE ROOM FOR JUSTIFIED BELIEFS WITHOUT EVIDENCE? A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF EPISTEMIC EVIDENTIALISM

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ABSTRACT: In the first section of this paper I present epistemic evidentialism and, in the following two sections, I discuss that view with counterexamples. I shall defend that adequately supporting evidence is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for epistemic justification. Although we need epistemic elements other than evidence in order to have epistemic justification, there can be no epistemically justified belief without evidence. However, there are other kinds of justification beyond the epistemic justification, such as prudential or moral justification; therefore, there is room for justified beliefs (in a prudential or moral sense) without evidence.

KEYWORDS: evidence, evidentialism, epistemic justification, justification without evidence

Introduction

It is common to hold that beliefs need justification because, as Paul Moser says, “belief without any justification is blind, or at least unreasonable.”¹ But what is a justified or rational belief? It is often stated that a belief is justified or rational if and only if there is sufficient evidence to support that belief. But is this correct? Can a belief be rational or justified without any evidence? Is it possible that there are justified beliefs not adequately supported by evidence? In order to properly answer these issues, we need to examine carefully the view which holds that evidence is a necessary and sufficient condition for having an epistemically justified belief (that view is called ‘epistemic evidentialism’). We must survey to what extent this perspective is sound. So, in the first section of this paper I present epistemic evidentialism and, in the following two sections, I discuss that view with counterexamples. I shall defend that adequately supporting evidence is a

¹ Paul Moser, *Empirical Justification* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1985), 1.

necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for epistemic justification. Although we need epistemic elements other than evidence in order to have epistemic justification, there can be no epistemically justified belief without evidence. However, there are other kinds of justification beyond the epistemic justification, such as prudential or moral justification; therefore, there is room for justified beliefs (in a prudential or moral sense) without evidence.

1. Epistemic Evidentialism: Justified Beliefs with Evidence

Evidentialism is the view that epistemic justification has to do with the evidence and with the quality of evidence that is supported by a person. If at time *t* a person *S* has evidence that better supports a belief *B* than its denial, then *B* is justified for *S*; for example, when *S* looks at a green field that is in front of him in normal circumstances of observation, then *S*'s belief that there is something green before him is a justified belief. By contrast, if it is the denial of *B* that is better supported by the evidence available to *S* at *t*, then disbelief in *B* is justified; for example, when *S* considers the belief that sugar is sour, *S*'s gustatory experience is evidence that makes disbelief in the sourness of sugar justified. However, if *S*'s evidence is counterbalanced, then *S*'s suspension of judgment is justified. Inspired by Feldman and Conee,² and Swinburne,³ among others, we can formulate more precisely the main thesis of evidentialism in the following way:

(EJ) *B* is epistemically justified for *S* at *t* iff *S*'s evidence sufficiently supports *B* at *t*.

But (EJ) needs to be analyzed and clarified, namely: (i) what counts as *evidence*? (ii) What is it for *S* to *have* something as evidence? (iii) What is it for *S* to have something as *sufficient* evidence to support *B*? Maybe, in answering question (i), the most immediate response is to assert that "evidence" means "propositional evidence" or "inferential evidence," like the first writings of Plantinga⁴ on the epistemology of religion seem to suggest. Thus, *S*'s belief *B* is justified iff *B* is supported by arguments or on the basis of other propositions. More precisely, *S*'s evidence *E* supports *B* iff *E* consists in other propositional

² See Richard Feldman and Earl Conee, "Evidentialism," *Philosophical Studies* 48 (1985): 15-34 and Richard Feldman and Earl Conee, *Evidentialism: Essays in Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

³ See Richard Swinburne, "Evidentialism," in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Charles Taliaferro et al. (Lanham: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 681-688 and Richard Swinburne, "Evidence," in *Evidentialism and its Discontents*, ed. Trent Dougherty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 195-206.

⁴ Alvin Plantinga, "Is Belief in God Properly Basic?" *Noûs* 15 (1981): 41-51.

beliefs S has and B is supported deductively, inductively or abductively on the basis of E.

However, if we understand “evidence” in this way, then it might make sense to think that there are justified beliefs without evidence; for example, it is plausible to hold that my belief that I drank coffee today at breakfast is justified, but this belief which I hold is not based on propositional evidence. That is because when I hold this belief, I don’t usually make the following inference or argument: (first premise) I remember that I drank a coffee; (second premise) my memory is typically reliable; (conclusion) so, it is probable that I drank a coffee. Instead, this is a belief which I hold immediately, without any inference or on the base of any proposition. In the same way, I typically form justified perceptual beliefs, or justified testimonial beliefs, etc, without this type of propositional evidence. For that reason, if evidence is only propositional evidence, then I have justified beliefs without evidence.

