

# Have mentalism and evidentialism been refuted?\*

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## Abstract

Michael Bergmann has recently argued that both Mentalism and Evidentialism succumb to a distinctive type of counterexample. A Bergmann-style counterexample to Mentalism and Evidentialism is a case which purports to show that it is a contingent property of a subject's evidence or mental state that it justifies that subject's beliefs. If this is right, then subjects can be mentally or evidentially identical but differ justificationaly. I first show that Bergmann's argument for this claim reduces to an unmotivated request for an intuitional report that it is a contingent property of some evidence (mental state) that it justifies a subject's belief. Since this is precisely the intuition that mentalists and evidentialists lack, Bergmann has failed to give either any good reasons for abandoning their positions. Second, I observe that an obvious strategy for circumventing Bergmann-style counterexamples emerges from Bergmann's critique unscathed.

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# 1 Introduction

Bergmann mounts a sophisticated defense of a proper function account of epistemic justification in *Justification Without Awareness*. This defense partly consists in the attempted refutation of each member of a holy trinity of epistemological views: Internalism, Evidentialism and Mentalism. Crisp (forthcoming) and Rogers & Matheson (forthcoming here) argue persuasively that the first member of this trinity withstands Bergmann’s attack. I here complete the defense of that trinity by showing that Bergmann fails to establish the falsity of either Mentalism or Evidentialism.

Mentalism is the doctrine that justification is consequential upon purely mental items.<sup>1</sup> Officially:

*Mentalism:* A proposition  $p$  is doxastically justified for  $S$  to degree  $d$  if and only if, for all possible mental duplicates  $S^*$  of  $S$ ,  $S^*$  is doxastically justified in believing  $p$  to degree  $d$ . And one’s mental profile grounds one’s justificational profile.<sup>2</sup>

Evidentialism is, roughly, the doctrine that “doxastic attitude  $D$  toward proposition  $p$  is epistemically justified for  $S$  at  $t$  if and only if having  $D$  toward  $p$  fits the evidence  $S$  has at  $t$ .”<sup>3</sup> This formulation says nothing about the modal profile of the relation of fit mentioned. I will here follow Bergmann and those evidentialists who take the relation of fit to be a relation that necessarily obtains between a body of evidence and doxastic attitude if it possibly obtains.<sup>4</sup> Officially:

*Strong Evidentialism:*  $S$ ’s doxastic attitude  $A$  towards  $p$  is justified if and only if, necessarily, the adoption of  $A$  is a fitting doxastic response to all the relevant evidence  $S$  has for  $p$ .<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Defenders of this doctrine include Pollock (1999), Conee and Feldman (2001), Steup (2001), and Wedgwood (2002).

<sup>2</sup>I take consequentiality to be supervenience plus grounding. While any official statement of Mentalism needs to make the grounding claim explicit, the supervenience portion of the doctrine will be our only focus.

<sup>3</sup>Feldman and Conee (1985, p. 15). Note they are careful to observe that they not offering this as an analysis. It should instead be treated as a gloss.

<sup>4</sup>The most prominent evidentialists are *Strong Evidentialists*. For example, see Conee and Feldman (2005, p. 99). *Strong Evidentialism* is also the evidentialist position that is Bergmann’s target. Some evidentialists construe the modal profile of the relation of fit less stringently (and so appear not to be subject to Bergmann’s counterexample). For a defense of such a position see Comesaña (forthcoming). Hereafter, I will mean *Strong Evidentialism* by *Evidentialism*.

<sup>5</sup>I intend “the relevant evidence  $S$  has for  $p$ ” to be construed broadly. So for example,

Recent conversations with those familiar with *JWA* have suggested that many take its refutation of Mentalism and Evidentialism as decisive. And Markie (forthcoming here) asserts that Bergmann’s “attack on Mentalism [is] successful.” Markie’s endorsement is, *eo ipso*, a commitment to endorsing Bergmann’s attack on Evidentialism, for Bergmann’s reasons for rejecting these doctrines are identical. Even for those who would like to see both Mentalism and Evidentialism forever banished from the epistemological terrain, this is too good to be true.

