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# Internalism, externalism, and epistemic source circularity

Ian David MacMillan  
*University of Iowa*

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INTERNALISM, EXTERNALISM, AND EPISTEMIC SOURCE CIRCULARITY

by

Ian David MacMillan

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Doctor of  
Philosophy degree in Philosophy  
in the Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

December 2012

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Richard Fumerton

## ABSTRACT

The dissertation examines the nature and epistemic implications of epistemic source circularity. An argument exhibits this type of circularity when at least one of the premises is produced by a belief source the conclusion says is legitimate, e.g. a track record argument for the legitimacy of sense perception that uses premises produced by sense perception. In chapter one I examine this and several other types of circularity, identifying relevant similarities and differences between them.

In chapter two I discuss the differences between internalist and externalist analyses of justification. I examine in detail foundationalist and non-foundationalist versions of internalism, and go on to consider how one might characterize externalism: either negatively, by denying particular internalist theses, or positively, in terms of a theory offering different conditions for justification. I discuss the views of reliabilist foundationalists at length.

In chapter three I present the internalist objection to externalism that the latter mistakenly permit one to be justified in believing the conclusion of an epistemic source circular inference. I explain the externalists' response that it is not in virtue of their externalism that they permit epistemic source circularity but rather their foundationalism; thus, internalist foundationalists must permit epistemic source circularity as well. I evaluate the positions of several internalists, most of them explicitly foundationalists, and argue that they too cannot avoid permitting epistemic source circularity.

In the final chapter I consider whether such circularity is vicious, even though both internalist and externalist foundationalists permit it. I argue that one can sustain an objection to epistemic source circularity by imposing a non-question-begging requirement on justification and explain how respecting this requirement leads one to a non-foundationalist view. I conclude by considering the objection that question-begging leads to a certain arbitrariness in belief formation that should give the foundationalist

pause when it comes to determining, at the beginning of inquiry, which beliefs are justified and which are not.

The dissertation is primarily concerned with making clear the possible skeptical and non-skeptical positions one can take towards epistemic source circularity. I do not argue for the truth of a particular metaepistemology.

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Graduate College  
The University of Iowa  
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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## PREFACE

I was first introduced to the issues addressed in this dissertation eight years ago while a junior in college. In particular, I heard a podcast discussing the problem of the criterion that relied heavily on Chisholm's treatment of it in his published lecture with the same title. My initial reaction found the skeptic's position most plausible. This was somewhat disturbing, since this particular sort of skepticism was literally the most extreme: if true, it is impossible for any belief to be justified to any extent whatsoever. At the same time, I couldn't shake my skeptical intuitions and found other positions problematically dogmatic. I spent a great deal of the remainder of my undergraduate career reading as much as I could about related issues in epistemology, spending countless hours in the university's library devouring stacks of books and journal articles. After entering graduate school to study philosophy, I developed other interests outside epistemology, but those surrounding the problem of the criterion, epistemic source circularity, and Pyrrhonian skepticism remained constant.

This dissertation represents the culmination of my work on the issue. In an important sense I am still sympathetic to the skeptic's position. Despite the fact that I argue that if foundationalism is true, epistemic source circularity need not be vicious, I have deliberately avoided arguing for or against the truth of the antecedent of that conditional. While I often find myself sympathetic to foundationalism, I also cannot bring myself to once-and-for-all either affirm or deny it. In that sense the dissertation has a definite, yet implicit, non-dogmatic Pyrrhonian flavor.

## CHAPTER 1

### TYPES OF CIRCULARITY

#### 1.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will examine several types of circularity. While there may not be universal agreement among philosophers on whether the specified types are appropriately labeled types of “circularity” where this connotes a defect, I include them since at least some philosophers have taken them to be problematic. Whether problematic or not, all of the following types have in common the property of there being not only a relation of dependence of conclusion on the premise(s) or the inference rule(s) connecting the latter to the former—e.g. in the way one’s justified belief in the conclusion depends in part on the premise(s) being justified or the inference being legitimate—but also of premise(s) or inference rule(s) on conclusion. It is this two-way dependence that leads me to describe them all as types of circularity. I will initially keep the discussion free of epistemological issues as much as possible. There are several such issues that I would like to mention briefly, only to alert the reader that I am aware of them but will not discuss them until later chapters. I will not ask at this point what it is to “beg the question”, nor will I seek to determine the relationship between circularity and begging the question. I will return to this issue in chapter four. Finally, I will set aside initially the question of whether certain sorts of circularity prevent one from attaining justified beliefs.

Before examining types of circularity, two important distinctions must be made. In order to determine what thing(s) can be circular, we should distinguish between an argument and an inference.<sup>1</sup> An argument is a set of statements, some of which, the premises, are put forward as potential support for the conclusion. We may ask about the

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<sup>1</sup> See Pryor (2004) for a discussion of this distinction as it relates to evaluating Moore’s argument for the existence of the external world. Pryor uses the term “piece of reasoning”, though I will use “inference” in what follows.

truth of the premise(s) and conclusion, as well as the relevant connection between premise(s) and conclusion. An inference involves these very same statements, but the focus is on the movement from premises to conclusion. The main difference is that an inference only exists when someone actually infers the conclusion from the premise(s). On the other hand, one can consider an argument even if one has no intention to use it to get a justified belief himself. To illustrate the difference, consider a valid argument with true premises and a true conclusion where a subject S is unjustified in believing the premises. The argument is good because all the statements are true and it is valid. Yet S would not be able to justifiably believe the conclusion on the basis of the premise(s) since the latter are unjustified for S.

The following discussion of types of circularity will often invoke the concept of justification. The second crucial distinction is between two types of justification, propositional and doxastic. A belief P is propositionally justified for a subject S or “there is justification for S to believe P” when S has available a justification for P such that were S to believe P on the basis of that justification, P would be doxastically justified for S. Having propositional justification for a belief does not require the subject to believe the proposition on the basis of the justification. By contrast, a belief P is doxastically justified for S or “S has a justified belief P” when S bases her belief that P on a justification that provides propositional justification for S.<sup>2</sup> To illustrate the distinction, consider the following examples. Suppose that I am walking down the street talking with a friend. I hear loud noises and yelling from inside a nearby house, and on the window shades I see the silhouettes of two people struggling. If I reflected on the data enough I would arguably have propositional justification for the belief that there is a fight going on

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<sup>2</sup> One might worry that inter-defining these types of justification is problematically circular. It is not, nor does the apparent circularity fit into one of the types I will consider in this chapter. Often what happens is one begins by defining one type in terms of the other due to being primarily concerned with that type, only going on to define the second in terms of the first.

in the house. But since I am talking to my friend, I continue walking past the house and do not form the belief that there is a fight going on. In this example I have propositional justification to believe that there is a fight going on, but I do not have a doxastically justified belief because I have not believed that there is a fight on the basis of what would justify me in believing it. In the preceding example, while I have propositional justification, I lack doxastic justification because no belief was formed. Consider the following modified example: all is the same as before, but I form the belief that there is a fight going on in the house. I base the belief on wishful thinking. Here I have formed a belief that is propositionally, but not doxastically, justified because it is not based on that which provides propositional justification for it. One lesson is that forming a belief that is propositionally justified is not sufficient for that belief's being doxastically justified. For that to be the case, the belief must also have a proper basis. In what follows I will often define types of circularity in terms of doxastic justification, although often the reader may choose to re-cast them in terms of propositional justification without damaging the spirit of the discussion. There are potential exceptions to this that I will discuss in turn.

### 1.2 Simple Logical Circularity

An argument or inference exhibits simple logical circularity iff the conclusion is identical or logically equivalent to at least one of the premises. The most straightforward example of such an argument involving identity is one where there is only one premise and the conclusion restates the premise:

1. Snow is white.
- ∴ 2. Snow is white.

Additional examples involve premise(s) and conclusion that are more complicatedly logically equivalent:

1. If snow is white then grass is green.

∴ 2. Either snow is not white or grass is green.

Some philosophers have taken simple logical circularity to be a purely formal feature of an argument: one need not understand what the premise(s) or conclusion mean, nor does one need to ascertain their alethic or epistemic status.

Both arguments and inferences can exhibit simple logical circularity. While one may infer a statement from itself, one need not actually do so to determine whether the corresponding argument exhibits simple logical circularity. One simply needs to examine the premise(s) and conclusion to determine whether the latter is identical or logically equivalent to at least one of the former.

### 1.3 Lexical Circularity

An argument or inference exhibits lexical circularity iff the conclusion is logically equivalent to at least one of the premises given substitution of synonymous predicate expressions. For instance:

1. Klaus is a bachelor.

∴ 2. Klaus is an unmarried man.

While the premise and conclusion do not have the same form, they have the same meaning. Many examples of simple logical circularity will also exhibit lexical circularity. For instance:

1. Snow is white.

∴ 2. Snow is white.

This argument plausibly exhibits both simple logical circularity and lexical circularity, given that a predicate expression is trivially synonymous with itself. However, not all do.

Recall the above example:

1. If snow is white then grass is green.

∴ 2. Either snow is not white or grass is green.

Whether one says that this argument exhibits lexical circularity will depend in part on what the correct theory of synonymy is.

Both arguments and inferences can exhibit lexical circularity. While one may infer a statement from one with the same meaning, one need not actually do so to determine whether the corresponding argument exhibits semantic circularity. One simply needs to examine the premise(s) and conclusion to determine whether the meaning of the latter is identical to the meaning of at least one of the former.

#### 1.4 Strict Implication Circularity

An argument or inference exhibits strict implication circularity iff the truth of the conclusion is logically necessary for the truth of the conjunction of the premises. For example:

1. Someone has an apple.
- ∴ 2. An apple exists.

Necessarily, if the conclusion of this argument is false, then the premise is false. This type of circularity may not be epistemically problematic, since every deductively valid argument or inference exemplifies it.<sup>3</sup> A valid argument is such that it is impossible for the premise(s) to be true and the conclusion false. In other words, if the conclusion is false, the premise(s) cannot be true; the truth of the former is necessary for the truth of the latter. This type of circularity also comes cheap when the argument or inference's conclusion is a logically necessary truth:

1. Roses are red.
- ∴ 2. Either grass is green or grass is not green.

Since logically necessary truths cannot be false, there will never be an argument or inference with all true premises and one of these as a false conclusion. Hence, the truth

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<sup>3</sup> Below I will discuss the position that all valid arguments are epistemologically problematic due to circularity.



of this sort of conclusion is always a logically necessary condition for the truth of the premise(s).

Both arguments and inferences can exhibit strict implication circularity. While one may infer a statement from another that is such that the truth of the former is necessary for the truth of itself, one need not actually do so to determine whether the corresponding argument exhibits strict implication circularity. One simply needs to examine the premise(s) and conclusion to determine whether truth of the latter is necessary for the truth of the former.

### 1.5 Justification-Permitting Circularity

An argument or inference exhibits justification-permitting circularity iff a subject S is justified in believing at least one premise only if the conclusion is true. It has conclusions the truth of which makes it possible for, but does not require, the premises to be justifiably believed:

1. Someone has a justified belief.
- ∴ 2. It is possible that justified belief exists.

For the same reasons given above, any argument or inference with a logically necessary truth as the conclusion will exhibit this type of circularity.

Both arguments and inferences can exhibit justification-permitting circularity. While one may infer a conclusion from a set of premises that is such that the latter are justified only if the former is true, one need not actually do so to determine whether the corresponding argument exhibits justification-permitting circularity. One simply needs to examine the conclusion to determine whether its falsity permits the premise(s) to be justified.

### 1.6 Justification-Undercutting Circularity

An argument or inference exhibits justification-undercutting circularity iff a subject S is unjustified in believing the premise(s) if the conclusion is true. Arguments or

inferences of this sort are also sometimes called “epistemically self-defeating”. They have conclusions the truth of which removes or undercuts any justification one might have had for believing the premise(s). For instance:

1. If the legitimacy of any source of belief cannot be justified in a non-question-begging way, then there are no justified beliefs.
  2. The legitimacy of any source of belief cannot be justified in a non-question-begging way.
- ∴ 3. There are no justified beliefs.

If the conclusion of this argument is true, no one is justified in believing any of the premises.

Both arguments and inferences can exhibit justification-undercutting circularity. While one may infer a conclusion from a set of premises that are such that the latter are unjustified only if the former is true, one need not actually do so to determine whether the corresponding argument exhibits justification-undercutting circularity. One simply needs to examine the conclusion to determine whether its truth precludes the premise(s) from being justified.

### 1.7 Antecedent-Justification Circularity

An argument or inference exhibits antecedent-justification circularity iff a subject S is justified in believing the premise(s) only if S is already justified in believing the conclusion. Inferences of this sort contain statements that must be justified by inferring them from the conclusion before they can be used as premises capable of transferring justification to the conclusion. The words “before” and “already” are to be construed as designating mainly logical priority. One’s being justified in believing the conclusion is logically necessary for being justified in believing at least one premise. The priority is also temporal; one must be justified in believing the conclusion at a time earlier than the

time at which one is justified in believing at least one premise.<sup>4</sup> Temporal priority precludes all instances of simple logical circularity from also being instances of antecedent-justification circularity, since it is impossible that one have justification to believe a proposition at a time earlier than the time at which one has justification to believe that same proposition.

While it may seem easy to identify inferences that exhibit antecedent-justification circularity, I will argue below that often one cannot tell whether this is so until one determines on what the subject based belief in the premise(s). This may imply that antecedent-justification circularity pertains only to doxastic justification, contrary to the claim made in section 1.1 that one may unproblematically replace all instances of doxastic justification with propositional justification in the characterizations of the types of circularity. Suppose that S considers the following inference:

1. P.
- ∴ 2. Q.

If S's evidence contains many propositions that support P, including Q, then we might say that the argument does not exhibit antecedent-justification circularity because it is possible that S justifiably infer P from a proposition that is not Q. Whether an argument or inference involves propositional or doxastic antecedent-justification circularity depends heavily on the context. Below I will argue for this claim with respect to doxastic justification.