Moreover, if we restrict evidence to propositional evidence and if a belief is justified just in case there is propositional or inferential evidence to support that belief, then we may fall into the problem of infinite regress of justification. For, if a belief B is justified just in case there is evidence for it, i.e., only if there is another propositional belief B* that supports B, then we need also another belief B** to support B*, and another belief B*** to support B**, and so on *ad infinitum*. Therefore, S’s belief is justified just in case S has an infinite number of justified beliefs. However, since S cannot have an infinite number of justified beliefs, because of the limited nature of human cognitive faculties, then it seems that S’s beliefs are never justified.

But, does it make sense to restrict evidence to propositional evidence? A lot of evidentialists claim that such a restriction is implausible and I tend to agree with them. They assert that not only propositions are the relevant sort of evidence, but also other mental states or non-doxastic states are. Nevertheless, what sorts of mental states or non-doxastic states also count as evidence? For example, Sosa holds that *experiences* count likewise as evidence;⁵ i.e., S’s experiences can provide him with reasons to believe B. These *experiences* can justify beliefs that need not be based on other beliefs or propositional evidence. In other words, these beliefs justified by experiences are basic, because they need not be grounded by inferences, arguments, or propositional evidence. In the same way, Conee and Feldman reject a restricted view of evidence and they argue for an evidentialist thesis which includes feelings and experiences. For example, they say that “part of a person’s evidence that it is a warm day might be her feeling warm.

⁵ See Ernest Sosa, “The Foundations of Foundationalism,” *Noûs* 14 (1980): 547-565.

The feeling itself is part of her evidence.”⁶ More recently they claim that “experiences can be evidence, and beliefs are only derivatively evidence (...) all ultimate evidence is experiential.”⁷ Swinburne also agrees with this.⁸ And Plantinga, including himself in the tradition of Thomas Reid, argues more recently that evidence needs not be merely propositional evidence but it can also be testimonial evidence, perceptual evidence, evidence of the senses, impulsional evidence (i.e., a felt inclination to accept something) or evidence of yet another sort⁹. For example, regarding perceptual beliefs, Plantinga holds that:

My perceptual beliefs are not ordinarily formed on the basis of *propositions about* my experience; nonetheless they are formed on the basis of my experience. You look out of the window: you are appeared to in a certain characteristic way; you find yourself with the belief that what you see is an expanse of green grass. You have *evidence* for this belief: the evidence of your senses. Your evidence is just this way of being appeared to; and you form the belief in question *on the basis of* this phenomenal imagery, this way of being appeared to.¹⁰

With this broader sense of evidence, the problems highlighted above seem to be dissolved. On the one hand, we can prevent the infinite regress of justification because we can have rightly or properly basic beliefs which are grounded noninferentially by experiences, without relying on other propositional beliefs or arguments in order to be justified. On the other hand, it allows, for example, that my belief that I drank coffee at breakfast is grounded by evidence (i.e. by experiential or impulsional evidence), although it is not grounded by propositional evidence. Thus, it seems that almost all of my justified beliefs are based on evidence: either noninferential evidence (such as being grounded by experiences) or inferential evidence (such as being grounded by other propositional beliefs). More rigorously, and inspired by Dougherty,¹¹ we can answer question (i) in the following way:

(E) S’s evidence E can support B either inferentially or noninferentially:

⁶ Feldman and Conee, *Evidentialism*, 2.

⁷ Richard Feldman and Earl Conee, “Evidence,” in *Epistemology: New Essays*, ed. Quentin Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 87-88.

⁸ See Swinburne, “Evidentialism,” 681.

⁹ See Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 185-193. If evidence is also “impulsional evidence” (or “felt attractiveness”), then we have evidence for simple mathematical or a priori beliefs.

¹⁰ Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 98.

¹¹ See Trent Dougherty and Chris Tweedt, “Religious Epistemology,” *Philosophy Compass* 10/8 (2015): 557.

Is There Room for Justified Beliefs without Evidence?

- (I) E noninferentially supports B iff E is a non-doxastic experience, broadly construed, that S has and B is an epistemically fitting response to E.
- (II) E inferentially supports B iff E consists of other justified beliefs S has and the content of E deductively, inductively, or abductively supports B's content.