## 2 The Putative Counterexample

Bergmann’s strategy is to try to produce a case in which a belief fits some evidence (mental state) for one person but fails to fit that evidence (mental state) for another. That is, forming a particular belief in response to some evidence or mental state is in one case a fitting doxastic response and in another case an unfitting doxastic response to the same evidence or mental state. We are to conclude that whether some bit of evidence (mental state) fits a belief is a contingent property of that bit of evidence (mental state). This conclusion, if true, obviously falsifies both *Mentalism* and *Evidentialism* as defined.

Let  $B_{tomato}$  be the belief that there is a round, red object before one. Let  $E_{tomato}$  be the sensory experience one ordinarily has shortly before forming  $B_{tomato}$ . This will be a mundane visual experience as of redness and roundness. Say that  $E_{tomato}$  is the main evidence had for  $B_{tomato}$ . But there is also connecting evidence. Call the typical felt-inclination to take this experience to be indicative of the truth of  $B_{tomato}$  connecting evidence  $CE_{norm}$ . Now suppose  $S_{norm}$  is an ordinary cognizer in the actual world. It is perfectly reasonable to suppose that  $S_{norm}$  can form  $B_{tomato}$  after having sensory experience  $E_{tomato}$  and be justified in so believing. After all, most of us do it all the time.<sup>6</sup>

How does this work, on Bergmann’s view? In ordinary produce stand

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if  $S$  has an undercutting defeater (that a testifier is unreliable, say) for a bit of testimonial evidence to the effect that  $p$ , this defeater is part of the relevant evidence  $S$  has for  $p$ . Roughly,  $e$  is relevant evidence  $S$  has for  $p$  if  $S$  ought to take  $e$  to bear upon whether she should take  $p$  to be true (or perhaps: if it would be rational for  $S$  to take  $e$  to bear upon whether she takes  $p$  to be true).

<sup>6</sup>I present the argument using color terms. Officially, Bergmann (from communication) prefers to avoid secondary qualities. But this choice has no bearing on the structure of the argument. Since the argument’s problems are wholly structural, this decision isn’t problematic.

situations  $S_{norm}$  will have the sensory experience of being appeared to redly and roundly (and so comes to possess main evidence  $E_{tomato}$ ). This experience (or this main evidence) is treated as an input to a particular belief forming process  $P$ .  $P$  generates the typical felt-inclination to believe,  $CE_{norm}$ . When all goes well, the result is that  $S_{norm}$  forms the  $P$ -output  $B_{tomato}$  as a result of a non-deviant causal chain originating with the input of  $E_{tomato}$  to process  $P$ . And so  $S_{norm}$  comes to justifiedly believe  $B_{tomato}$  on the basis of  $E_{tomato}$ . A necessary condition for  $S_{norm}$  being justified is that her belief is held in the right way. Since  $S_{norm}$  is justified her belief is held in the right way, and so  $E_{tomato}$  was an appropriate input to  $P$  and her evidence fits her belief.

Now consider otherworldly cognizers. Suppose one member of an otherworldly race of alien species forms the belief  $B_{tomato}$  in response to the sensory experience (main evidence)  $E_{flourite}$ . Here,  $E_{flourite}$  is the sensory experience ordinary humans have when looking at a blue cube of crystallized flourite. Further suppose that this alien is not atypical. All members of this otherworldly species form the belief  $B_{tomato}$  after having the experience  $E_{flourite}$ . For these beings, being appeared to cubely and bluely prompts in them the felt-inclination  $CE_{alien}$  to believe that there is a red, round object before them.<sup>7</sup> We may add that it is *natural* for them to believe in this fashion or that they were *designed* to believe in this fashion, if it helps prompt intuitions. We may even add that their tomato beliefs are mostly true. But surely our alien is justified in believing  $B_{tomato}$ . And if so,  $E_{flourite}$  was an appropriate input to the alien's belief forming process and the alien's evidence fits her belief.