The immediately preceding example helps illustrate why propositional justification is not necessarily susceptible to antecedent-justification circularity. If S's evidence contains Q and Q is the only proposition that supports P, then it seems that

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<sup>4</sup> This fact allows the present account to avoid Pryor's objection in his (2004) that solely logical priority would problematically include cases where "the connection between premise and conclusion is so obvious that understanding the premise well enough to be justified in believing it requires you to take any justification for the premise to also justify you in believing the conclusion" (p. 359).

propositional justification is susceptible to antecedent-justification circularity for S in this particular case. For if the only way that S could justifiably believe P is to believe it on the basis of the proposition that is the conclusion of the relevant argument, then S will have justification for believing the premise only if S is already justified in believing the conclusion. Thus, to determine whether any given argument exhibits antecedent-justification circularity, one must see whether it is possible for S to justifiably believe at least one premise on the basis of a proposition contained in S's evidence that is not the conclusion of the argument. We must therefore look to contextual factors, viz. what S's evidence actually is and what the premise belief(s) are based on, to determine whether antecedent-justification circularity afflicts S's propositional justification for the premise(s). For the purposes of exposition I will offer some examples:

1. All men are mortal. [Believed on the basis of having completed at t a survey of all men who died at  $t_1 \leq t$ , including Socrates]<sup>5</sup>
  2. Socrates is a man.
- ∴ 3. Socrates is mortal.

By stipulating that S based his belief on seeing that each man is mortal, the inference exhibits antecedent-justification circularity. It is trivially the case that, necessarily in the situation as described, before S is justified in believing the first premise, S is already be justified in believing the conclusion that Socrates is mortal. Another example:

1. Violets are blue. [Believed on the basis of violets being blue]
- ∴ 2. Violets are blue.

Both arguments and inferences can exhibit antecedent-justification circularity. While one may infer a conclusion from a set of premises that is such that the latter are justified for one only if the former is already justified for one, one need not actually do so to determine whether the corresponding argument exhibits antecedent-justification

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<sup>5</sup> I am presupposing that the generalization isn't logically equivalent to the conjunction.

circularity. One simply needs to examine the argument and ask whether the following is true: a subject S could be justified in believing the premise(s) only if S is already justified in believing the conclusion.

### 1.7.1 Which inferences exhibit antecedent-justification circularity?

It will be useful to explicate the property of being antecedent-justification circular by first determining which inferences have it. I will first consider the radical position of John Stuart Mill and Sextus Empiricus that many, if not all, valid inferences exhibit antecedent-justification circularity. I will offer grounds for rejecting this position, and then argue at some length for the position that contextual factors determine which inferences exhibit antecedent-justification circularity.

#### 1.7.1.1 Mill & Sextus: Many, if not all, valid inferences exhibit antecedent-justification circularity

A valid argument is such that it is impossible for the premise(s) to be true and the conclusion false. Mill claims that all instances of a subset of valid inferences, viz. syllogistic inferences, are circular. He says that “It is universally allowed that a syllogism is vicious if there be anything more in the conclusion than was assumed in the premises. But this is, in fact, to say that nothing ever was, or can be, proved by syllogism which was not known, or assumed to be known before” (Mill, 1851, p. 139). Moreover, “no reasoning from generals to particulars can, as such, prove any thing: since from a general principle we can not infer any particulars, but those which the principle itself assumes as known” (Mill, 1851, p. 140). These remarks are best explained with one of his examples:

1. All men are mortal.
  2. Socrates is a man.
- ∴ 3. Socrates is mortal.

The general first premise assumes as known every particular statement describing men of the form “A is mortal”, “B is mortal”, etc. Included in these is the statement “Socrates is mortal”. Since this is the conclusion, it must already be known for the first premise to be known.<sup>6</sup> Hence, Mill says that the inference exhibits what I call antecedent-justification circularity.

Sextus Empiricus offers a very similar example:

1. Every human is an animal.
2. But Socrates is human.
- ∴ 3. Socrates is an animal.

The inference exhibits what I call antecedent-justification circularity, he claims, since one must “[confirm] the universal proposition inductively by way of each of the particulars existing up to now and the particular deductively from the universal” (Sextus Empiricus, 2000, p. 120). One can know the conclusion only by inferring it from the premises, yet one can know the first premise only if one already knows the conclusion.

I reject the position of Mill and Sextus because it relies on the confused idea that the premise(s) must be known with certainty if one is to be able to justifiably believe the conclusion on the basis of the premise(s).<sup>7,8,9</sup> Both claim that one cannot know a general statement without first knowing each particular statement it implies. Since this includes

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<sup>6</sup> While Mill and Sextus speak only of knowledge and not of justification, their comments can be translated into the present discussion if we assume that S’s knowing P implies S’s being justified in believing P. Externalists may deny this implication, but for present purposes the point in the text stands.

<sup>7</sup> The sort of certainty I have in mind is epistemic, not psychological. One has epistemic certainty when one’s evidence relevantly entails the truth of the claim in question. Note that this may come cheap when dealing with necessary truths. This is quite true, but it is not a problem here.

<sup>8</sup> For additional discussion of this objection, see Cohen and Nagel (2002).

<sup>9</sup> This remark is not intended to convey the position that, in general, knowledge does not require certainty. Quite the contrary, I believe that knowledge does require certainty.

the particular statement that is the conclusion, it needs to already be known for the first premise to be known. Hence the inference exhibits antecedent-justification circularity. But if one does not need to be certain, i.e. *know*, that every instance of “S is a P” is true to *justifiably* believe that “All S are P”, then one can justifiably believe the latter without knowing that the S stated in the conclusion is a P.<sup>10</sup> The following illustrates the sort of case I have in mind. Suppose that one justifiably believes that all men are mortal on the basis of the death of many men—but not Socrates. Suppose further that one justifiably believes that Socrates is a man. It is plausible that one can come to have a justified belief that Socrates is mortal on the basis of this information. The obvious difference between this argument and the ones Mill and Sextus offer is that the conclusion is not known but only justifiably believed. I will say more about this difference below, but for now notice that the following is true: it is false that one is justified in believing the premise(s) only if one is already justified in believing the conclusion.

Why do Mill and Sextus believe that the premises must always be certain if one is to justifiably believe the conclusion on the basis of the premise(s)? Unfortunately they do not say, yet I think it is charitable to infer that they say this because they are focusing on the best sort of inference one can make: where one comes to know the conclusion by making that inference. But why think the conclusion must be known on the basis of the premise(s) for it to be a good inference? More importantly, why think that this must be the case for the argument to be valid? It is clear that one can make a valid inference even if one does not know the premise(s).

The problem with the position of Mill and Sextus is that it focuses on a subset of valid inferences, viz. those where the conclusion is known on the basis of an inference from known premises. In this section I have been concerned with the broad thesis that all

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<sup>10</sup> I am assuming that justification does not entail truth, i.e. it is possible to have a justified false belief.

valid inferences exhibit antecedent-justification circularity. I have pointed out that some valid inferences whose premises are not known do not have this property. This is important, insofar as the present discussion seeks to identify what features of *any* inference will make it exhibit this type of circularity. This includes inferences where the premises are not known. If Mill and Sextus have been focusing only on the best sort of inference, then I can grant their claim about the best inferences while retaining mine about inferences in general. Nevertheless, it is important to notice the difference in scope, as many philosophers seem to have taken Mill and Sextus to be making a pronouncement on all valid inferences.

#### 1.7.1.2 The dependence of antecedent-justification circularity on contextual factors

I've argued that not all valid inferences exhibit antecedent-justification circularity. I will now argue that, with one potential exception to be discussed below, whether an inference has this property depends on contextual factors, and not on its structure alone. The subsequent discussion will focus on examples, some of which are such that the subject S does not base belief in the premise(s) on prior belief in the conclusion; the reader is free to construct similar examples where this is the case. Consider the following inference containing a disjunction:

1. Either Kris is in the office or Travis is in the office.
  2. Travis is not in the office.
- ∴ 3. Kris is in the office.

Suppose that my justified belief in the first premise is based on two sources. First, I hear muffled voices coming from inside the office while I am standing outside. Second, I justifiably believe via induction from past experiences that the only people that would be



in the office are Kris or Travis.<sup>1112</sup> My justified belief in the second premise is based on the fact that I see Travis walk past the door while continuing to hear the same voice coming from inside. Like the previous example, it is not the case that I am justified in believing the premise(s) only if I am already justified in believing the conclusion.

To illustrate the point that whether an inference exhibits antecedent-justification circularity depends on the context, consider this example found in Plantinga (1974):

1.  $5 + 7 = 13$  or God exists.
  2.  $5 + 7 \neq 13$ .
- ∴ 3. God exists.

This inference has the same structure as the one before it. But, as Plantinga points out, since the first disjunct of the first premise is a necessary falsehood, it is likely that a subject S would believe the premises only if S already believed the second disjunct of the first premise, i.e. the conclusion. So this inference likely has the property of being antecedent-justification circular despite having the same structure as other inferences without this property, e.g. the inference preceding it.

I now turn to biconditionals. Consider the following:

1. P if and only if Q.
  2. P.
- ∴ 3. Q.

This inference need not exhibit antecedent-justification circularity. A subject S does not need to first be justified in believing that Q to be justified in believing that  $P \equiv Q$ . Suppose that P is “That A is a creature with a heart” and Q is “That A is a creature with a

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<sup>11</sup> Alternatively, one might become justified in believing the disjunction on the basis of testimony. In this case, too, one wouldn't need to be justified in believing the conclusion before one can become justified in believing the premise.

<sup>12</sup> Here I commit myself to a rejection of some sort of inductive skepticism. While I will not defend this rejection here, suffice to say it will not affect the example.

kidney”. S can be justified in believing that the truth-values of these statements do not diverge, even if S is justified in believing neither proposition first. The reason for this is that the first premise makes an assertion that can be known independently of the any knowledge of truth-functional components.

I now turn to conditionals. Consider the following:

1.  $P \supset Q$ .

2. P.

$\therefore$  3. Q.

Although it is not asserted by it, the proposition expressed by the conclusion in some sense “appears” as a part of the first premise, but it is not necessarily the case that one is justified in believing the latter only if one is already justified in believing the former. One could become justified in believing the first premise, for example, on the basis of expert testimony or a priori intuition.

Finally, I turn to conjunctions. Consider the following:

1.  $P \bullet Q$ .

$\therefore$  2. Q.

This inference more plausibly exhibits antecedent-justification circularity, since one might think that the only way to be justified in believing the premise is to be first justified in believing P and Q individually, then conjoining them. Even if a subject S believes  $P \bullet Q$  on the basis of expert testimony, and even though it may seem to S that he acquires a justified belief in the conjunction all at once, it is plausible that S must (perhaps unconsciously) believe both P and Q individually before conjoining them.

I have argued that whether an inference exhibits antecedent-justification circularity depends upon the epistemological context in which the inference is made. Often, we can't tell whether the inference exhibits antecedent-justification circularity until we know what the person based his belief(s) in the premise(s) on.

I now turn to the seemingly special case of inferences of the form “P; therefore P”. *Prima facie*, these inferences will always exhibit antecedent-justification circularity (even if those discussed above do not), since the proposition expressed by the premise and the conclusion is the same. There is some opposition to this, and I will consider potential counterexamples presently. Sorenson (1991, p. 248-249) offers the following examples:

- 1. Some arguments are written in black ink.
- ∴ 2. Some arguments are written in black ink.
- 1. It is possible for a conclusion to entail its premise.
- ∴ 2. It is possible for a conclusion to entail its premise.
- 1. Some deductive arguments do not reason from general to particular.
- ∴ 2. Some deductive arguments do not reason from general to particular.

He claims that these inferences do not exhibit antecedent-justification circularity because they are rationally persuasive. One who did not already believe the conclusion of the inference would be convinced of its truth by considering this inference. There is nothing vicious about this inference.<sup>13</sup>

These inferences are special, insofar as features of them other than validity contribute to one’s being justified in believing its conclusion. The relevant feature is what Sorenson calls exemplification. The premise and conclusion jointly exemplify, by being an instance of, the claim made by premise and conclusion. In sum, Sorenson’s examples do not exhibit antecedent-justification circularity since the conclusion’s already being justified is not required for the premise to be justified. Instead, the premise and conclusion are justified via the argument as a whole exemplifying a certain property.

Hoffman (1971) has argued against Sorenson’s claim that some inferences of the

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<sup>13</sup> These remarks bear on the question of whether an inference’s being circular and it begging the question are the same. I will return to this issue in the final chapter.

form “P; therefore P” do not exhibit antecedent-justification circularity.<sup>14</sup> His claim is based on his definition of an argument, according to which an argument is a set of propositions, some of which are offered as reasons to believe the others. But when you have an apparent inference like “P; therefore, P” there is only one proposition, and hence the premise is not being offered as a reason to believe *another* proposition. So there really is no argument (or an inference using it) at all. *A fortiori*, there are no inferences of the form “P; therefore P” that exhibit antecedent-justification circularity either.

My response to this objection has two parts. First, if Hoffman is right then the main thesis of this section remains untouched: one cannot determine whether an inference exhibits antecedent-justification circularity by looking at its form; one must look to contextual factors. Second, Hoffman’s definition of an argument as containing at least two distinct propositions is implicitly narrower than mine. Earlier I defined an argument as “a set of statements, some of which, the premises, are put forward as evidence for the remaining statement, the conclusion.” This definition is noncommittal on the number of distinct propositions that must be present in an argument. Yet I am willing to say that “P; therefore P” is a structure a genuine inference can have because there may be a case where one tries to offer a proposition P as evidence for P. Of course, this inference may seem strange or pointless, but that doesn’t imply that it isn’t an inference. It is the treating of the statement as evidence for itself that renders the set of statements an inference rather than a list of statements. The purpose of this section is to determine, in the most general terms, which inferences exhibit antecedent-justification circularity and which do not. The fact that “P; therefore P” may be deemed atypical or even pointless is not relevant. My discussion intends to cover all inferences, even the bad ones or the ones

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<sup>14</sup> Hoffman’s discussion is conducted in terms of arguments, not inferences. This does not affect the present discussion, since the relevant feature of the present arguments, viz. the premise and conclusion being the same, will also be present if one inferred the conclusion from the premises.

no one actually makes. In sum, Hoffman's objection can be dismissed on the grounds that it deals with a subject matter of narrower scope than mine.<sup>15</sup>

### 1.7.2 Antecedent-justification circularity and indiscrimination

To further understand the nature of antecedent-justification circularity, I will consider a common objection to it. The objection claims that antecedent-justification circular inference is indiscriminate: if it were acceptable, it would imply the (absurd) consequence that one could justify any proposition whatsoever. Here are some representative statements of the objection:

Schmitt (2004, p. 383) writes:

There is a second property of adducing [an antecedent-justification] circular argument in support of its conclusion that might be thought to prevent support. The problem this time is that adducing such an argument is in a certain sense indiscriminate. If merely adducing [an antecedent-justification] circular argument succeeded in supporting its conclusion, then any proposition *p* whatever could be supported merely by adducing [an antecedent justification] circular argument with conclusion *p*. But then any conclusion whatever could be supported.