After having clarified what evidence is,¹² we need to clarify what it is to *have* something as evidence. According to (EJ), only S's *own* evidence (her propositions or mental states) at t is relevant to S's being justified in believing B. But this raises some problems: does S's evidence at t include only what S actually *has currently* in mind or does it also *include everything stored* in S's mind and memory?

On the one hand, if we accept a liberal view in which what counts as evidence is everything that S has in his mind (even his deep memories of which he is now unaware), then it may happen that S is justified relative to some portion of his evidence but he is not justified relative to his total evidence (which includes long-term memories, etc). For example, suppose that we have the belief R1 that all journalists are reliable to report the news. We have justification to believe R1 because the news which we read or see from different sources seem similar. For instance, we always see that if we read in some newspaper that some important event happened, there is a strong probability that another newspaper reports the same event. But suppose further that ten years ago we heard a reliable person tell us that journalist X is always incompetent and writes fake news. So, ten years ago, we had the belief R2 that X is an unreliable journalist. However, now we are unable to bring to mind this belief R2 although it is stored deeply in our long-term memory. So, if now someone asks us whether or not X is a reliable journalist, the belief R1 which we have may give us a reason to believe R3: that X is a reliable journalist. But there is a problem: R3 is a belief that is justified for us in relation to current evidential belief R1; however R3 is not justified in relation to our total evidence (which includes memory beliefs, like R2). This is because the evidential belief R2, which is present in our long-term memories, defeats the evidential belief R1. Therefore, the belief R3 is not justified for us. But that consequence is

¹² There are other relevant accounts of evidence, like the view of Williamson in which he argues that "knowledge, and only knowledge, constitutes evidence", wherein it is defended the «*Evidence = Knowledge thesis*». See Timothy Williamson, *Knowledge and its Limits*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 185. But this view of evidence seems too narrow and austere. For further discussion about this notion of evidence see Jim Joyce, "Williamson on Evidence and Knowledge," *Philosophical Books* 45 (2004): 296–305, or Anthony Brueckner "Knowledge, Evidence, and Skepticism According to Williamson," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 70 (2005): 436–443.

odd and counterintuitive once having beliefs like R3 seems reasonable. Hence, it seems that we need a better account of *having* evidence.

We may accept a more restrictive view in which what counts as evidence is just what S actually *has currently* in mind, such as Feldman argued in his first writings on this subject.¹³ With this account the evidential belief R2 is irrelevant (because it is not evidence which we have currently and actually in mind) and, for that reason, we have justification to believe R3 based solely on our current evidential belief R1. Yet such account has its problems, namely it seems too restrictive. This is because when we are not presently thinking about the reliability of journalists or when we don't have current beliefs about it, the nonoccurrent belief R1 which is stored in our memory is not justified for us. However, this also seems counterintuitive. So, if it seems that some nonoccurrent beliefs are justified, we need a better approach of *having* evidence.

A better option to answer question (ii) seems to be a more moderate view, between those two extremes, as is advocated by Mittag¹⁴ or by Feldman and Conee.¹⁵ According to this moderate view, what counts as evidence is not merely what S actually *has currently* in mind but also some (though not all) nonoccurrent beliefs or mental states which S has. However, which, more specifically, nonoccurrent beliefs or mental states count as evidence for S? One plausible proposal is to claim that what counts as evidence are those nonoccurrent beliefs or mental states which are easily available to S upon reflection. Thereby, we are now justified in believing R3 iff our evidential belief R2 is not easily available to us upon reflection, but evidential belief R1 is easily available to us. It is true that the concept *easily available* is a bit vague, but this is not a sufficient reason to exclude this moderate approach to what having evidence amounts to. Even Feldman and Conee themselves acknowledge that it is difficult to offer a detailed account of having evidence; nonetheless they see no reason in this to give up the evidentialist theory of justification.

We have already taken a glimpse on what *evidence* is and what it is for S to *have* evidence. Now we need to clarify what it is for S to have something in the way of *sufficient* evidence. In a first attempt to understand this notion, one may be tempted to claim that some evidence E for B is sufficient iff E could convince any reasonable person that B is the case. But this criterion is too restrictive and

¹³ See Richard Feldman, "Having Evidence," in *Philosophical Analysis*, ed. David Austin (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988), 83-104.