This is supposed to show that  $E_{tomato}$  is an appropriate process-input for leading to the human belief  $B_{tomato}$  and  $E_{flourite}$  is an appropriate process-input for leading to the alien belief  $B_{tomato}$ . But (crucially) matters cannot be reversed.  $E_{flourite}$  is not an appropriate process-input for leading to a human's belief  $B_{tomato}$  (similarly,  $E_{tomato}$  is not an appropriate process-input for leading to the alien's belief  $B_{tomato}$ ). Thus it is a contingent matter whether a doxastic response to a bit of evidence is a fitting (appropriate) doxastic response to that evidence. And so *Evidentialism* and *Mentalism* are

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<sup>7</sup>Why  $CE_{alien}$  and not  $CE_{norm}$  all over again? Because I am supposing, *with Bergmann*, that the felt-inclination to believe that there is a red object before one after coming to possess  $E_{tomato}$  is a different felt-inclination than the felt-inclination one might have after coming to possess  $E_{flourite}$ . Bergmann would call the former bit of connecting evidence "the felt-inclination to take  $E_{tomato}$  to be indicative of the truth of  $B_{tomato}$ ." So for him,  $CE_{alien}$  would be the non-identical felt-inclination to take  $E_{flourite}$  to be indicative of the truth of  $B_{tomato}$ .

false.

### 3 Diagnosis of Bergmann's Argument

The argument of §2 is, I maintain, unsuccessful. Our alien and ordinary cognizers responded to their respective inputs by way of different processes. These processes themselves generated further evidence. In the putative counterexample, the human process generated connecting evidence  $CE_{norm}$  and the alien process generated connecting evidence  $CE_{alien}$ . The ordinary cognizers and the otherworldly cognizers were not employing the same belief-forming processes, and as a result, they did not have the same total evidence (the ordinary cognizers had evidence  $CE_{norm}$  that the alien cognizers lacked). Nor were they mental duplicates, for they both employed different belief formation processes and had different bits of connecting evidence. Thus we get no counterexample to *Mentalism* or *Evidentialism*.

It is worth putting this point more carefully. Bergmann's case would constitute a counterexample to *Evidentialism* and *Mentalism* respectively only if we supposed that the belief formation processes employed by the ordinary and alien cognizers in §2 resulted in differently justified beliefs *while* either (i) the aliens and ordinary cognizers had the same relevant evidence for their respective beliefs, or (ii) the aliens and ordinary cognizers instantiated the same mental states. But that is not what happens.

$S_{alien}$  got to her belief  $B_{tomato}$  by way of some process  $P^*$ . That is, for  $S_{alien}$ ,  $B_{tomato}$  was a  $P^*$ -response to main evidence  $E_{flourite}$ . Now since  $S_{alien}$  is *ex hypothesi* justified, this belief is a fitting  $P^*$ -response to that main evidence. Thus *Evidentialism* tells us that this  $P^*$ -response to that main evidence must result in  $S_{alien}$ 's belief  $B_{tomato}$  being a fitting doxastic response to all the relevant evidence  $S_{alien}$  has for  $B_{tomato}$ . But here, all the relevant evidence  $S_{alien}$  has for  $B_{tomato}$  includes the  $P^*$ -produced evidence  $CE_{alien}$ . So the *Evidentialist* is now committed to the claim that  $S_{alien}$  is justified, and her belief  $B_{tomato}$  is a fitting doxastic response to all the relevant evidence she has, namely  $E_{flourite} + CE_{alien}$ . By analogous reasoning, the ordinary cognizer's belief  $B_{tomato}$  is a fitting doxastic response to all the relevant evidence she has, namely  $E_{flourite} + CE_{norm}$ . But then it's just obvious that the alien and ordinary cognizer do not have the same relevant evidence. Thus condition (i) is not satisfied; we get no counterexample to *Evidentialism*. On the eminently reasonable assumption that cognizers who possess different connecting evidence instantiate different mental states, we likewise get no counterexample to *Mentalism*.