Boghossian (2000, p. 245) writes:

A second problem is that, by allowing itself the liberty of assuming that which it is trying to prove, a [antecedent-justification] circular argument is able to prove absolutely anything, however intuitively unjustifiable.

Moser (1993, pp. 4-5) writes:

Philosophers, among others, usually seek non-questionbegging supporting evidence for a simple reason: Questionbegging evidence fosters arbitrariness, in that it is easy to produce for *any* claim under dispute. If questionbegging evidence is permissible in a dispute, all participants will enjoy support from permissible

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<sup>15</sup> Hoffman distinguishes between an argument and reasoning, much as I distinguish between the former and inference. The objection is still worth considering, if only to reaffirm the distinction I have argued must be made. See Jacquette (1993) for further criticism of Hoffman's restriction.

evidence for their claims: They need only support their disputed claims *with the disputed claims themselves*.

What exactly is it that antecedent-justification circular argument is supposed to be indiscriminate about? The most straightforward answer is that it is indiscriminate with respect to which statements can form the premise(s) and conclusion of an antecedent-justification circular argument: any statement can be. By itself, this fails to capture the intuition behind this objection. For the ability to substitute any statement into the schema “P; therefore P” does not imply that every statement so substituted is justified. The reason for this is that not every statement is justified. If the premise of an inference is unjustified, then there will be no justification available to transfer to the conclusion, and the conclusion will be unjustified if believed on the basis of the premise.

If there is any indiscriminate objection to antecedent-justification circularity, it cannot stem from a worry with the argument itself. This sort of indiscriminate is true of all argument forms. We do not say *modus ponens* is problematically indiscriminate because one can insert any statements in for P and Q in the schema “P, if P then Q; therefore Q”. If indiscriminate is problematic, this cannot be what it refers to. The indiscriminate problem is, I suggest, best described as an epistemological problem for *us*: how do we discriminate between which statements are justified and which are not? A statement’s occurring in an antecedent-justification circular inference will not by itself enable us to determine whether it is justified, since any statement can so occur. This is such a small amount of information about the statement that we shouldn’t be surprised if we are unable to ascertain its justificatory status on the basis of so little.

### 1.8 Epistemic Source Circularity

An inference exhibits epistemic source circularity iff at least one of the premises is produced by a source the conclusion says is legitimate. The clearest and most well known example of epistemic source circularity is an inference where the track record of a belief source is used to establish the legitimacy of the source:

1. On the basis of visual experience S formed the belief that P.
2. P is true. [Produced using S's visual faculty]
3. On the basis of visual experience S formed the belief that Q.
4. Q is true. [Produced using S's visual faculty]

...

∴ N. Visual experience is a legitimate source of belief.

Circularity arises for S if the beliefs specified in the even numbered premises were formed only using vision. That need not be the case, however, since if one used a different source to verify one's visual beliefs, e.g. the testimony of a friend, one would not be relying on the source specified in the conclusion to *show* that that source indeed produces mostly true beliefs.

What is it for a belief source to be legitimate?<sup>16</sup> The following is a rather cursory characterization of a common, albeit highly controversial view, reliabilism, which is often considered to be the paradigmatic metaepistemological view that licenses track record inferences. First of all, according to reliabilism, every legitimate source produces mostly true beliefs. But this is not enough, since a source that produces many false beliefs as well may not be legitimate. Instead, a source is legitimate if it produces a favorable ratio of true beliefs to false ones; i.e. it must produce mostly true beliefs. The exact percentage is not relevant for present purposes—however, it need not be 100%. Second, according to the reliabilist, when must the source produce mostly true beliefs—within a compressed time frame, e.g. all past uses, or all the time? It would seem strange to call a source legitimate if it only produced mostly true beliefs in a small subset of times of its total use. Moreover, to say that a source is legitimate also seems to imply that

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<sup>16</sup> The following remarks draw heavily on Goldman's discussion of reliability in his (1979). I will save discussion of the details and terminology of Goldman's own position for chapter two. In the final chapter I will discuss an internalist conception of source-legitimacy that has no conceptual connection to reliability.

it will continue to produce mostly true beliefs throughout future usage as well. Finally, we must take into account that a source does not typically produce beliefs *ex nihilo*; it takes something as an input and outputs a belief. There is a parallel here with inference rules (the legitimacy of which will be discussed in the next section): we say that it is desirable for an inference rule to be truth-preserving, i.e. given true premises, the inference produces at least mostly true conclusions. But we do not discount a rule's legitimacy if it does not produce mostly true conclusions when the premises are false. Something similar can be said for sources. When the inputs are true beliefs, a legitimate source will output mostly true beliefs; when the input beliefs are false we do not require the legitimate source to output mostly true beliefs. What about non-belief, non-propositional inputs such as sensory experiences?<sup>17</sup> Here the temptation is to say that a legitimate source will produce mostly true beliefs given non-propositional sense-experiential inputs.<sup>18</sup>

Thus far I have discussed epistemic source circularity as establishing the legitimacy of sources of belief, where legitimacy is defined in a distinctively externalist sense. I will now consider epistemic source circular inferences that may be given by an internalist who denies, roughly, that "legitimacy" means "truth conducive". I will not offer an internalist account of legitimacy here, although chapter four will explore this issue in more detail. For present purposes, it is sufficient to note that the following inference exhibits epistemic source circularity and by stipulation does not rely on an externalist rendering of legitimacy:

1. I seem to remember that P.

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<sup>17</sup> It is not relevant for present purposes to discuss whether any or all sensory experiences have propositional content like beliefs. So long as at least some sensory experiences are non-propositional it is relevant to discuss them.

<sup>18</sup> This contention might cause the reliabilist trouble, given the New Evil Demon problem, to be discussed in the next chapter.



2. P is true. [Produced using my memorial faculty]

3. I seem to remember that Q.

4. Q is true. [Produced using my memory faculty]

...

∴ N. Memory is a legitimate source of belief.

This inference exhibits epistemic source circularity because the even numbered premises are formed using the source that the conclusion says is legitimate. The internalist might be wary of track record arguments like this one for different reasons than the externalist.

For example, Stroud (1989, p. 101) has argued that a philosophical theory of knowledge is an account that is “completely general” in several respects. Less broadly, one might seek to understand one’s knowledge or justified belief within a smaller domain, e.g. one’s memorial faculty. Being fully general, the sought after account would ask (i) whether *anything* is justifiably believed within the specified domain, and (ii) how such justified belief is possible. One consequence is that one will not be able to simply assume that one already has some justified memory beliefs in the process of answering these two questions. For making such an assumption “holds fixed” some subset of apparently justified beliefs, and uses those to help facilitate understanding of the rest of one’s beliefs formed via memory. But the resulting understanding would not be fully general, since it exempts some beliefs from scrutiny. In the epistemic source circular inference above, one uses or otherwise relies on apparently justified memory beliefs as premises to argue for the conclusion that memory is *in general* a legitimate source of belief. Hence, an internalist might object to epistemic source circularity on the grounds that it would, even if apparently successful, fail to provide a fully general account or understanding of the domain in question. Note that this objection to this type of circularity in no way depends on understanding the concept of legitimacy in the externalist’s “truth conducive” sense. In chapter four I will discuss Stroud’s position in greater detail.

Both arguments and inferences can exhibit epistemic source circularity. While one may infer a conclusion from a set of premises which is such that least one of the latter is produced by a source the conclusion says is legitimate, one need not actually do so to determine whether the corresponding argument exhibits epistemic source circularity. One simply needs to examine the argument and ask whether the following is true: “A subject S could base belief in at least one of the premises on a source the conclusion says is legitimate, were S to believe the premise(s)”.

It is worth noting that beliefs not supported by inference can also exhibit a closely related sort of epistemic source circularity. Bergmann (2006, p. 180) points out than an “EC-Belief”, i.e. one exhibiting epistemic source circularity, arises if “in holding that belief [about the legitimacy of a source X], I *depend on X*”. For example, Reid (2002) claims that the beliefs that all our natural sources are legitimate are both produced by those very sources and justified noninferentially, since, he claims, it is true that all our natural sources are legitimate.

### 1.8.1 Relationship between antecedent-justification circularity and epistemic source circularity

One crucial difference between inferences that exhibit antecedent-justification circularity and epistemic source circularity is the epistemic relationship a subject S would need to have towards the conclusion. Making an antecedent-justification circular inference requires S to have justification to believe the conclusion first and then infer at least one of the premises from it.<sup>19</sup> To make an epistemic source circular inference, on the other hand, S need not have any epistemic attitude toward the conclusion or the source it asserts is legitimate. The conclusion simply needs to *be* true; S doesn’t also

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<sup>19</sup> Neither this inference nor the belief in the conclusion needs to be made explicit in the course of making the inference itself, so long as the justification of the premise derives from and is sustained by the conclusion.

need to believe that it is true in order for the premise(s) to be doxastically justified. This is perhaps the key difference between these types of circularity, and its implications for the internalism/externalism debate(s) will be drawn out in detail in the following chapters.

If the relationship between the justification of the premise(s) and the conclusion of the inference is not belief, what is it? As already explained, the one making the inference clearly *uses* the source specified by the conclusion to form belief in some of the premises. Alston (1986) suggests that the use of a source in this way is best described as a practical assumption that the source is legitimate. His use of the word “assumption” should not be taken to indicate belief, however. Rather, he has in mind a sort of manifest acceptance of the source in one’s belief-forming practices. One accepts the source by forming beliefs using it. Alexander (2010, p. 228) reiterates this point by stressing that the commitment one has to a source’s legitimacy is “non-doxastic”. Finally, Bergmann (2006, p.180) talks of a belief B “depending upon” a belief forming source X whenever B is either “an output of X or [is] held on the basis of an *actually employed* inference chain leading back to an output of X”. As with Alston’s characterization, one need not form any beliefs about a source for it to produce beliefs as outputs.

There is an additional necessary condition for the premises of an argument exhibiting epistemic source circularity argument to be justified. The true conclusion must also be underwritten by a true epistemic principle specifying the conditions under which a belief is justified.<sup>20</sup> The principle has the form “If a belief B satisfies conditions C, then B is justified” where C specifies being formed by the source.<sup>21</sup> In a favorable

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<sup>20</sup> Whether the justification such beliefs enjoy is inferential or non-inferential is not relevant for present purposes.

<sup>21</sup> The modal status of these principles is also not relevant for present purposes. Despite this, it is worth noting that internalists and externalists may disagree on this point. See McGrew & McGrew (2007) for discussion.

circumstance, the underlying epistemic principle is true and so the premise beliefs meet conditions C and are thereby justified. There being a true epistemic principle is also necessary because the truth of the conclusion may not be sufficient for the source's output beliefs to be justified. It is possible for a source to be legitimate according to an externalist or internalist conception even though it is not underwritten by a true epistemic principle. For example, if reliabilism is false, then the conclusion that the source is reliable might be true despite the fact that the underlying meta-epistemological view is false. Furthermore, many true beliefs, in addition to not being underwritten by a true epistemic principle, do not describe a source at all and so are neither legitimate nor illegitimate in the present sense. Hence, true propositions such as "I am now typing at my computer" or "snow is white" cannot be the conclusion of an argument exhibiting epistemic source circularity. Despite being true, they concern the wrong subject matter.

Is there an indiscrimination problem for epistemic source circularity? Can the legitimacy of any source be established by means of an inference that exhibits epistemic source circularity? No. For if the source is not underwritten by a true epistemic principle, then the premise beliefs produced by that source will not be justified, and so neither will the conclusion on the basis of the premise(s). As with inferences exhibiting antecedent-justification circularity, this sort of indiscrimination should not be deemed epistemologically problematic. It is merely a symptom of the nature of epistemic source circular inference qua instances of schematic argument.

Despite this response to the allegation that epistemic source circular inferences are problematically indiscriminate, there is a related indiscrimination problem that seems to pose a greater epistemological threat: how do *we* discriminate between true and false epistemic principles? Inferences exhibiting epistemic source circularity do not provide the resources to answer this question. As Alston (1986) puts it, the trouble with this type of circularity is that it "doesn't let you distinguish the sheep from the goats" (p. 17). In

the final chapter of the dissertation I will return to this point and examine it in greater detail.

Arguments exhibiting epistemic source circularity can be transformed to exhibit antecedent-justification circularity if one accepts the following principle discussed in Cohen (2002, p. 309):

KR: a potential knowledge source K can yield knowledge for S, only if S knows that K is legitimate.<sup>22</sup>

Consider the track record inference discussed above:

1. On the basis of visual experience S formed the belief that P.
2. P is true. [Produced using S's visual faculty]
3. On the basis of visual experience S formed the belief that Q.
4. Q is true. [Produced using S's visual faculty]

...

∴ N. Visual experience is a legitimate source of belief.

If one accepts KR, the premises formed using vision are unjustified if one does not already know that vision is legitimate. An updated version of this inference is as follows:

1. Visual experience is a legitimate source of belief.
2. On the basis of visual experience S formed the belief that P.
3. P is true. [Produced using S's visual faculty]
4. On the basis of visual experience S formed the belief that Q.
5. Q is true. [Produced using S's visual faculty]

...

∴ N. Visual experience is a legitimate source of belief.

The addition of the legitimacy premise puts the proponent of KR in a position to

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<sup>22</sup> I've replaced Cohen's "reliable" with "legitimate" for consistency. In chapter three I will discuss a similar principle regarding justification.

say that the premises formed using vision are justified. The inference no longer exhibits epistemic source circularity, however, since the probabilistic justification provided by the initial premises is trumped by the entailing justification provided by the new premise. To be justified in believing the conclusion, one no longer needs to appeal to the source's track record. Moreover, the inference has been transformed into one that exhibits antecedent-justification circularity. I will put aside questions concerning which metaepistemological commitments that might lead one to accept or reject KR; I will return to them in later chapters. For now I am concerned with characterizing types of circularity. Part of this involves explaining the interconnections that may exist between them.

### 1.9 Rule Circularity

An argument or inference is rule circular iff the inference rule that joins the premises and the conclusion is legitimate only if the conclusion is true. What is it for an inference rule to be legitimate?<sup>23</sup> The initial explication of this concept for sources in terms of producing more true beliefs than false etc. will not capture all that is needed. For an inference rule may, as a matter of contingent fact, have mostly false beliefs as outputs due to mostly false inputs as premises. Instead, we should characterize an inference rule as legitimate when it produces mostly true propositions given true inputs. This characterization fits nicely with the idea that a good inference rule is one that is truth-preserving, at least most of the time.<sup>24</sup> If there is no truth for an inference to preserve, this fact will not count against its claim to legitimacy.

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<sup>23</sup> The following discussion has obvious parallels to what the reliabilist says about the legitimacy of belief-producing processes. In his (1986), externalist Goldman appeals to "right J-rules" which themselves bear additional similarity to the present topic.