¹⁴ See Daniel Mittag, "Evidentialism," in *The Routledge Companion to Epistemology*, ed. Duncan Pritchard (London: Routledge, 2011), 197-186.

¹⁵ See Feldman and Conee, "Evidence," 83-104.

leads to absurd consequences. For example, in many subjects it seems that we have justification to believe some proposition, yet we are unable to convince every reasonable person. This is very common in many philosophical, historical, scientific or political discussions. In this regard, Van Inwagen holds that we may have some evidence which is non communicable (or at least that we don't know how to communicate), like personal *insights* and, for that reason, we cannot convince everyone.¹⁶ Nevertheless, we may have justification and sufficient evidence.

A more plausible account of how to answer question (iii) may be to understand sufficient evidence in terms of probabilities, as Swinburne seems to defend¹⁷. So, the evidence E *sufficiently* supports B iff B is made epistemically likely by E and E is *prima facie* absent of any defeaters. In other words, S is justified to believe B and, thus, S's evidence E sufficiently supports B iff the evidence E that S has makes it more probable that B is true rather than false, where the probability in question must be greater than $\frac{1}{2}$, and this evidence E is not defeated by counterevidence E* which S has. However, if S *knows that* B, the degree of evidence must be greater than that required for mere *justification*. As Conee and Feldman hold,

a belief is well-enough justified for knowledge provided that the believer has strong evidence that supports it beyond all reasonable doubt. One has evidence that supports a proposition beyond all reasonable doubt just in case one has strong evidence in support of the proposition and no undefeated reason to doubt the proposition.¹⁸

Nevertheless, Feldman also recognizes that an understanding of sufficient evidence merely in terms of probabilities is not enough, because this view seems to imply that if S's evidence E makes it probable that B, even when S does not understand either B or E, then S is justified to believe B.¹⁹ That is, on this view, S is even justified to believe extremely complex beliefs that he is unable to understand. But if this consequence seems unacceptable to us, perhaps we may reformulate the notion as follows: evidence E provides sufficient evidence for S to

¹⁶ See Peter Van Inwagen, "It Is Wrong, Everywhere, Always, and for Anyone, to Believe Anything Upon Insufficient Evidence?" in *The Possibility of Resurrection and Other Essays in Christian Apologetics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 30.

¹⁷ See Swinburne, "Evidentialism," 683 and Swinburne, "Evidence," 195.

¹⁸ Richard Feldman and Earl Conee, "Self-Profiles: Earl Conee and Richard Feldman," in *A Companion to Epistemology*, ed. Jonathan Dancy and Ernest Sosa (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2010), 123.

¹⁹ See Richard Feldman, "Evidence," in *A Companion to Epistemology*, ed. Jonathan Dancy and Ernest Sosa (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2010), 350.

believe B iff E makes B probable, E is *prima facie* absent of any defeaters, and S *grasps* the connection between E and B. But even this formulation of the notion has its problems: it seems to over-intellectualize justification since, for example, children usually seem not to grasp such a connection between E and B. Thus, it is very difficult to give necessary and simultaneously sufficient conditions for having “sufficient evidence.” But I think that an understanding of this notion in terms of probabilities is at least a necessary condition.

Before discussing the necessary and sufficient conditions of (EJ), it is worth noting some brief motivation to hold (EJ). First of all, (EJ) is pre-theoretically plausible since when we think intuitively about what makes a belief justified for S, we assume that S must have adequate reasons to hold that belief and having adequate reasons is, after all, having sufficient evidence – for example, it seems intuitively plausible that if S has no reason or evidence to believe B (in other words, if B has no ground in S’s epistemic states), then B is not justified for S. Secondly, there is a strong and important tradition in the history of philosophy, in which (EJ) is defended. Philosophers like John Locke, David Hume, William Clifford, Bertrand Russell, Roderick Chisholm, among many others, have argued for (EJ). Thirdly, there are new arguments seeking to show that (EJ) is true, as those presented by Adler,²⁰ Shah,²¹ and Dougherty.²² However, my aim in this paper is not to look over these arguments or motivations, but only to discuss the necessary and sufficient conditions for (EJ).

2. Against the Sufficient Condition for (EJ): Evidence without Justification?

As we saw in the previous section, (EJ) holds that having sufficient evidence is a necessary and sufficient condition for epistemic justification. Is this correct? Can there be evidence without justification and, in turn, justification without evidence? To examine this, let’s start with some strong objections to the proposed sufficient condition. Claiming that evidence is not sufficient for epistemic justification is to hold that:

(EJ*) S’s evidence sufficiently supports B at t, but B is not epistemically justified for S at t.