The natural assumption is that Bergmann moves to include connecting evidence in an attempt to render plausible the notion that sensory experience  $E_{flourite}$  might yield a justified belief  $B_{tomato}$ . For to get his case off the ground we have to assume that his aliens can have justified beliefs. But if inclusion of additional evidence—connecting evidence—suffices to work magic for aliens, why shouldn't it work magic for (even brain damaged) humans as well? Both the mentalist and the evidentialist have the strong intuition that evidence that provides *prima facie* justification for a belief provides just that *prima facie* justification for that belief for anyone. Insofar as they're on board with Bergmann about the justifiedly believing aliens, it's because they take the connecting evidence to be working the requisite sort of magic.

The upshot is that once we are clear that we have a case of mental identity or evidential identity, a condition which is required in order to provide a counterexample to *Mentalism* or *Evidentialism*, it becomes clear that if connectors are in play we should have been asked to return a brute intuitional report of the following form:

Case (1): Humans believe  $B_{tomato}$  with relevant evidence  $E_{tomato}$  +  $CE_{norm}$ . The humans are justified.

Case (2): Aliens believe  $B_{tomato}$  with relevant evidence  $E_{tomato}$  +  $CE_{norm}$ . The aliens are not justified.<sup>8</sup>

Requesting *this* report is a far cry from providing an argument that should concern the mentalist. This is not to say it is illegitimate to ask for this report. But if you return it, then you aren't a mentalist; if you were a mentalist, you certainly weren't that reflective. The same holds for evidentialists, all of whom think that some bit of evidence—a sensory or perceptual experience—can't itself justify any belief whatsoever. Perhaps mentalists

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<sup>8</sup>This is not, of course, the intuitional report Bergmann anywhere explicitly requested. Bergmann has suggested (in communication) that he means to ask for this report as well. On p. 120 he mentions brain damaged humans who lead alien mental lives, and with respect to this case, he says (in communication) that he expects readers to think that the brain damaged humans are not justified in their beliefs even though the aliens whose mental lives they perfectly duplicate are justified. The intuitional report requested here perfectly parallels that scenario. For in Case (2) Bergmann must think that the aliens are brain damaged. I would be happy to add the term "brain damaged" to Case (2). I fail to see why that term should be taken by the mentalist or evidentialist to add any epistemically relevant information, for it is fairly clear that it doesn't help unless one *already* endorses something like a proper function account of epistemic justification. But here Bergmann is supposed to be refuting competing accounts—not presupposing their falsity.

and evidentialists are wrong about this, but some argument is required to show it.

Here, of course, is one place where Bergmann could potentially mount an argument. He could try to argue that, in the envisioned circumstances, a human  $S$  (no longer  $S_{norm}$ , for now he's brain damaged) would not have a justified belief despite the facts that (i) she has an alien mental life  $L$  and (ii) aliens with mental lives  $L$  are justified in their beliefs. But we don't get such an argument. This is surprising for Bergmann notes that brain damaged humans could respond just as alien cognizers do. Of course, it will seem to the mentalist/evidentialist that the brain damaged ordinary cognizer is justified if and only if the alien cognizer whose mental life is being simulated is justified. To simply deny this is just to assert that Mentalism/Evidentialism is false - it is not to produce an argument against Mentalism/Evidentialism. For it to seem to you that this is the case is for you to have the intuition that Mentalism/Evidentialism is false. But your intuition isn't an argument against Mentalism/Evidentialism either, even if it is a reason for you to deny it.

Bergmann's task would be much easier if he could omit talk of connecting evidence. This would allow him to simplify the counterexample greatly. Since pointing to the different bits of connecting evidence generated by his processes was the obvious reason for treating the belief-formation processes (and so the mental states and relevant evidence) as being non-identical, this would help to remove the most serious obstacle blocking his argument. He could then let the main evidence be the only evidence going for the ordinary and alien cognizer's tomato beliefs. That is, the ordinary cognizer has as main evidence sensory experience  $E_{tomato}$  and the alien has main evidence  $E_{flourite}$ . At this point, Bergmann could claim that the alien cognizer's evidence  $E_{flourite}$  (alone) justifies her belief  $B_{tomato}$ . And, of course, it does not (alone) justify the belief  $B_{tomato}$  for an ordinary cognizer. If the mentalist/evidentialist were to grant that this was possible (*and* if it were reasonable to suppose that the processes employed by the alien and the human which led from evidence to belief were identical), *then* the mentalist/evidentialist would be in trouble.