<sup>24</sup> Deductive inference rules, if valid, will be necessarily truth-preserving, whereas strong inductive rules will probably be truth-preserving.

Perhaps the most famous historical examples of such inferences are inductive justifications of induction. Here is one reconstruction:

1. I inductively inferred P from a set of premises at  $t_1$ .
2. My belief that P at  $t_1$  was true.
3. I inductively inferred Q from a set of premises at  $t_2$ .
4. My belief that Q at  $t_2$  was true.

...

∴ N. Inductive inference is a legitimate inference form.

Like the track record inferences discussed earlier, this inference enumerates several favorable instances and then inductively infers a claim about legitimacy. What makes this inference different is that the inference rule used to infer the conclusion from the premises is the same inference rule asserted by the conclusion to be legitimate.

Rule circularity need not involve induction. Here is an inference exhibiting rule circularity involving the deductive inference rule *modus ponens*:

1. If P, then *modus ponens* is a legitimate inference rule.
2. P.

∴ 3. *Modus ponens* is a legitimate inference rule.

As before, the inference rule used to derive the conclusion from the premises is the inference rule the conclusion asserts to be legitimate.

If the conclusion of a rule circular inference is false, then the inference rule used to derive the conclusion from the premise(s) is illegitimate. In such a case, one may not be justified in believing the conclusion on the basis of those premises, even if the premises are justified. Of course, one might argue that all one needs is to be justified in believing that the inference is legitimate, even if this belief is false. On the other hand, if the conclusion of the inference is true, the premises are justified, and any other metaepistemological requirements are met, then the justification will transfer from the premises to the conclusion, giving one a justified belief in the conclusion.

Both arguments and inferences can exhibit rule circularity. While one may infer a conclusion from premises using a rule the former says is legitimate, one need not actually do so to determine whether the corresponding argument exhibits rule circularity. One simply needs to examine the inference rule joining premise(s) and conclusion to determine whether it is the one the conclusion says is legitimate.

### 1.9.1 Relationship between rule circularity and epistemic source circularity

Inferences exhibiting rule circularity are more similar to those exhibiting epistemic source circularity than antecedent-justification circularity in the following respect. Whereas the circularity arising in an antecedent-justification circular inference depends on assuming the conclusion to be already *justified*, the circularity arising in the other two depends on assuming the conclusion of the inference to be *true*. For it is on that assumption that the premises are justified or that the justification present in the premise(s) transfers to the conclusion.

Following this last point, a further similarity between inferences exhibiting rule circularity and epistemic source circularity can be identified. With both sorts of inferences, one relies on something specified by the conclusion, even though that reliance is not necessarily to be construed as belief. In the case of a rule circular inference, one uses the inference rule—or as Boghossian (2000) puts it: one reasons in accordance with a rule—by inferring from the premise what the rule specifies as following from it. Insofar as one uses the rule without forming beliefs about it, I will say that one's use of or reliance on an inference rule in a rule circular inference is practical, not doxastic.

### 1.9.2 Relationship between rule circularity and antecedent- justification circularity

It is worth noting briefly that one metaepistemological view about the nature of inferential justification might turn inferences exhibiting rule circularity into inferences



exhibiting antecedent-justification circularity. According to inferential internalism, one is justified in believing a proposition P on the basis of evidence E only if one is justified in believing that E makes P probable.<sup>25</sup> Roughly, to say that E makes probable P is to say that E supports P, i.e. the justification one has for believing E can be transferred to P. For this transmission to be possible, however, one must be justified in believing that the inference from E to P is a good one. To be explicit, the inferential internalist's inference from premise E to conclusion P must include as an additional condition that E makes probable P. Take the example of an inference exhibiting rule circularity with the conclusion that *modus ponens* is legitimate. The original, rule circular, inference looks like this:

1. If P is true, then *modus ponens* is legitimate.
  2. P is true.
- ∴ 3. *Modus ponens* is legitimate.

The inferential internalist will not allow one to be justified in believing this conclusion on the basis of these premises unless one meets the condition that one be justified in believing that the inference is legitimate. It is controversial what role the inferential internalist's condition plays in the argument. Suppose that the inferential internalist requires in this case that the subject include the claim that *modus ponens* is legitimate as an additional premise. The inference no longer exhibits rule circularity, although it does exhibit antecedent-justification circularity due to the new premises' being both identical to the conclusion and being such that it must be justifiably believed for the new set of premises to be justified. The general lesson is that the inferential internalist will never be in a position to offer a legitimate inference exhibiting rule circularity. In the next chapter I will look more closely at inferential internalism as part of an examination of internalism generally.

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<sup>25</sup> See Fumerton (1995) for details.

I have explained the indiscrimination objection to antecedent-justification circularity above. Does a similar objection apply to rule circularity? Like inferences exhibiting antecedent-justification circularity and epistemic source circularity, inferences exhibiting rule circularity are neutral on which inference rule one uses to infer from the premises that that rule is legitimate. As before, this sort of indiscrimination seems unproblematic. The more interesting sort of indiscrimination is epistemic in nature, and it can be framed for rule circularity this way: on the basis of being the conclusion of a rule circular inference *alone*, we will be unable to discriminate the legitimate inference rules from the illegitimate ones.

#### 1.10 Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined several types of circularity. I would like to briefly indicate the role these types of circularity will play in the rest of the dissertation. Of central concern to the dissertation is epistemic source circularity, and chapter three will examine whether externalist and internalist metaepistemologies should allow that inferences of this type are legitimate. Internalists have often accused externalists of being committed to allowing this, and have taken this as a reason to reject externalism. Some externalists have argued, however, that internalists either already do or must allow this as well. In chapter four, I will consider the results from the previous chapters and discuss the prospects of avoiding the skeptical thesis that it is impossible for any belief to be justified to any extent, due to the apparent unavoidability of epistemic source circularity.

## CHAPTER 2

### INTERNALISM AND EXTERNALISM

#### 2.1 Introduction

In chapter one I distinguished several types of circularity that an argument or inference can exhibit. The dissertation focuses on epistemic source circularity and seeks to answer two questions about it. Recall that this type of circularity arises when belief in at least one premise is produced by a source the conclusion says is legitimate. The first question is this: can any metaepistemology consistently avoid permitting epistemic source circularity? I will answer this question in chapter three. To set the stage for that discussion, in this chapter I will distinguish several types of internalist and externalist views regarding the conditions for epistemic justification. The second question the dissertation seeks to answer is this: is epistemic source circularity vicious, i.e. does it preclude one from attaining justified beliefs? Chapter four will address this question.

I now briefly digress to consider an issue that will come to the forefront only in later chapters. Doing so will help shed further light on the structure of the dissertation, notably the interconnections between the answers to the two main questions listed above. As we shall see in the third chapter, some epistemologists have argued that the characteristics a metaepistemological theory must have to permit epistemic source circular inferences to be justificatory are not peculiar to internalism or externalism.<sup>26</sup> In other words, the answer to the first question “Can one avoid permitting epistemic source circularity?” it is argued, can be answered independently of one’s commitment to internalism or externalism. Even if this were correct, it would be premature to conclude that an in-depth discussion of the different sorts of internalism and externalism is not needed. For in order to answer the second question, “Is epistemic source circularity

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<sup>26</sup> See Bergmann (2006) and Cohen (2002).

vicious?” one must enquire into the aspects of internalism and externalism that would either permit or prohibit epistemic source circularity. These metaepistemological commitments must be laid bare, since arguably they are at the focal point of the apparent dispute between internalists and externalists regarding epistemic source circularity.

It seems clear enough that internalists and externalists disagree over how to analyze at least some epistemic concepts. Which concepts? Traditionally, internalists and externalists have proposed analyses of knowledge or justification. In this chapter, I will be most concerned with analyses of justification. There are two main reasons for this. First, the Pyrrhonian skepticism largely responsible for initially highlighting the apparently problematic nature of epistemic source circularity is itself concerned with justification.<sup>27</sup> Pyrrhonian skepticism is best characterized not as a skeptical thesis but as a way of regulating one’s cognition. As a first approximation, a Pyrrhonian suspends judgment on any proposition for which there is equal evidence for it and its negation. They seemed to find such equal evidence for nearly every proposition, and so formed very few beliefs. This explains why Pyrrhonism does not involve a skeptical thesis: a Pyrrhonist suspends judgment on the truth or falsity of Pyrrhonian skepticism, too. Hence the dissertation may be conveniently viewed as an investigation into the prospects for internalist and externalist responses to Pyrrhonian skepticism: (epistemically) ought one suspend judgment on nearly all matters of fact due to unavoidable vicious epistemic source circularity?

Second, there seems to be general agreement among epistemologists that *knowledge* is best given an externalist analysis. Knowledge requires true belief, and the truth of a belief will in most cases involve the obtaining of something external to a subject S. In particular, the truth of a belief will most often involve the obtaining of

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<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Sextus Empiricus’ discussion of Agrippa’s trilemma and the problem of the criterion in his (2000).

something objective, in the sense of mind-independent.<sup>28</sup> While a discussion of metaphysical and alethic realism is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it seems fairly uncontroversial to say that most epistemologists are metaphysical realists, which, as we shall see later, on most accounts of externalism commits them to an externalist analysis of knowledge due to the external nature of the truth condition.<sup>29</sup>

Discussions of internalism and externalism have focused mainly on justification. Yet here, too, there is divergence as to the role justification plays in epistemology. For instance, Gettier (1963) showed that justified, true belief is not sufficient for knowledge. In response to this, some externalists either denied that justification is even necessary for knowledge or significantly downplayed its importance in the analysis of knowledge. Interestingly, some internalists (notably BonJour) have taken this result in stride and have called for a shift of attention among epistemologists to justification, leaving knowledge by the wayside.<sup>30</sup> Hence, it may be the case that not much of a concession is made by the internalists when they adopt an externalist analysis of knowledge. Rather, the central issue between camps seems to be whether the concept of justification is best given an internalist or externalist analysis.

Nevertheless, it remains an open issue what is required to add to true belief to get knowledge. Here there is divergence between internalists and externalists. The issue is this: Are all of the other conditions for knowledge internalist conditions?<sup>31</sup> Here it may seem more clear that there is a genuine dispute, where proponents of a view are more

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<sup>28</sup> For a discussion of metaphysical realism see Putnam (1981) and Alston (1997).

<sup>29</sup> Internalists might make exceptions in cases where one has infallible justification for a belief about an internal state. In such a case, the truth condition is internal to the subject.

<sup>30</sup> BonJour (2003, pp. 21-23) provides additional reasons for focusing on justification rather than knowledge.

<sup>31</sup> This may oversimplify things a bit, since internalists typically want a Gettier-proof analysis, which may very well require an externalist condition.

likely to say that the other view has picked out the wrong conditions. But, one could always say that there are many different, complementary analyses of knowledge, some of which contain internalist conditions and some of which do not. While the contextualist literature has typically focused on the standards for knowledge attributions, there is nothing stopping such philosophers from claiming that internalist and externalist analyses are appropriate or operative in some contexts but not all.

It may still be misleading to describe internalists and externalists as engaging in a dispute over the analysis of justification, if this implies that either side is committed to the other's analysis being false. Some epistemologists have suggested that both camps are simply interested in different concepts altogether. Each view is interested in a different aspect of epistemic evaluation, and so it would be a mistake to think that they are mutually exclusive. For instance, internalists often seem interested in the more first person, subjective issues such as "removing doubt", "gaining assurance" as well as developing an "idealized" epistemic theory. By contrast, externalists often seem more interested in third person, objective issues surrounding "causal bases of belief", "reliability", "safety", and "sensitivity", etc.

Is the relationship between internalism and externalism best described as one of complementarity or competition? The default position seems to be that internalists and externalists are in disagreement over the analysis of justification.

In the first chapter I distinguished between propositional and doxastic justification. Briefly, the distinction may be seen as between the conditions for there being justification for a potentially believed proposition and for the having of a justified belief, respectively. Internalists and externalists have also diverged on which sort of justification they are analyzing. Internalists have often considered themselves in the business of analyzing propositional justification whereas externalists have been primarily

concerned with doxastic justification.<sup>32</sup>

Despite these different ways of viewing the dialectical relationship between internalism and externalism, this chapter will focus on their respective analyses of justification, whether propositional or doxastic. Whether one thinks these views are best described as offering opposing analyses of the same concept—and are thereby committed to their opponent’s analyses being false—or different analyses of different concepts (perhaps being committed to their opponent’s analyses being simply uninteresting yet true) it is important to determine exactly what these concepts are. To that task I now turn.

## 2.2 Characterizing Internalism

In this section I will distinguish several versions of internalism. A common thread between all versions of internalism is that the factors that provide justification for one to believe a proposition must be in some sense internal to the subject. Since saying that “X is internal” is incomplete, the first question that must be addressed is: “Internal to what?” I will proceed by considering views that gradually narrow the scope of the answer to this question.

### 2.2.1 Internal to the Body

According to this version of internalism, the only factors that contribute to a belief’s justification are located inside of a subject’s physical body. Depending on one’s position on the relationship between the mind and body, the views to be discussed below may simply focus on a part of one’s body.

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<sup>32</sup> For further discussion, see Bergmann (2006, pp. 4-7). One reason internalists may not be particularly interested in doxastic justification is that having a justified *belief* plausibly requires identifying the basis on which the belief was formed. Basing is normally thought to involve a causal requirement, which seems to involve paradigmatically externalist conditions.

### 2.2.2 Internal to the Mind

According to this version of internalism, variously referred to as “mentalism”, “internal state internalism” or simply “internalism”, the only features that are relevant to a belief’s justification are internal to a subject’s mind. (Fumerton 1995, Conee and Feldman 2004, Cruz and Pollock 1999) Put differently, the mental states that a subject is in determine which propositions the subject is propositionally justified in believing.

Conee and Feldman (2004, p. 56) propose a version of mentalism that involves two theses:

(S) The justificatory status of a person’s doxastic attitudes strongly supervenes on the person’s occurrent and dispositional mental states, events, and conditions.

(M) If any two possible individuals are exactly alike mentally, then they are alike justificationaly, e.g., the same beliefs are doxastically justified for them to the same extent.

They take M to be the principal implication of S. To illustrate S, they offer several examples where two subjects have different justified beliefs and argue that the difference is best explained by the subjects’ differing internal mental factors. In a representative example, Bob and Ray are sitting in a hotel lobby reading yesterday’s newspaper. Each of them believes that it will be very warm today on the basis of the newspapers’ forecast that it will be very warm today. Bob goes outside and feels the heat. Bob’s belief that it will be very warm today is now better justified than Ray’s belief, because Bob has internalized the temperature and Ray has not. The difference between them consists solely of internal factors. Conee and Feldman do not specify what it is to “internalize” something, beyond the truism that something is internalized when it becomes part of the total internal state of the subject.