²⁰ See Jonathan Adler, *Belief’s Own Ethics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 31.

²¹ See Nishi Shah, “A New Argument for Evidentialism,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 56 (2006): 481–498.

²² See Trent Dougherty, introduction to *Evidentialism and its Discontents* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5.

Is There Room for Justified Beliefs without Evidence?

A first challenge to (EJ), or defense of (EJ)*, is presented by Feldman with the following counterexample:

(Ex1) A professor and his wife are going to the movies to see *Star Wars, Episode 68*. The professor has in his hand today's newspaper, which contains the listing of movies at the theater and their times. He remembers that yesterday's paper said that *Star Wars, Episode 68* was showing at 8:00. Knowing that movies usually show at the same time each day, he believes that it is showing today at 8:00 as well. He does not look in today's paper. When they get to the theater, they discover that the movie started at 7:30. When they complain at the box office about the change, they are told that the correct time was listed in the newspaper today. The professor's wife says that he should have looked in today's paper and he was not justified in thinking it started at 8:00.²³

With (Ex1) we see that the professor seems to have sufficient evidence to believe, when he was driving to the theater, that the movie starts at 8:00. This belief is based on his memory beliefs, namely his remembering that yesterday's newspaper reported that the movie was showing at 8:00 and that movies are commonly showed at the same time every day. So, if he has sufficient evidence, then he is justified in his belief. Nevertheless, (Ex1) shows that the professor's belief is not justified (since if he had looked for additional evidence, for example, if he had read today's newspaper, then he would find a defeater for his belief). Thus, (Ex1) seems to illustrate (EJ)*.

Is this a good objection to (EJ)? Maybe not. One possible reply to this objection is to include a search for defeaters in the notion of "sufficient evidence." So, in (Ex1) the professor does not have sufficient evidence for his belief because he could easily gather defeating evidence (if he had read today's newspaper). However, perhaps this notion would be far too demanding. So, another possible reply is to start with a question formulated by Feldman: "what should S believe now, given the situation he's actually in?" If we apply this question to (Ex1), it seems plausible to hold that the professor is in a situation (when he was driving to the theater) in which he is justified to believe that the movie starts at 8:00 and, in this situation, he also has good evidence for that belief. So, given the professor's actual situation, it is reasonable to believe what he believes. Thereby, (Ex1) does not seem to be a good counterexample to (EJ).

Another criticism of (EJ) is presented by Hilary Kornblith. He argues that it is not enough for a person to have evidence or sufficient evidence in order to be epistemically justified, but that it is also relevant how this evidence is gathered by

²³ Richard Feldman, *Epistemology* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2003), 47.

that person. Namely, it is important to act in an epistemically responsible way in forming beliefs, where

epistemically responsible action is action guided by a desire to have true beliefs. The epistemically responsible agent will thus desire to have true beliefs and thus desire to have his beliefs produced by reliable processes.²⁴

If a person neglects further evidence, or if she acquires evidence by dubious means, even in a situation in which she has a belief supported by sufficient evidence, it seems that her belief is not properly justified. Here is an example:

(Ex2) Jones is a headstrong young physicist, eager to hear the praise of his colleagues. After Jones reads a paper, a senior colleague presents an objection. Expecting praise and unable to tolerate criticism, Jones pays no attention to the objection; while the criticism is devastating, it fails to make any impact on Jones' beliefs because Jones has not even heard it. Jones' conduct is epistemically irresponsible; had Jones' action been guided by a desire to have true beliefs, he would have listened carefully to the objection. Since his continuing to believe the doctrines presented in his paper is due, in part, to this epistemically irresponsible act, his continued belief is unjustified.²⁵

In this (Ex2), we can assert that Jones has sufficient evidence for his belief; however, his belief is not justified for him because he is neglecting important information and objections. In other words, he is culpable by failing to take into account relevant information and, for that reason, he has not performed an epistemically responsible action. So, evidence is insufficient for justification; more is required (beyond evidence) in order to have justification. But is this a good objection to (EJ)? Resorting to the question formulated by Feldman (what should S believe now, given the situation he's actually in?), we cannot say that Jones is justified in the same way as the professor in (Ex1). Because, given the situation in which Jones is actually in, Jones should listen to the criticism and the additional evidence presented by the senior colleague. So, there seems to be a disanalogy between (Ex2) and (Ex1).