This is just to say, however, that mentalists and evidentialists would be in trouble if they had Reidean intuitions *and* thought that connecting evidence isn't required for justified belief.<sup>9</sup> Yet absent the inclusion of connecting ev-

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<sup>9</sup>The Reidian intuition is that any sensory experience alone can justify any perceptual belief for some possible cognizer (provided they have the right cognitive makeup, or, in Reid's terms, if the belief is licensed by an "original principle of their constitution"). Bergmann has this Reidian intuition, for he thinks that the process the sensory experience

idence, mentalists and evidentialists will not swallow the claim that  $E_{tomato}$  and  $E_{flourite}$  can (alone) justify the very same belief, and therefore can fit the very same belief for different cognizers. This is clearly not a mentalist or evidentialist friendly assumption, and so Bergmann is left with one final strategy. He has to show that connecting evidence is irrelevant to determinations of fit. If he could do this, he would succeed in demonstrating that the epistemically relevant relation of fit is one that (i) holds between sensory experience and belief, and (ii) that it is contingent. Let us examine this attempt.

In brief, Bergmann’s idea is that connecting evidence cannot generate fit between sensory experiences and beliefs. If the sensory experiences do not already fit the belief for a cognizer, the connecting evidence is nugatory. This assertion stands in deep tension with Bergmann’s introduction of connectors (which motivate the attribution of justificational differences to alien and ordinary cognizers). Since no mentalist would grant that  $E_{flourite}$  alone fits (and so can only justify) the alien belief  $B_{tomato}$ , we were offered the complex of  $E_{flourite} + CE_{alien}$ . It would then seem that the relevant relation of fit should be one between  $E_{flourite} + CE_{alien}$  and  $B_{tomato}$ . Yet Bergmann wants to insist that this is not the case. The evidential complex couldn’t have fit the belief if  $E_{flourite}$  didn’t antecedently fit alien belief  $B_{tomato}$ , we are told. So we ought to think that  $E_{flourite}$  does fit the alien’s belief  $B_{tomato}$  after all!

Now if the connecting evidence couldn’t generate fit, then Bergmann ought to have left it behind in the first place, in which case he would be trying to elicit the brute Reidian intuition. His argument would straightforwardly reduce to the hope that one has the intuition that tomato experiences *alone* can justify both tomato beliefs and flourite beliefs (for different species of cognizers and not vice versa).<sup>10</sup>

But why does Bergmann think that connecting evidence cannot generate

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is an input to (along with facts about the design plan of creatures instantiating that process) determines whether a subject is justified in believing the resultant proposition. And he thinks that if the creature’s design plan is such that it licenses the belief, then the belief is at least *prima facie* justified. But the brute Reidean intuition isn’t that helpful anymore, as we’ll see, for the mentalist/evidentialist can grant it.

<sup>10</sup>Note that adding the claim that it is natural for a species to form tomato beliefs on the basis of flourite experiences, or that members of species reliably form tomato beliefs on the basis of flourite experiences doesn’t help. The kind of justification at issue here is *epistemic justification*, and mere reliability doesn’t suffice for epistemic justification (a point Bergmann himself grants). And if mere reliability isn’t sufficient, it won’t help to also claim that it’s *natural* for members of a species to form beliefs in this way—or at least it won’t help without telling us what more is meant by “natural”. (Here, of course, appeal to proper function as the marker of naturalness will not help, for at this point we’re

the requisite fit? The complete answer is that he thinks of connecting evidence as being somehow radically subjective. How radically subjective? He tells us (Bergmann 2006, p. 116) that if connecting evidence could generate fit, this would amount to the claim that one can “get justification for one’s beliefs merely by thinking that one has good reasons for them.” And that claim would run afoul of the following (highly plausible) principle:

*Objectivity*: In order for  $S$  to be justified in believing  $B$  on the basis of some evidence  $E$ , the belief that  $B$  must bear a relation of objective fittingness to the evidence  $E$  (Bergmann 2006, p. 112).