M implies that necessarily, if two subjects have the same internal states, then they have the same justified beliefs, no matter what possible world they are in. The New Evil Demon thought experiment best illustrates this. (Cohen and Lehrer 1983, Cohen 1984)



Suppose that two subjects have the same internal states, although one of them is in a world where one is radically deceived by a demon and the other is in a world where there is no demon. The intuition internalists draw from this example is that the subjects' beliefs are justified to the same extent, if at all, even though the external conditions are quite different. This implies that only internal states of the subject are relevant for the justification of beliefs.

Cruz and Pollock (1999) argue for a view similar to Conee and Feldman's. It is a version of internalism, where this means, "the justification of a belief is a function solely of internal considerations" (p. 131). In particular, they defend the view that "a belief is justified if it is held in compliance with correct epistemic norms." Epistemic norms are rules that specify how one is to cognize. Cognition includes forming and rejecting beliefs, as well as reasoning. They claim that we do know how to cognize, i.e. know how to reason in compliance with correct epistemic norms. It is this fact that brings out why they believe correct epistemic norms must be internalist.<sup>33</sup> They begin with an analogy to riding a bicycle. Initially, one follows a set of instructions that specify how to ride. Their oft-used example of such a norm is "In riding a bicycle, when the bicycle leans to the right you should turn the handlebars to the right". After some time, one learns this and other rules and internalizes them, which is to say one follows them without having to articulate them.<sup>34</sup> At this point, one's bicycle riding behavior is governed by the norms,

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<sup>33</sup> This places only a necessary condition on a norm's being correct. Elsewhere (1999, p. 135), they claim that correct norms must also be non-doxastic, insofar as they must take into account not only the cognizer's doxastic state, but *also* his perceptual and memory states. They do not state a sufficient condition for an epistemic rule's being correct.

<sup>34</sup> The fact that we can do this shows, they think, that an intellectualist theory of epistemic norms is false. According to such a theory, one must do everything "by the book", explicitly articulating to one's self each norm before acting in accordance with it. It may seem strange to some that to think that the norms we actually act in accordance with must be the *correct* norms. Notably, for reasons that are beyond the scope of this dissertation, they address this concern with a theory call the "rational role of concepts" that implies that necessarily, the norms we actually follow in cognizing are correct. Hence, the fact that we do not actually reason along intellectualist lines shows that it is a false picture of how norms govern cognition. See (1999, pp. 147-150).

and so one knows how to ride a bicycle. Similarly, they claim that we cognize in accordance epistemic norms such as “If something looks red to you and you have no reason for thinking it is not red, you are permitted to believe it is red” without making those rules explicit. We form beliefs, and they are justified if they are held in compliance with this and other norms.

More must be said about their crucial concept of “internalizing” a norm. It has already been said that such norms are followed without articulating them. That these norms must be internalist, according to Cruz and Pollock, follows from the fact that correct epistemic norms must be reason-guiding, and that no externalist condition can be reason-guiding. Norms must be, by definition, reason-guiding because Cruz and Pollock are concerned with “procedural justification” (pp. 130-131), which tells us how to cognize. To be reason guiding, a norm must be internalized. However, no externalist norm can be internalized because it appeals to concepts such as reliability that, by their nature, make reference to facts wholly external to the subject. Hence, only norms that appeal to things that can be internalized can possibly be correct with respect to procedural justification.

The next question to address is this: What things can be internalized? We have already seen that, according to Cruz and Pollock, correct epistemic norms must be such that one can follow them without articulating them. Moreover, the things these norms govern must themselves be items that one can in some sense use without having to make explicit account of them. In other words, we must be able to automatically process all the items our epistemic norms make reference to. This leads us to Cruz and Pollock’s preferred version of internalism, which they refer to as “direct realism”. According to direct realism,

The circumstance-types to which our norms appeal in telling us to do something in circumstances of those types must be directly accessible to our system of cognitive processing. The sense in which they must be directly accessible is that our cognitive system must be able to access them without our first having to make a

judgment about whether we are in circumstances of that type. We must have non-epistemic access. (1999, p. 132)

While they do not provide an exhaustive list of those items that can be directly accessed in this way, they say that they must all be in some sense psychological. For this reason, their version of internalism is similar to the mentalism of Conee and Feldman.

The present position is also similar to mentalism insofar as it accepts what Cruz and Pollock call cognitive essentialism: “the epistemic correctness of a cognitive process is an essential feature of that process and is not affected by contingent facts such as the reliability of the process in the actual world” (1999, p. 132). As applied to the New Evil Demon thought experiment, cognitive essentialism implies that necessarily, so long as the subjects in both worlds form their beliefs using the same cognitive processes (assuming the inputs are the same as well), the justificatory status of their output beliefs is the same. (1999, p. 132)

One additional detail of Cruz and Pollock’s position is worth mentioning to facilitate comparison with other versions of internalism. Perhaps most importantly, their view does not require subjects to have epistemic access to the items that can contribute to the justification of beliefs. As will be discussed in detail below, there are versions of internalism that require, for anything to contribute to the justification or justifiability of a belief, that a subject form a belief to the effect that this thing obtains. This is clearly a form of epistemic access, since this belief is itself subject to epistemic evaluation in terms of justification etc. Moreover, Cruz and Pollock’s non-epistemic access is intuitively different from weak access internalism, according to which non-conceptual states of direct acquaintance with percepts etc. provide justification for beliefs.<sup>35</sup> While direct acquaintance is not a doxastic state that involves concept application, its non-conceptual awareness of percepts etc. seems to make some difference to one’s first-person perspective. Weak awareness is, of course, different from strong awareness, but also

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<sup>35</sup> Direct acquaintance will be spelled out in greater detail below.

importantly different from Cruz and Pollock's non-epistemic "direct access". Unlike both types of awareness, it seems that one could have "direct access" to something without it's making any difference to one's first person perspective.

### 2.2.3 Internal to Awareness

Perhaps the most well known versions of internalism require that the subject have some sort of awareness of or access to something if it is to do epistemic work. Perhaps the simplest, if not most precise, statement of this view comes from Chisholm: "We presuppose, second, that the things we know are justified for us in the following sense: we can know what it is, on any occasion, that constitutes our grounds, or reason, or evidence for thinking that we know" (1977, p. 17). These views are implicitly narrower than the mentalist ones discussed in the preceding section, since mentalism allows internal states that one is or could not be aware of to be able to justify beliefs. Hence, these awareness versions of internalism answer the question "internal to what?" by pointing to a smaller set of states. Just how small this set of states is depends on the details of the view. In this section I will examine types of internalism that impose both non-conceptual and conceptual awareness requirements.

What is the motivation for awareness requirements in the first place? The general reason seems to be that cases in which subjects' beliefs meet, e.g. externalist reliability conditions, are still intuitively unjustified due to the truth of the belief seeming to be an accident from the subject's first person point of view. Perhaps the most famous set of examples come from BonJour and Lehrer. BonJour proposes the following thought experiment:

Norman, under certain conditions which usually obtain, is a completely reliable clairvoyant with respect to certain kinds of subject matter. He possesses no evidence or reasons of any kind for or against the general possibility of such a cognitive power or for or against the thesis that he possesses it. One day Norman comes to believe that the President is in New York City, though he has no evidence either for or against this belief. In fact, the belief is true

and results from his clairvoyant power under circumstances in which it is completely reliable. (1985, p. 41.)

According to simple reliabilist views, Norman's belief is justified since it is produced by a reliable clairvoyant faculty. Bonjour thinks it obvious that Norman's belief is not justified, however, since it is a matter of luck from Norman's point of view that the belief is true. He assimilates justification with rationality, suggesting that the rationality or justifiability of Norman's belief should be made from a perspective Norman has access to, viz. his own, rather than from a third person perspective that is unavailable to him. What is required, Bonjour claims, is that Norman has some sort of first-person awareness of the features that justify his belief.<sup>36</sup>

Lehrer offers a similar example:

Suppose a person, whom we shall name Mr. Truetemp, undergoes brain surgery by an experimental surgeon who invents a small device which is both a very accurate thermometer and a computational device capable of generating thoughts. The device, call it a tempucomp, is implanted in Truetemp's head so that the very tip of the device, no larger than the head of a pin, sits unnoticed on his scalp and acts as a sensor to transmit information about the temperature to the computational system of his brain. This device, in turn, sends a message to his brain causing him to think of the temperature recorded by the external sensor. Assume that the tempucomp is very reliable, and so his thoughts are correct temperature thoughts. All told, this is a reliable belief-forming process. Now imagine, finally, that he has no idea that the tempucomp has been inserted in his brain, is only slightly puzzled about why he thinks so obsessively about the temperature, but never checks a thermometer to determine whether these thoughts about the temperature are correct. He accepts them unreflectively, another effect of the tempucomp. Thus, he thinks and accepts that the temperature is 104 degrees. It is. Does he know that it is? (1990, pp. 163-164)<sup>37</sup>

In this example, Mr. Truetemp consistently forms true beliefs about the temperature, though the mechanism responsible for its truth is completely outside of his awareness.

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<sup>36</sup> It is not clear exactly what sort of access is motivated by this example. See Bergmann (2006) for discussion.

<sup>37</sup> Despite the fact that Lehrer asks whether Mr. Truetemp has knowledge, the implication seems to be that he lacks knowledge at least because his beliefs about the temperature are unjustified in an internalist sense.

He simply finds himself with true beliefs about the temperature. If simple versions of reliabilism are true, Mr. Truetemp's temperature beliefs are justified. But Lehrer shares Bonjour's intuition that Mr. Truetemp's beliefs are not justified precisely because he has no awareness of the relevant mechanisms. What these examples minimally suggest is that there is an awareness requirement on justification: in order to be justified in believing something, one must have access to (at least some of) the things that contribute to the justification of the belief. As we shall see, there are many different ways of filling in the details of this requirement.

On the present view, facts about one's unconscious mind or one's body are not relevant to the justification of a belief. An advantage of this position is that it can avoid the potential worries with "internal to the mind" views associated with determining whether relational properties with non-mental items as constituents are internal to the mind. So long as one is aware of the property, it does not matter whether some constituents are otherwise non-mental. Bergmann (2006) has persuasively argued that mentalism is importantly different from awareness or "access" internalism, since there will be cases where one has justification for a belief according to mentalist standards but not according to access internalist ones. This is because there may be subconscious mental states that contribute to epistemic status that are not accessible to the subject.

#### 2.2.3.1 Non-conceptual Awareness

The two categories of awareness I will discuss are distinguished by the contents of those states. Broadly speaking, non-conceptual awareness does not involve the application of concepts to the object of awareness, whereas conceptual awareness does. Within these types of awareness we can further distinguish views that require for justified belief that the subject be either actually or potentially aware of the relevant features. This section is concerned with actual non-conceptual awareness. I will discuss several specific views, highlighting general features as I proceed.

Moser (1989) advocates “Awareness Internalism” as an account of a proposition P’s being unconditionally evidentially probable to some extent for a subject S, where one necessary condition of this is that “S is presented with what is posited by P” (p. 109). To say that a proposition is “unconditionally evidentially probable” is to say that it is made probable noninferentially, i.e. independently of its relation to any beliefs one has. Moreover, his account is concerned with the probability of propositions for a subject. Thus Moser is concerned with what it is to have noninferential propositional justification. (1989, pp. 97, 107) His internalism involves a version of actual non-conceptual awareness since S must be presented with what is posited by P, not merely able to be presented with it. Presentation is intended as a technical term, and involves what he calls “direct attention attraction”. One’s attention is directly attracted to the content’s of one’s experience when one is directly aware of those contents. Direct attention attraction involves more than mere sensory stimulation, since the latter does not necessarily involve any awareness at all. It is also distinct from one’s focusing on something. He states, “In essence, direct attention attraction is one’s being directly psychologically ‘affected’ by certain contents in such a way that one is psychologically presented with those contents” (1989, p. 82). Direct attention attraction is a non-conceptual state of awareness, insofar as it has as its object or content only a sensory item. Since the state is non-conceptual, it is also non-propositional.

Fumerton (1995) endorses a version of internalism which holds that there is noninferential justification for a subject S to believe that P iff S is directly acquainted with (i) the fact that P, (ii) the thought that P, and (iii) the relation of correspondence between the thought and the fact. (p. 75) Like Moser, Fumerton is concerned with awareness requirements on propositional justification. One is directly acquainted with non-relational properties of the mind, although direct acquaintance itself is a relation between a self and something else. It qualifies as a type of non-conceptual awareness since one can be directly acquainted with something without having the concept of that

thing, nor being able to otherwise represent that thing in thought. It contains no claim that something is the case. There is in principle no limit on what a subject can be directly acquainted with on Fumerton's view.

The views just discussed are versions of actual nonconceptual awareness internalism. They require, for there to be noninferential justification for a belief, that one actually be nonconceptually aware of the relevant items. To my knowledge, there are no versions of potential nonconceptual awareness internalism being defended. Is this because the resulting view is untenable? I do not think so. Two relevant points can still be made. First, views requiring any sort of actual awareness are implicitly more demanding than those requiring potential awareness, since it is not enough that one could be in the state; one must actually be in the state. Views requiring actual awareness require a subject to be in at least one more mental state than those requiring potential access. Second, this slightly more demanding account hasn't deterred epistemologists from defending it. The reason for this, it seems to me, is that they find it rather obvious and unproblematic that we often are in these states of nonconceptual awareness—often enough that they do not see a problem in requiring us to actually be in them in order to possess justification. If the reader still desires an account of potential nonconceptual awareness, he or she may simply attach the potentiality clause to the proposals already discussed above.

### 2.2.3.2 Conceptual Awareness

These versions of internalism require that for one to have noninferential justification to believe a proposition that one be in a state of awareness that applies concepts to the object of the state. Being conceptual, these states of awareness will also be propositional. Like nonconceptual awareness, this type of view can require either that one have actual or potential awareness of the relevant items.