Another interesting objection to (EJ) is presented by Plantinga. He concedes that evidence (in a broad sense) is necessary for justification or warrant. So, if a belief has justification or warrant, then that belief has sufficient evidence. However, he also argues that "no amount of evidence of this sort is by itself sufficient for warrant" or justification.²⁶ In other words, evidence is not a

²⁴ Hilary Kornblith, "Justified Belief and Epistemically Responsible Action," *The Philosophical Review* 92 (1983): 47-48.

²⁵ Kornblith, "Justified Belief and Epistemically Responsible Action," 36.

²⁶ Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 192.

sufficient condition for justification. Plantinga's argument may be summarized as follows: suppose I see a tree; so, my inclination to believe that what I see is a tree together with my perceptual experience (my being appeared to treely) constitutes evidence for the belief that I see a tree. But suppose further that my perceptual faculties are not functioning in a proper way. For example, because of this malfunction I have often this perceptual experience of a tree even when there is no tree in the surroundings. For that reason, it seems that I am not justified in my belief that I see a tree since this belief is merely accidental. Thus, evidence is not enough for justification or warrant; we also need proper function or absence of cognitive pathology,²⁷ such as Plantinga maintains:

So the evidentialist is right: where there is warrant, there is evidence. Having this evidence, however, or having this evidence and forming belief on the basis of it, is not sufficient for warrant: proper function is also required. And given proper function, we also have evidence: impulsional evidence, to be sure, but also whatever sort is required, in the situation at hand, by design plan; and that will be the evidence that confers warrant.²⁸

This thesis is also defended with another counterexample presented by Plantinga:

(Ex3) An aging forest ranger lives in a cottage in the mountains. There is a set of wind chimes hanging from the bough just outside the kitchen window; when these wind chimes sound, the ranger forms the belief that the wind is blowing. As he ages, his hearing (unbeknownst to him) deteriorates; he can no longer hear the chimes. He is also sometimes subject to small auditory hallucinations in which he is appeared to in that wind-chimes way; and occasionally these hallucinations occur when the wind is blowing.²⁹

In this last case, it seems that the forest ranger has sufficient evidence (i.e. experiential auditory evidence) to support the belief that the wind is blowing. But, even so, this belief seems not to be justified or warranted for him, since his cognitive faculties are deteriorated and he has auditory hallucinations; in other words, his cognitive faculties are not functioning properly. And if a person's cognitive faculties are not functioning properly, the beliefs that person holds do not seem to be justified in the same way as when that person has properly

²⁷ Plantinga is more interested with concept of *warrant* (that which makes the difference between knowledge and mere true belie) than that *justification*. But, we can also apply the proper function theory to concept of epistemic justification, like Michael Bergmann, *Justification without Awareness: A Defense of Epistemic Externalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

²⁸ Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 193.

²⁹ Alvin Plantinga, "Proper Functionalism," in *The Continuum Companion to Epistemology*, ed. Andrew Cullison (London: Continuum, 2012), 125-126.

functioning cognitive faculties. So, my conclusion in this section is that (EJ*) seems true; evidence is not sufficient for epistemic justification, at least it is not sufficient for an epistemic justification from an objective or third-person perspective. For that end, we need other epistemic elements (like epistemic responsibilism, reliabilism,³⁰ or proper functionalism) beyond evidence in order to have epistemic justification.

3. Against the Necessary Condition for (EJ): Justification without Evidence?

In the previous section I argued that evidence is not sufficient for epistemic justification. Now we need to ask whether evidence is necessary for justification. Maintaining that evidence is not necessary for epistemic justification is to hold that:

(EJ**) B is epistemically justified for S at t, but it is not true that S's evidence sufficiently supports B at t.

Are there cases in which (EJ**) is true? A first attempt to show this is to think about examples such as:

(Ex4) Suppose that Joseph formed a belief that Afonso Henriques was the first king of Portugal and he had good evidence for believing it (for example, he learned it at elementary school); thus, he was justified in believing that. However, after twenty years, Joseph has forgotten all of his evidence for that belief and he has not acquired any new evidence. Even so he continues to believe strongly and without hesitation that Afonso Henriques was the first king of Portugal. So, it seems that he is also now justified in having this belief; nevertheless, he has not any evidence for it now.