While I agree with Bergmann that *Objectivity* is true, I cannot see how maintaining that connecting *evidence* can generate fit is to endorse the proposition that “one can get justification for one’s beliefs merely by thinking one has good reasons for them.” After all, connecting evidence is *evidence*. And presumably, merely believing or thinking that I have a good reason for believing  $p$  is not itself evidence for  $p$ . And even if it is some minimal evidence for  $p$ , it’s not evidence that could *epistemically justify* the belief that  $p$ .

More importantly, nowhere did Bergmann identify connectors with “merely thinking that one has evidence or reasons for a belief”. Had he made such an identification, he would have lost all the intuitive motivation for the justificational differences between the ordinary and alien cognizers. We were told that connectors were felt-inclinations to believe that an experience is indicative of the truth of a proposition. A felt-inclination to believe is not a belief, nor does it amount to “thinking that an experience is indicative of the truth of a proposition”. We cannot, therefore, take seriously Bergmann’s claim that allowing connectors to produce fit is to deny *Objectivity*. And even if we could, doing so would undercut any argument presented by way of appeal to connectors, which appeared to be introduced for the purpose of convincing us that the alien cognizer’s beliefs did fit their evidence. For we were then supposed to assume that the alien cognizer’s beliefs fit a part of their evidence which didn’t include the very evidence which was introduced to get us to think fit obtained in the first place.

I think these remarks should completely assuage any concerns mentalists and evidentialists may have had about Bergmann’s argument. But they suggest something further. Whatever one thinks of them, all the mentalist or evidentialist has to do in order to avoid a Bergmann-style counterexample

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(supposed to be refuting competing epistemological theories.)

is to maintain that a perceptual belief is not justified on the basis of some bit of purely sensory (non-perceptual) experience *alone*. Rather, it is justified on the basis of some main evidence (sensory experience) plus some connecting evidence, that is, on the basis of some perceptual experience rather than on the basis of a rarefied sensory experience. So long as the perceptual experience cited is such that it can generate fit where pure sensory experience alone does not suffice (and is not radically subjective, that is, is not a belief that one has good reasons...), the position will not run afoul of *Objectivity*.

This is, of course, quite analogous to the structural strategy Bergmann avails himself of. He does not think that any sensory experience can itself justify any perceptual belief held by a member of any species. According to him, sensory experience needs to be an input into the right sort of process (for a species) in order to result in a justified belief. But mentalists and evidentialists can agree with this. They can simply disagree with him over what makes the process of “the right sort”. According to Bergmann, the process is of the right sort if it fits the creature’s “design” plan. Yet mentalists and evidentialists can grant the Reidian insight that whether *S* is justified in believing *p* depends upon *S*’s “design” plan.<sup>11</sup> It is just that for them the process will be of the right sort if its upshot is that the subject’s mental states or evidence wind up fitting the subject’s belief. This will simply be a condition of adequacy on any “design” plan. So here, of course, they will merely want to require that the process generated connecting evidence that makes for fit.<sup>12</sup>

Need this connecting evidence be a felt-inclination to believe that one’s sensory experience is indicative of the truth of the proposition in question? Surely not. One *can* appeal to such felt-inclinations to believe if one likes, but I think a better candidate here would be a seeming—the kind of mental state commonly referred to as an *intuition*. The option is readily available to anyone who already countenances intuitional evidence.<sup>13</sup> Of course, just how plausible it would be to expand the justificatory role of intuitions or alternative forms of connecting evidence in this way (by requiring them for fit) is a topic for another day, and it is an especially pressing one for those who, like Bergmann, are unhappy with sensory experiences having propositional content—a nice candidate for playing the fit generating role.

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<sup>11</sup>See Reid ([1764] 1997, p. 57). Tucker (manuscript) makes a similar point.

<sup>12</sup>It’s worth noting that this line of response is open to those mentalists and evidentialists who share Bergmann’s (not widely held) view (2006, pp. 121-122) that sensory experiences do not have propositional content.

<sup>13</sup>See Audi (2004), Bealer and Strawson (1992), DePaul and Ramsey (1998), Huemer (2001, 2006, and 2007), and Rogers and Matheson (forthcoming).

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