Before looking at specific versions of this view in more detail, I would like to



briefly comment on the strength—or others might say, perhaps uncharitably, the severity—of this view. Of all the versions of internalism discussed in this chapter, those requiring conceptual awareness for noninferential justification are the most stringent. In particular, it is often thought that these views are the least likely to avoid the most radical version of skepticism: it is impossible that any belief be justified to any extent whatever. There are two elements to this. First, the set of mental items that we are or can be conceptually aware of is arguably smaller—perhaps much smaller—than any of the other versions of internalism discussed above. This suggests that the range of beliefs that can be justified according to these views is much smaller, too. Second, this type of internalism has often been thought to generate vicious regresses that vitiate the positive justificatory status of the beliefs in question. Suppose that one takes an act of conceptual awareness A to be what justifies a belief B. A was required for the justification of B since, being propositional, B is capable of being either true or false and so must be supported by something that justifies that claim of truth. The regress is generated by noting that A is also propositional and so also apparently in need of justification by a further claim. According to the critics, since the only thing that can justify a propositional claim is another propositional claim, we must appeal to something like a further act of conceptual awareness A\* to justify A. But since A\* is propositional, it requires the existence of a still further act of awareness A\*\* with the same feature, and hence an infinite regress is generated. Note that one motivation for adopting a nonconceptual awareness version of internalism is to avoid the regress just described.

In a series of recent publications Bonjour defends a version of internalism requiring conceptual awareness. One has noninferential justification for a belief B exactly when one is conceptually aware of a descriptive fit between the propositional content of B and the content of a sensory experience E. This imposes a requirement on propositional justification. He describes this awareness of fit as a “propositional judgment” (2006, p. 747). The awareness of fit must be conceptual partly due to the fact

that “[nonconceptual] awareness simply does not yield anything that would count as a reason for thinking that the belief is true” (2006, p. 748). Bonjour goes on to argue that one must actually have the requisite conceptual awareness to have noninferential justification for believing that P, making his view a version of actual conceptual awareness internalism.<sup>38</sup>

Fales argues on similar grounds that the awareness required by internalism is conceptual. He claims that internalism requires for noninferential justification that the subject “[have] a guarantee” that his or her beliefs are true. (1996, p. 146) Moreover, one has this guarantee only if one knows that it obtains. (1996, p. 146) Since knowledge requires belief, and belief essentially involves concept application, Fales imposes a conceptual awareness requirement on justification. The requirement may be stated as follows: A subject S is noninferentially justified in believing that P if and only if the truth of P is transparent to S. Unlike the other versions of internalism already discussed, Fales is primarily concerned with awareness requirements on doxastic justification. The critical notion here is transparency of content, and—in ideal circumstances—Fales describes it as an infallible grasp into the truth of a claim that brings with it full clarity and understanding of both the content of the belief and its truth-value. Transparency has as an additional feature that if it is transparent to S that P, it is transparent to S that it is transparent to S that P. This is due to the fact that one’s awareness of a belief’s content is transparent only if the fact that it is transparent is also transparent to the subject. In this sense transparency at one level is sufficient for transparency at all levels.

One might argue that Fales’ internalism leads to a vicious infinite regress. Knowledge is similar to transparency, insofar as if S knows that P, S knows that S knows that P, and S knows that S knows that S knows that P, etc. This is a version of the KK

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<sup>38</sup> Bonjour argues that, despite appearances to the contrary, his position does not generate a vicious infinite regress like the one set out in the beginning of this section. His reasons for believing this are interesting, but not relevant to the present discussion.

thesis, which Fales adopts. (1996, p. 164)<sup>39</sup> The objection states that it is impossible for finite minds such as ours to form the infinite number of beliefs required to satisfy the KK thesis. Understanding how Fales responds to this objection will help to further clarify his position. In response, he argues that one need not actually form every higher-order belief, so long as they are available to the subject and he or she would appeal to them if questioned. (1996, pp. 163-164) This makes Fales' view a version of potential conceptual awareness internalism.

### 2.2.3.3 Inferential Internalism

All of the versions of internalism discussed so far have been similar in that they impose an awareness requirement on noninferential (propositional or doxastic) justification. A view known as inferential internalism is different insofar as it places an awareness requirement on inferential justification.<sup>40</sup> Inferential internalism requires that, in order to be justified in believing P on the basis of E, one be not only justified in believing E, but also be aware that E makes probable P. One might describe the difference between the requirements on noninferential justification as awareness of the adequacy of the ground and those on inferential justification as awareness of the adequacy of the *connection* between a belief and its ground.

Advocates of inferential internalism construe the awareness of the connection between a belief and its ground as a justified belief. (Fumerton 1995, Leite 2008) This feature of the view might be thought to lead to a vicious infinite regress in the following way: if, to be justified in believing that E makes probable P, one must infer this from Q, one must also be justified in believing that Q makes probable that E makes probable P, and so on for this proposition ad infinitum. To avoid such a regress, the inferential

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<sup>39</sup> I will discuss versions of the KK thesis in more detail below.

<sup>40</sup> It is not clear that adopting an awareness requirement for noninferential justification itself requires adopting it for inferential justification or vice versa.

internalist must hold that some beliefs of the form “E makes probable P” can be justified noninferentially.

Despite the fact that the inferential internalist would require for inferential justification that one use E as a premise from which to infer P, he would be wise to avoid imposing a similar requirement on the belief that E makes probable P. Lewis Carroll (1895) forcefully expounded this lesson in his story of Achilles and the Tortoise. The Tortoise tries to convince Achilles that the following argument fails to justify its conclusion:

(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.

and that it can be fixed by adding a premise asserting that the initial premises make probable the conclusion:

(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.

(C) If A and B are true, Z is true.

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

Of course, the reasoning that led the Tortoise to require the additional premise needs to be satisfied for this revised argument. For now, it is claimed one must be justified in believing that the premises make probable the conclusion, giving us

(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.

(C) If A and B are true, Z is true.

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

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

Instead of satiating the inferential internalist’s worries, this argument presents us with a new set of premises, all of which must be justifiably believed to make probable the

conclusion. An infinite regress of premises of ever-increasing complexity is generated. The moral of Carroll's story is that the non-skeptical inferential internalist cannot require the belief that one's premises make the conclusion probable to be inserted into the argument as a premise in order for one to be justified in believing the conclusion. Instead, it must simply be the case that this belief is part of the basis for the belief that (Z), i.e. it is part of what causally produced and sustains the belief.

#### 2.2.4 Higher-order Requirements

I have characterized some versions of internalism as imposing an awareness requirement on justification. In this section I will examine the relationship between these and so-called "higher-order" requirements. I will be arguing that there is an important dissimilarity between higher-level requirements on propositional and doxastic justification. I will complete my discussion by responding to the objection that, by imposing these requirements, internalism commits a level-confusion.

As shown by the preceding discussions of various ways internalists have answered the question, "Internal to what?", there are several types of awareness requirements. Such requirements can be further distinguished along the following dimensions: the content of the state of awareness, the object of the awareness, the type of justification the awareness is required for, and a modal requirement, i.e. whether the awareness required is actual or potential.

While awareness requirements have often been seen as the hallmark of internalist views, including those discussed above, they have also prompted serious objections. Critics argue that awareness requirements quickly lead to a vicious regress. Consider a simple internalist view requiring, for propositional justification, that one be actually conceptually aware of at least some of the relevant factors that contribute to the

proposition's epistemic status.<sup>41</sup> For instance, in order for S to have justification for believing

(P) It rained today.

S must be actually conceptually aware of something Q that contributes to P's justification. Call this act of awareness

(P2) Q contributes to (P)'s justification.

Like (P), (P2) is a conceptual state. The regress begins by seeing that, intuitively, (P2) cannot make it the case that (P) is propositionally justified unless (P2) is as well. Hence, to have justification for believing (P2), S must be actually conceptually aware of something further R:

(P3) R contributes to (P2)'s justification.

To satisfy the awareness requirement that led S to (P2) and (P3), S will need to be conceptually aware of a further state, (P4) and so on ad infinitum. The reason for this is that the content of the state of awareness is itself the same *type* of thing as the original proposition, and so it too requires a further state of awareness for it to do its epistemic work. Once one imposes this type of awareness requirement, there seems to be no way to “turn it off”, thus requiring that one actually be conceptually aware of an infinite number of propositions to have justification for believing any proposition. It seems clear that creatures with finite minds like ours will not be able to complete such a series. Hence, this type of awareness requirement leads to the most extreme version of skepticism: it is impossible that anyone have justification to believe anything to any extent whatsoever.

There are at least two ways an internalist can attempt to avoid this regress. First, one might argue that there is an asymmetry between the state of awareness and the target proposition, so that one need not be in an additional state of awareness for (P2) to do its

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<sup>41</sup> For present purposes it is not necessary to specify which factors are and are not relevant.

job. The asymmetry could be secured by imposing an actual non-conceptual awareness requirement. Internalists like Moser have argued that one's being non-conceptually presented with the content of P is sufficient for having non-inferential justification for believing that P. The state of presentation itself is non-conceptual, unlike knowledge of P, so there is no need for a higher-level awareness to certify it. Even if successful, this type of move will only avoid regress with respect to noninferential justification. To have a full theory, the internalist will also need an account of inferential justification that can avoid vicious regress. Fumerton has argued that one can avoid this regress only by adopting the view that one can be noninferentially justified in believing statements to the effect that one's evidence makes the target proposition probable.

The second way to avoid a vicious regress involves adopting a potential awareness requirement. On this type of view, one only needs to be *able* to become aware of the relevant factors, perhaps on reflection alone. This move successfully avoids the worry that finite minds are unable to complete an actual infinite series, although it seems to generate a different but related problem. Now the issue is not the number of levels, but the complexity of the propositions that one must be potentially aware of. Simply put, some propositions will be so complex that it is not clear that we will be able to grasp them in the first place. For example, a potential conceptual awareness view requires that one be able to become aware of

(P429) X contributes to (P428)'s justification

the contents of which include information about (P428) through (P2). Surely this exceedingly complex proposition is too complex for a finite mind to potentially grasp. Many internalists have offered awareness requirements that they do not think are susceptible to the above worries. Some have accepted the regress, but argued that it is not vicious. I will not be concerned here with evaluating the objection that internalism leads to vicious regress. The present chapter is partly concerned with defining and exploring internalist views, not evaluating them.

Having discussed awareness requirements in a general manner, I will now explicate so called higher-level requirements. Higher levels are generated by adding epistemic operators such as justified in believing that—, knows that—, etc. For instance:

N: P

N+1: S is justified in believing that P

N+2: S is justified in believing that S is justified in believing that P

and so on.

The most well known higher-level requirement is probably the KK-thesis. Different versions exist, the most common likely being

If  $sKp$  then  $sKsKp$ .

where this means, for any subject S, S's knowing that P entails S's knowing that S knows that P. (Hintikka 1962, Hilpinen 1970) In the language of requirements, this version of the KK-thesis requires that one have a higher-order knowledge that one knows in order to know something. For at least two reasons this thesis might strike one as too stringent. First, it makes possession of the concept of knowledge necessary for knowing, since the higher-order belief itself contains that concept. This will preclude unsophisticated subjects from having any knowledge at all. Second, this thesis seems to require that to know anything one must actually have an infinite number of beliefs of ever-increasing complexity that all count as knowledge. When one substitutes 'KKp' for p in the original schema, KKp entails KKKp and so on. It is extremely doubtful that any finite mind is able to actually form an infinite number of beliefs of ever increasing complexity, not to mention that all of these beliefs must also meet the standards for knowledge.

To avoid these worries, one might modify the thesis as follows:

If S knows that p, then S is in a position to know that S knows that p.

This version of the KK-thesis does not require one to actually ascend to higher levels, so it may avoid the worries mentioned in connection with the original formulation above.



The locution “in a position to know” may be specified in many different ways.<sup>42</sup> Generally speaking, however, these specifications have in common the idea that, whenever one knows something, one would be able to come to know that one knows this were one to reflect on the matter. Thought of in this way, the revised thesis may be seen not as a level-connecting principle but as a description of one’s relationship to a certain set of one’s mental states. In particular, the states that constitute knowledge are themselves accessible on reflection and are collectively identifiable as constituting knowledge. According to the thesis, this identification involves believing that one knows in such a way that this belief itself counts as knowledge. This revision does not avoid the worry related to unsophisticated subjects, unless one builds into “being in a position to know” the ability to acquire the concept of knowledge.

Related to the KK-thesis is the JJ-thesis:

If  $sJp$  then  $sJsJp$ .

where this means that S’s being justified in believing that P entails S’s being justified in believing that S is justified in believing that P. As with the KK-thesis, there is the worry that unsophisticated subjects will have no justified beliefs if they lack the concept of justification. Again, one may weaken the JJ-thesis to claim only that, if one has the relevant concept, whenever one is justified in believing P one is in a position to be justified in believing that one is justified in believing that P. In the present sense, a belief P is dependent on the justification of another belief Q when Q’s being justified is part of what constitutes P’s having that justificatory status. This type of dependence is importantly different from P’s being justified implying that Q is justified, although Q’s justificatory status has no other epistemic bearing on that of P. By analogy, “It is true that P” implies “It is true that it is true that P” although the latter is not partly constitutive

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<sup>42</sup> See McHugh (2010) for discussion.

of the former. The proponent of the JJ-thesis is open to interpret the relationship between  $sJp$  and  $sJsJp$  in either way, noting the above implications.

The main difference between these higher-level requirements and the awareness requirements discussed earlier are that the former are versions of the view that one always has special access to one's belief's justificatory status. Keeping in mind the exceptions noted above, the awareness requirements instead place restrictions on there being justification to believe a proposition, i.e. on propositional justification. Pryor (2001) offers a clean explication of the distinction: awareness requirements say that accessed or accessible states determine justification; higher-order requirements say that whether one is justified or not is itself an accessed or accessible state.<sup>43</sup>

This distinction is important because it shows that awareness and higher-order requirements are logically distinct: one can consistently adopt one sort without adopting the other. For instance, one might object to internalism on the grounds that the KK and JJ theses are too strong. These views place higher-level requirements on doxastic justification. Yet if the preceding discussion is correct, this will not automatically rule out views like those of Moser and Bonjour, since they only place higher-level requirements on propositional justification. A possible position claims that (i) one must be either actually or potentially aware of something for it to provide justification for a proposition, and (ii) one can have a doxastically-justified belief without being either actually or potentially aware that one's belief is so justified.

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<sup>43</sup> Pryor's terminology is different than mine; he describes views imposing awareness requirements as versions of "Simple Internalism" and those imposing higher order requirements as "Access Internalism". Cf. (Pryor, 2000, p. 105).