With (Ex4) we can see that the belief that Afonso Henriques was the first king of Portugal is an epistemically justified belief for Joseph at this moment, but he has not any evidence to support this belief at this moment (because he forgot about the evidence). But, is (Ex4) a good counterexample to (EJ)? There are some strategies to cope with this problem. For example, Alvin Goldman suggests that, to

³⁰ Reliabilism and evidentialism are theories usually considered as being in conflict, but in the last years there are attempts to reconcile both theories. For example, Comesaña argues that to take care of Bonjour's clairvoyance objection to reliabilism, and the generality problem, we need to combine reliabilism with evidentialism; see Juan Comesaña, "Reliabilist Evidentialism," *Noûs* 44 (2010): 571-600. In the same way, Goldman argues that "perhaps an ideal theory would be a hybrid of the two, combining the best elements of each theory;" see Alvin Goldman, "Toward a Synthesis of Reliabilism and Evidentialism? Or: Evidentialism's Troubles, Reliabilism's Rescue Package," in *Evidentialism and its Discontents*, ed. Trent Dougherty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 254-280.

handle these cases, we need to abandon “the requirement that justifying evidence must be possessed at the same time as the belief” and, furthermore, we need “to add a rule or condition to mark preservative memory as a justification-transmitting feature” which are explained in terms of reliability; in this way “preservative memory is a cognitive belief-retaining process that is able to transmit justifiedness from an earlier to a later time.”³¹ For that reason, Joseph is still *now* justified in believing that Afonso Henriques was the first king of Portugal although he has no evidence *now* for this belief (but he had *evidence at an earlier time*). So, evidentialism needs the help of reliabilism.

Nevertheless I think that we can handle this counterexample (Ex4) only with recourse to evidentialism. Resorting to Feldman’s argument, we can assert that Joseph is in a mental state that is evidence for his belief; namely, he now has a disposition to recollect that Afonso Henriques was the first king of Portugal and this disposition is the evidence for his belief. And, according to Feldman, “if this disposition to recollect is sufficiently strong and clear, then in the absence of defeaters, it is strong enough evidence for him to know” his belief.³² Therefore, Joseph now has evidence that provides justification for his belief. Furthermore, we can classify this evidence as *impulsional evidence*, i.e., a felt push or an inclination to accept a belief; in this case, a kind of disposition to accept the belief which is recollected from memory. Thus, (Ex4) is not a good counterexample to the necessary condition of (EJ), because the belief that Afonso Henriques was the first king of Portugal is an epistemically justified belief for Joseph and he has evidence (mainly impulsional evidence) for this belief.

A last sort of counterexample that it is worth looking at has the following form:

(Ex5) Joey Votto gets a hit about 1 out of every 3 times at bat. This is a great average in baseball, but the likelihood that he will get a hit in a particular time at bat is very low. You might initially think that it would be unreasonable for Votto to believe he will get a hit in a particular time at bat. However, suppose you learn that Votto recently read *The Power of Positive Thinking in Baseball* and discovered that batters who believe they are going to get a hit are statistically more likely to get a hit. You might think that it would be a good idea for Votto to try to think positively and believe that he will get a hit, despite the evidence to the contrary. Hence, you might conclude that belief is justified in this case, in spite of the evidence. (It’s important to note that the evidence about positive

³¹ Goldman, “Toward a Synthesis,” 261.

³² Richard Feldman and Earl Conee, “Response to Goldman,” in *Evidentialism and its Discontents*, ed. Trent Dougherty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 304.

thinking only shows that it makes it more likely that one will get a hit, not that it makes it more likely than not).³³

Or, for example, suppose that a subject S has a severe disease, like a serious cancer; all evidence shows that almost no one recovers from this disease. However, even so, S does not want to give up his hope and he believes that he will recover soon. This optimistic belief helps him to have confidence, and having confidence tends to make slight improvements in one's health, even though almost nobody recovers from this disease. It seems that S is justified in believing that he will recover soon, despite his having insufficient evidence for that belief. With these two examples we see cases in which (EJ**) seems to be true.