### 2.2.4.1 Awareness & Level-Confusion

Several epistemologists have objected to internalism on the grounds that awareness requirements involve a level-confusion. To understand what is meant by a “level-confusion”, consider the following representative statements:

[A level-confusion involves] sloughing over the distinction between epistemic levels, proceeding as if what is true of a proposition, belief, or epistemic state of affairs at one level is ipso facto true of a correlated proposition, belief, or epistemic state of affairs on another. (Alston, 1980, p. 135)

[A level-confusion involves] a confusion between the conditions required for justifiably believing P and the conditions required for justifiably believing that one justifiably believes P. (Huemer, 2002, p. 330)

The claim is that internalists confuse the requirements for first-level justification with those for second-level justification.<sup>44</sup> In particular, internalists often argue that one’s being justified at the first-level requires some statement at the second-level to be true (or: that the subject be justified in believing it, or that the subject have a nonconceptual awareness of it). Externalists may agree that this second-level proposition is indeed necessary for justification, but only for a belief at the second level, not the first.

In response to this, the internalist can first of all ask: How damaging is the charge of confusion? No proponent of this objection has argued that there is an inconsistency in the internalist’s view. Second, and more importantly, what makes something a requirement on justification? By accusing the internalist of committing a level-confusion, one seems to be appealing to an implicit correct standard of justification about which the internalist is confused. What standard might this be? From an externalist perspective at least, the internalist is making a level-confusion. For externalists adopt no higher-order requirements. But why assume that externalism is correct? If certain versions of internalism are true, then there are higher-level requirements on justification.

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<sup>44</sup> Similar remarks apply as one ascends levels: the internalist is charged with confusing the requirements for justification at level  $n$  with the requirements for justification at level  $n+1$ .

Furthermore, given the internalist's own commitments, there is no level confusion; the requirements are just as one would expect. So it isn't clear why the internalist is supposed to be confused.

Both sides can agree that the internalist has more stringent requirements than the externalist. This is important, and it may reveal the true nature of the objector's worry. For instance, Alston remarks that higher-level requirements place requirements on justification that are too sophisticated to dovetail with common sense intuitions about the possibility of justified belief. Huemer says the same. In keeping with my remarks above concerning whether internalism and externalism are genuinely opposed to each other, the internalist may point out that his higher-order requirements just reflect a desire to analyze a type of epistemic status the externalist is not interested in. For example, the internalist may be interested in analyzing a concept of justified belief that provides the subject with some sort of assurance or guarantee that her beliefs have positive epistemic status. Externalism, on the other hand, has typically not been concerned with this.

### 2.3 Characterizing Externalism

I will characterize externalism in two ways: First, negatively, as a view denying particular fundamental tenets of internalism. Second, positively, as a view offering novel conditions for justification. My discussion of the positive aspects of externalism will focus on Goldman's reliabilism, as expounded in several publications over the last 30 years.

#### 2.3.1 Negatively

Externalism denies at least three central internalist theses. First, it denies the internalist thesis that all factors contributing to justification are somehow internal to the subject.<sup>45</sup> At least some are wholly external to the subject, in the sense that factors

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<sup>45</sup> See above for various construals of "internal".

external to both a subject's mind and body determine justificatory status. For instance, an externalist might claim that the causal origin of the belief is relevant for determining whether it is justified. This is motivated by a desire to avoid the skepticism that, externalists sometimes claim, seems to too easily afflict internalism. Often, there will be no internal characteristics that a subject could appeal to or rely on to distinguish between a case where his beliefs are true and one where there are false. If internalism is correct, it seems as if such subjects will lack justification or knowledge. Yet if one can point to salient differences between the cases, specified externally, one would be in a better position to explain why one subject intuitively has justification or knowledge and the other doesn't. Below I will discuss the New Evil Demon thought experiment that seeks to show that externalists ought to countenance at least some internal states as relevant to justification or knowledge.

Second, externalism denies that higher-level mental states are required for either propositional or doxastic justification. Hence, externalists reject all of the awareness and higher-level requirements set out above. This does not imply that externalists are not interested in beliefs of the form *S is justified in believing that P*, but it does imply that even higher-level beliefs require the existence of no still-higher levels. This rejection also seems motivated by a desire to avoid skepticism. There are two components to this. First, if higher-level mental states are required for justification, then many non-human animals, as well as young children and unreflective adults, will be massively unjustified. None of these subjects are either in a position to form these reflective states or, in some cases, to even possess the concept of justification. This last point applies especially to KK and JJ theses, which require subjects to form beliefs to the effect *that one knows that P* or *that one is justified in believing that P*. Internalists are often accused of over-intellectualizing cognition, requiring the possession of a sophisticated theoretical framework for justification or knowledge. In addition, externalists typically endorse the objection that awareness and higher-level requirements lead to vicious infinite regress.

They suggest that the lesson to be learned from this is that there ought to be no such requirements on justification or knowledge, period. Once either type of requirement is in place, there seems to be no principled way to “turn it off”.

Third, most externalists deny that all epistemic principles are necessarily true. Of course, this does not imply that they believe all epistemic principles are contingent. If one is a reliabilist, one will certainly claim that valid deduction is necessarily a conditionally reliable process.<sup>46</sup> But many epistemic principles will be contingently true. This is motivated by the fact that the associated sources are contingently reliable, i.e. they can be used in situations with variable external characteristics, some of which will facilitate the production of true beliefs, and some of which will not.

### 2.3.2 Positively: Goldman’s Reliabilism

In this section I will discuss a prominent version of externalism, Goldman’s reliabilism. The exposition will take the following course: the analysis of justification in “What Is Justified Belief?” will be considered in detail. Next, I will explain the objections that led to the modified view found in *Epistemology and Cognition* then evaluate the modified view. In what follows I will retain Goldman’s use of the word “process” and its variations rather than use the term “source” that I have elected to use in the rest of the dissertation. For instance, what he calls a “reliable process” would be considered a “legitimate source” elsewhere.

#### 2.3.2.1 “What is Justified Belief?”

Goldman proposes to answer the title question in such a way that three constraints are met. First, the account must not do violence to ordinary, so-called common-sense intuitions about which beliefs are justified and which are not. While he does not attempt

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<sup>46</sup> A conditionally reliable process is one that is reliable provided that its inputs are true. See the discussion of Goldman (1979) below for more details.

to reconstruct a “common sense” theory of justified belief, based solely on the intuitions of ordinary folk, he is chiefly concerned with preserving those intuitions as applied to particular cases. As we shall see below, this constraint permits some conceptual vagueness when ordinary intuitions are themselves vague. Given that this *is* a constraint, however, he does not find the occasional lack of precision problematic. The second constraint is that the account must not only state necessary and sufficient conditions for justification, it must also provide some sort of “deep or revelatory” explanation of *why* those beliefs are justified. As shall be brought out below, he believes that this is primarily accomplished by focusing on the causal story of the belief’s formation. Third, the analysis of justification must not include any epistemic terms, on pain of conceptual circularity. This constraint is met in part by Goldman’s usage of causal-nomological concepts like reliability and causation in stating the base clause of his recursive definition of justified belief.

He distinguishes between propositional and doxastic justification, though the focus is on the latter. The final analysis of doxastic justification is as follows:

If S's belief in p at t results from a reliable cognitive process, and there is no reliable or conditionally reliable process available to S which, had it been used by S in addition to the process actually used, would have resulted in S's not believing p at t, then S's belief in p at t is justified. (1979, p. 20)

A process is defined as a functional mapping that produces certain outputs, e.g. beliefs, given certain inputs, e.g. other beliefs, sensory experiences, etc. The issue of individuating processes is an important one for reliabilism, though Goldman notes that it will often be difficult to specify this with sufficient generality.<sup>47</sup> For a process to be reliable, it is not sufficient for the process to produce a larger number of true beliefs, for

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<sup>47</sup> Conee and Feldman (1998) argue against reliabilism on the basis that it is apparently unable to specify a source’s generality in a principled manner.

it might also produce a large number of false ones as well. Rather, what is required is that a process produces mostly true beliefs. The range of cases in which this must be so will vary, depending on whether one requires mostly true beliefs in all actual uses, or in all possible uses. Either way, the exact ratio of true to false belief is not specified, though this does not violate Goldman's first constraint since he claims the ordinary concept of justification is itself vague on this point. That being said, the resulting concept is fallibilist: false justified beliefs are possible.

Reliable processes can be further specified according to the nature of the inputs to the process. A belief-dependent process has beliefs as some of its inputs. The process of inductively inferring a conclusion on the basis of beliefs formed about past observations is a prime example. Processes can also be belief-independent. In this case, no inputs are beliefs. For example, a process taking sensory data as input and beliefs about one's environment as output would qualify as belief-independent.

Once the type of input to the process is specified, it is possible to distinguish between processes that are conditionally and unconditionally reliable. A conditionally reliable process is such that "a sufficient proportion of its output-beliefs are true *given that its input-beliefs are true*" (1979, p. 183). The italicized portion is required because we cannot expect an otherwise reliable process to turn out a sufficient portion of true beliefs when the input beliefs are false. An unconditionally reliable—or simply "reliable"—process is one such that a sufficient portion of its output beliefs is true, regardless of the type of input or its truth-value (if applicable).

The second clause of the analysis of doxastic justification contains what can be described as a "non-undermining" requirement. It requires that there be no reliable or conditionally reliable process available to S that had S used it in addition to the process actually used, it would have resulted in S's not believing p at t. If there is such a process, then S's belief that p at t is undermined and thereby unjustified. For instance, suppose that while walking through a desert S believes on the basis of a belief-independent



process that there is an oak tree present. Let's suppose that this process is reliable. Suppose further that, unbeknownst to S, S has wandered onto the set of a movie, and the special effects crew has started placing several faux-oak trees in the area. S notices the film crew and forms the belief that all of the apparent oak trees in the area are in fact fakes. In this situation, there is available to S a belief-dependent process taking the belief about the film crew as input that would output the belief that there are no oak trees in the area. But suppose that S ignores this belief, and continues to hold the initial belief that there is an oak tree present. In this case S's belief about the presence of oak trees produced by the belief-independent process is unjustified because it is undermined by the availability of the other belief-dependent process that would produce the belief that no oak tree is present. This type of example illustrates the fact that the justificatory status of a belief is not only a function of the cognitive process actually employed in producing it, it is also a function of processes that could and should be employed.

The emphasis on a belief's causal history, i.e. on the process that produced it, further distinguishes reliabilism from the versions of internalism discussed above. Those internalist views are labeled "Time-slice" theories, for they make justificatory status depend on what is true of the cognizer at the time of the belief. (1979, pp. 183-184) Goldman rejects this in favor of an "Historical" view that takes into account not only what is true of the cognizer at the time of the belief, but also what is true of him or her prior to the time of belief. In this sense, reliabilism offers a diachronic theory of justified belief concerned with what happens to the belief over time, as opposed to the typically synchronic internalist views concerned with what status the belief has taken at a particular time. By focusing on a broader temporal range, Goldman believes his view is well suited to provide a "deep or revelatory" explanation for why beliefs are justified or not. This feature helps the view meet the second constraint mentioned above.

Regarding the first constraint on a theory of justified belief—that it must not violate ordinary folk intuitions about which beliefs are justified or unjustified—Goldman

finds internalism sorely lacking. In particular, the inclusion of a JJ or KK-thesis is deemed much too strong, as it would rule out the intuitively plausible fact that infants, non-human animals and unsophisticated adults can have justified beliefs. In (Goldman 1999) several other difficulties with internalism related to this constraint are discussed.

### 2.3.2.2 Objections to the Analysis of “What Is Justified Belief?”

This section considers two objections to the version of reliabilism offered in “What Is Justified Belief?” The first argues that reliability is not sufficient for justified belief, the second that it is not necessary.

Recall BonJour’s Norman case:

Norman, under certain conditions which usually obtain, is a completely reliable clairvoyant with respect to certain kinds of subject matter. He possesses no evidence or reasons of any kind for or against the general possibility of such a cognitive power or for or against the thesis that he possesses it. One day Norman comes to believe that the President is in New York City, though he has no evidence either for or against this belief. In fact, the belief is true and results from his clairvoyant power under circumstances in which it is completely reliable. (1985, p. 41.)

In this example Norman apparently meets all the requirements for being justified according to the analysis in the article. A reliable process forms his belief that the President is in New York City, and there is no reliable process available to him that would lead him to not believe that the President is in New York City. In “What Is Justified Belief?” Goldman notes that “the proper use of evidence” is a reliable process, one that Norman could presumably use to give him reason to not form that belief about the President’s whereabouts. But in the case, Norman has no such evidence, and so there is no such process available to him. Of course, one could modify the example so that Norman comes to have evidence against the reliability of clairvoyance or against his possessing it, but this would make the case importantly different. Thus, it seems as if Norman’s belief satisfies Goldman’s analysis, despite its being intuitively unjustified.

This counts against the sufficiency of the analysis.

Even if the preceding objection succeeds in establishing that reliability is not sufficient for justified belief, the externalist may still oppose internalists who also deny that reliability is necessary for justified belief. There is another objection, however, designed to show that reliability is not necessary for justified belief either.<sup>48</sup> Often labeled the “New Evil Demon” thought experiment, this example seeks not to establish Descartes’ initial skeptical conclusion, but to demonstrate that reliabilism is mistaken. The case posits two people who form the same beliefs using the same processes. One is in a world where an evil demon brings it about that all the person's beliefs are false. The other is in a non-manipulated world. The people in the non-manipulated world’s beliefs are caused by a reliable belief forming process, we stipulate, and so his or her beliefs are justified. Yet the situation the person in the demon world finds himself in is similar in all internally relevant respects the person in the non-manipulated world. The commonly held intuition is that the person in the demon world also has beliefs with the same epistemic status, even though his or her belief-forming process in that world is unreliable. Hence, reliability is not necessary for justification.

### 2.3.2.3 Responses to the Objections in *Epistemology and Cognition*

Goldman at one time modified the analysis of justification in “What Is Justified Belief?” to accommodate the objections just discussed.<sup>49</sup> In response to Bonjour’s objection that reliability is not sufficient for justified belief, a non-undermining clause is added to the analysis. To see how this is supposed to salvage reliabilism, consider how

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<sup>48</sup> See Cohen (1984) and Feldman (1985) for discussion.

<sup>49</sup> Since then he has abandoned the view of *Epistemology and Cognition* as well for a view he distinguishes between “strong and weak justification” (1988, p. 54). The new position is designed to further clarify reliabilism but also acknowledge the plausibility of some of the presuppositions of the objections I’ve been considering.

he responds: although Norman does not reason or form any beliefs about his having a clairvoyant faculty, he ought to. When he does reason about his having a clairvoyant faculty, it should look something like this, "If I had a clairvoyant power, I would surely find some evidence of this. I would find myself believing things in otherwise inexplicable ways, and when these things were checked by other reliable processes, they would usually check out positively. Since I lack any such signs, I apparently do not possess reliable clairvoyant processes" (1986, p. 112). Since he ought to reason in this way, he is *ex ante* justified in believing that he does not possess reliable clairvoyant processes. This *ex ante* justification undermines any *ex post* justification his belief that the President is in New York City had. Thus, his belief that the President is in New York City is *ex post* unjustified according to reliabilism. With this modification reliabilism is able to accommodate Bonjour's worry, and so the objection fails to pinpoint a counterintuitive implication of the position.