Analogously, William James argues that S can be justified in believing that B, even in when S does not have sufficient evidence for B³⁴. Namely, this is what may happen when we are faced with a *living, forced, momentous option*. Some brief clarifications: (i) an *option* is a decision between two hypotheses and a *hypothesis* is what may be proposed to our belief; (ii) an *option is living* when both hypotheses are live and a *hypothesis is live* when it appears as real possibility for the person in question; (iii) an *option is forced* when there is no possibility of not choosing in that we are faced with a "dilemma based on a complete logical disjunction;" (iv) an *option is momentous* when the opportunity to choose between both hypotheses is unique, significant, irreversible; and (v) an option that is simultaneously living, forced, and momentous is called a *genuine option*. Based on these distinctions, James argues that if we are faced with a genuine option to believe a proposition "that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds," then we can be justified in believing that proposition without evidence. According to James this is what happens with the belief in God because this belief is intellectually undecidable and it is a genuine option; furthermore, if we believe in God and God exists, then we gain a certain vital good (which we would lose in a situation of non-belief). Thus, a person can be justified to believe in God without evidence.

Do all these examples amount to a good objection against the necessary condition for (EJ)? The answer is *no* if we draw a distinction between *epistemic justification* and *prudential* or *moral justification*. The point is that (EJ) is not the only kind of justification. Following Moser, while *epistemic justification* is related mainly to evidence, truth, knowledge, etc., *prudential* or *moral justification* is

³³ Richard Feldman, "Evidentialism," in *The Continuum Companion to Epistemology*, ed. Andrew Cullison (London: Continuum, 2012), 97.

³⁴ William James, "The Will to Believe," in *The Will to Believe, and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (Longmans, Green, and Company, 1896) 1-31.

more related with well-being or good practical consequences for a person.³⁵ In this last sense, a person may be justified to believe B even in a case in which B is not supported by evidence or in which B is obviously unlikely to be true. So, we can roughly say that:

(MJ) B is morally justified for S at t iff S's believing that B at t is probably more conducive to S's moral goodness than is S's denying that B and S's withholding that B.

(PJ) B is prudentially justified for S at t iff S's believing that B at t is probably more conducive to S's prudential well-being than is S's denying that B and S's withholding that B.

Let us survey the counterexamples to (EJ) again. On the one hand, considering (Ex5) in an epistemic sense, it is true that Votto shouldn't believe that he will get a hit since he does not have sufficient evidence for this belief and, therefore, Votto's belief is not justified. On the other hand, considering (Ex5) in a prudential or moral sense, Votto should believe that he will get a hit since he has a plausible practical reason for his belief and, thus, Votto's belief is justified. But when one intuitively asserts that in (Ex5) Votto's belief is justified, it is only so in this last sense of prudential or moral justification. So, example (Ex5) is not an instance of (EJ) but rather of (MJ) or (PJ); the justification in question is not epistemic but instead prudential or moral. Hence, (Ex5) is not indeed a counterexample to the necessary condition for (EJ).

Something similar happens with the example in which a person has a severe disease and believes in his quick recovery. We can say that his belief is justified, not in an epistemic sense, but in a prudential sense. Furthermore, it is plausible to assert that his prudential considerations with regard to his belief outweigh any other epistemic consideration. So, even though his evidence does not support the belief that he will recover soon and, thereby, this belief cannot be epistemically justified for him, it may be even more rational for this diseased person to believe in his recovery than not to believe it. Therefore, all things considered, he is justified or rational in believing in his quick recovery. Likewise, James' argument for a justified belief in God without evidence is not a counterexample to (EJ), because if James' argument is a successful argument, this argument is about (MJ) or (PJ) and not an instance of (EJ). In this regard, it is worth to quote Feldman and Conee:

It is possible that there are circumstances in which moral, or prudential, factors favor believing a proposition for which one has little or no evidence. In that case,

³⁵ See Moser, *Empirical Justification*, chapter VI.

the moral or prudential evaluation of believing might diverge from the epistemic evaluation indicated by evidentialism. It is consistent with our version of evidentialism that there are aspects of life in which one is better off not being guided by evidence. Thus, to take the obvious example, it is consistent with evidentialism that people are better off taking their religious beliefs on faith (rather than letting their beliefs on religious matters be guided by their evidence). Of course, if those beliefs are unsupported by evidence, then evidentialism implies that these beliefs are not epistemically justified. They may nevertheless retain whatever other non-epistemic virtues their defenders claim for them.³⁶

So, there is room for beliefs, and for justified beliefs, without evidence but only with respect to (MJ) or (PJ) and not with respect to (EJ). Therefore, my conclusion is the following: while beliefs without evidence cannot be justified in an epistemic sense (because evidence is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for epistemic justification), beliefs without evidence can be justified in a prudential or moral sense.³⁷

³⁶ Feldman and Conee, *Evidentialism*, 2.

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