In response to the objection that reliability is not necessary for justification, Goldman modified his view to include a normal worlds account of reliability. A normal world is one that is similar to the presumed actual world.<sup>50</sup> In keeping with the first constraint above, some of the beliefs of ordinary common sense determine what features the actual world presumably has. Regardless of whether the demon world is a non-actual or the actual world, the person's beliefs in the demon world are justified if processes that are reliable in normal worlds form them. Since the example stipulates that the process used in the demon world is the same process that is reliable in normal worlds, a process that is reliable in normal worlds forms the person in the demon world's beliefs. Hence, the reliabilist does not have to concede that the person in the demon world has reliably

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<sup>50</sup> A normal worlds theorist need not be committed to such a world's containing a particular set of common-sense objects like cars, houses, or trees. The concept of a normal world is defined instead in terms of "fundamental beliefs" about that world, including, but not limited to, the physical laws of that world or the existence of general kinds of events or changes therein.

formed yet unjustified beliefs. The person in the demon world has reliably-formed-in-normal-worlds beliefs, so their beliefs are justified in the demon world. Reliability in normal worlds is necessary for justification.

I will now evaluate the two modifications to reliabilism. I agree with Goldman that adding the non-undermining clause does make Norman's belief unjustified. The only thing to note now is that the non-undermining condition seems to be a paradigmatically internalist condition. To see this, notice that Bonjour claims in his (1985) that the belief that the President is in New York City is unjustified for the very same reason. So one of the two necessary conditions for a justified belief is a requirement perhaps more at home in an internalist analysis of justification. This is fine, because not all of the necessary conditions are internalist. The condition that appeals to reliability is a paradigmatically externalist condition that—for reasons related to the new evil demon problem—internalists reject as necessary for justification. The best argument I can give in favor of the non-undermining requirement is an appeal to the same intuition that both Goldman and Bonjour appeal to in explaining the Norman case.

Note that an externalist might still be uncomfortable with the non-undermining condition. One might argue that it over-intellectualizes the requirements for justification in such a way that it precludes unsophisticated subjects from having justified beliefs. For example, a young child or animal is very likely unable to recognize whether or not certain conditions obtain which, if they did obtain, would entail that the target beliefs are not permitted by a right rule system. Furthermore, to say in such circumstances that even if the subject does not actually form the belief about the obtaining of those conditions, the subject ought to have formed the belief, again seems too strong.

I would not find the normal worlds modification plausible if I were an externalist. The problem for such an epistemologist is that it implausibly divorces justification from truth. Since Goldman claims it is the inclusion of truth-linked criteria that in part distinguishes reliabilism from internalism, this criticism seems particularly damaging. I

might think: I want to form true beliefs, so I will form beliefs using the processes Goldman's normal worlds reliabilism says produce beliefs that are likely to be true. But when the actual world is a demon world, I take Goldman's advice but all of the beliefs I form are false. Hence, normal worlds reliabilism divorces justification (in a world) from truth (in that world). Even ignoring this last point, the establishment of a world as “normal” is also problematic. First, are the common sense beliefs used to characterize the normal world justified? If so, then the analysis seems circular, since the explication of how those beliefs are justified would have to appeal to the fact that subjects typically classify the processes used to form normal-worlds-beliefs as reliable in those very normal worlds. If the beliefs are not justified, on the other hand, then the modification seems problematically stipulative.

#### 2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have distinguished between internalist and externalist accounts of epistemic justification. I characterized internalist views as ones that require the justifying factors to be internal in some sense. I went on to distinguish different views in terms of how they answer the question, “Internal to what?” I first considered briefly the view that answers “Internal to the body”. I then considered those answering “Internal to the mind”. Finally, I considered those answering “Internal to awareness”. With respect to this last sub-type of internalism, I distinguished between those that require non-conceptual and conceptual awareness. Such views may also be distinguished by whether they require that the subject be actually or potentially aware of the justifiers. I concluded the discussion of internalism by distinguishing between views, like those above, that require the justifying factors to be internally accessed or accessible from those that require whether one is justified to be internally accessed or accessible. I called the latter sort “higher-level” requirements and explained how they are logically distinct from those imposing “awareness” requirements. I then considered and responded to the objection

that, by imposing higher-level requirements, internalists commit a level-confusion. I argued that they are not confused, although such requirements might imply stricter standards for justification.

The second portion of the chapter examined externalist accounts. I began by characterizing externalism negatively, as a view denying various tenets of internalism. I concluded by characterizing externalism positively, as a view offering novel conditions for justification. To this end I examined Goldman's reliabilism in detail. I discussed his early analysis of justification in "What is Justified Belief?" and detailed the objections to it that prompted the revised analysis in *Epistemology and Cognition*. I concluded this final section by briefly considering some objections to the latter analysis.

The purpose of this chapter was not to determine whether internalist or externalist accounts of justification are correct. Instead, I sought to make explicit the metaepistemological differences between these views in order to set up the discussion in the next chapter as to whether either internalists or externalists can avoid permitting epistemic source circular inferences to justify their conclusions.

CHAPTER 3  
CAN ONE AVOID PERMITTING EPISTEMIC SOURCE  
CIRCULARITY?

3.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to determine whether it is possible to avoid permitting one to be justified in believing the conclusion of an inference that exhibits epistemic source circularity. This question is motivated by the fact that internalists have often argued that epistemic source circularity is vicious, and so must be avoided to escape skepticism. In the next chapter I will determine whether this type of circularity is vicious, i.e. whether one can justifiably believe the conclusion of such an inference on the basis of the premises. After some stage setting, I will consider arguments from externalists claiming that anyone who is a foundationalist—which, as the previous chapter indicates, includes many prominent contemporary internalists—is unable to avoid permitting epistemic source circularity. The chapter concludes by considering responses from internalist foundationalists to the effect that they are able to avoid permitting epistemic source circularity, while externalists are not. I will evaluate these arguments and defend the position that foundationalists, whether internalist or externalist, are unable to avoid permitting epistemic source circularity.

3.2 Avoid Using vs. Avoid Permitting Epistemic Source  
Circularity

The issue of whether epistemic source circularity can be avoided needs clarification. To see this, note that it would be a relatively uninteresting claim that a metaepistemological view simply allows one to avoid *using* epistemic source circular inferences. Such a person would never believe anything produced by an epistemic source circular procedure. But this would also be true of a person who never formed any beliefs



at all.<sup>51</sup> Hence, avoidability should not be of central concern. I suggest that a more fruitful question is: Can one avoid *permitting* epistemic source circularity? This issue arises for any metaepistemological view, even if the use of epistemic source circular inference is avoidable by its proponents. Consider a view that, if true, would allow all of one's beliefs to be justified without any of them needing to be justified on the basis of an epistemic source circular inference. The view still might allow one to be justified in believing the conclusion an epistemic source circular inference on the basis of the premises, despite the fact that other means are (perhaps always) available. According to such a view, there may be nothing inherently objectionable about epistemic source circularity. It would be avoidable in theory but permissible in practice. As we shall see presently, epistemologists who reject epistemic source circularity typically hold that such a procedure is always vicious, implying that no belief can be justified in this manner. If this assessment is correct it would follow that a true metaepistemology must avoid permitting epistemic source circularity.

### 3.3 The Challenge

Internalists have argued that externalism is to be rejected because it permits epistemic source circularity to provide justification for some propositions. Vogel (2000) offers what has become perhaps a standard example of this:<sup>52</sup>

Roxanne routinely forms beliefs about her gas gauge, although she does not know whether it is reliable. On one occasion, she looks at the gauge, notes that it reads 'F', and believes on that basis "that the tank is full". But she also forms a belief about the status of the gauge itself: "The gauge reads 'F'". Conjoining these beliefs leads her to believe the more complex proposition "The gauge reads 'F' and F", i.e. that the gauge correctly registered the amount of gas in the tank on this occasion. She repeats this procedure several times

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<sup>51</sup> A similar point applies to non-modal versions of skepticism: the thesis that no one actually knows or has justification to believe anything would be trivially true if no conscious beings existed.

<sup>52</sup> I have paraphrased the case for present purposes.

until she has enough beliefs about the gauge's successes to infer "that the gauge is reliable".

Here Roxanne uses the gas gauge to produce the conjunctive premises used to inductively infer the conclusion. But the conclusion concerns the reliability of the gas gauge, and so her inference is epistemic source circular. Vogel calls this type of inference "bootstrapping", and he "assumes it is illegitimate" (2000, p. 615). Since an externalist would find nothing wrong with such a procedure, he claims, externalism is to be rejected. Fumerton has also issued a ban on epistemic source circularity: "You cannot use perception to justify perception! You cannot use memory to justify memory! You cannot use induction to justify the reliability of induction! Such attempts to respond to the skeptic's concerns involve blatant, indeed pathetic, circularity" (1995, p. 177). Such are the oft-referenced internalist dismissals of epistemic source circularity. This motivates the central issue of this chapter: can anyone avoid permitting epistemic source circularity?

Before proceeding further, I would like to distinguish between the following two types of inference. The definitions are stipulative, though they highlight a difference that will emerge as important in chapter four.<sup>53</sup> I propose that a distinction be drawn between the following two types of inference:

Bootstrapping: one uses the deliverances of a source to argue that the source is reliable.

Epistemic source circularity: one uses the deliverances of a source to argue that the source produces justified beliefs, i.e. that the source is legitimate.

These types of inference have the same structure; the difference lies in the content of the conclusion. I argue that these should be treated as distinct types of inference, but that externalism—at least of a reliabilist stripe—is unable to make the distinction.

Consider the following argument offered by a reliabilist:

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<sup>53</sup> See the discussion of the internalist conception of source-legitimacy.

1. Using belief source X, I formed the belief that P. [Formed independently of X]

2. P. [Formed using X]

...

∴ N. X produces mostly true beliefs.

∴ N+1. X is reliable.

∴ N+2. If a belief B is produced by X, B is justified.

Up to N+1 is a standard case of bootstrapping. Up to N+2 is a case of epistemic source circularity. The point is that, for the reliabilist, N is sufficient for both N+1 and N+2. The reliabilist is unable to distinguish between these types inferences because, on his view, being produced by a reliable source *is* what makes the belief justified. Hence, knowing that a source is reliable allows one to unproblematically infer that it produces justified beliefs.

Now consider how an internalist might try the same maneuver:

1i. Using belief source X, I formed the belief that P. [Formed independently of X]

2i. P. [Formed using X]

...

∴ Ni. X produces mostly true beliefs.

∴ N+1i. X is reliable.

∴ N+2i. If a belief B is produced by X, B is justified.

Again, up to N+1i is an instance of bootstrapping. Up to N+2i is an instance of epistemic source circularity. The difference for the internalist is that while Ni is sufficient to justify N+1i, it is insufficient to justify N+2i. Recall that internalists deny that a source's being reliable is sufficient for it to produce justified beliefs. In other words, a belief source could have a positive track record and still produce only unjustified beliefs. This means

that internalists can avoid permitting epistemic source circular *inferences* so defined.<sup>54</sup> However, since the type of circularity is the same in the bootstrapping and epistemic source circularity cases—one uses premises produced by a source to argue that the source produces justified beliefs—it remains a pressing question for the internalist whether he can avoid permitting one to be justified in believing the conclusion of a so-called bootstrapping inference on the basis of the premises. Internalists typically believe bootstrapping inferences are vicious for similar reasons they think epistemic source circular inferences are vicious, so they aren't yet off the hook by making the distinction proposed above.

Does anything interesting follow from this? The main lesson is that those who think permitting easy justification is bad have some reason to prefer internalism.<sup>55</sup> That's because internalists can't get easy justification for the truth of their epistemic principles, unlike externalists—or at least reliabilists. To the extent that easy justification is bad, internalism comes out ahead. Of course, internalists might be able to become justified in believing their epistemic principles, too, albeit in some other way that may not be so easy. For example, one might think that by establishing the reliability of a belief source, one would be able to use inductive inferences to conclude that the source is legitimate as well.

### 3.4 Can Externalism Avoid Permitting Epistemic Source

#### Circularity?

Having laid the central issue on the table, it now needs to be determined whether externalism has the resources to avoid permitting epistemic source circularity. While the

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<sup>54</sup> Internalists may still be unable to avoid permitting noninferential epistemic source circular *beliefs*, such as forming the belief “memory is reliable” on the basis of memory. See the final section of chapter four for discussion.

<sup>55</sup> I'll discuss this problem in connection with Cohen (2002) below.

internalists posing the challenge above have argued that externalism would have no problem in principle with the *type* of procedure Roxanne uses to believe that her gas gauge is reliable, I think it would be more interesting to see why externalists would (perhaps happily) agree.

It is worth noting that the following discussions of epistemic source circularity by externalists have a common component: all argue that the feature(s) of their view that make them permit epistemic source circularity are not products of externalism itself. Rather, general features of the view—features shared by the most plausible versions of internalism—make this the case. Thus the basic strategy is to argue that internalists can press their objection to externalists only at the cost of undermining their own views.

#### 3.4.1 Sosa

Ernest Sosa has published a series of articles that seek not only to diagnose the source of the apparent threat of epistemic source circularity, but also to point to a non-skeptical way out. (1994, 1997b, 2009) His resultant view is that one cannot avoid using epistemic source circular procedures, but that's okay since such procedures aren't necessarily vicious. In this subsection I will be concerned with the first claim just mentioned. Evaluating Sosa's second claim will be part of chapter four, where I consider whether epistemic source circularity is vicious, i.e. whether it prevents one from being justified in believing the conclusion of such an inference on the basis of the premises. While his discussion is carried out in terms of knowledge, I will continue to focus on justification. I will indicate below whenever this difference in focus potentially affects one's evaluation of Sosa's views.

Sosa thinks that in general we form beliefs according to certain dispositions. When a disposition produces true beliefs when manifested in particular scenarios, that disposition counts as a competence. To maintain terminological consistency, talk of competent dispositions will be replaced with justification-producing belief sources. In a

recent paper, Sosa distinguishes between two types of bootstrapping: those involving reason-based competences and those involving non-reason-based competences. He claims that bootstrapping involving the former is always vicious, but that instances involving the latter are not always vicious. (Sosa, 2011) Hence Sosa permits one to be justified in believing the conclusions of some instances of bootstrapping.

Reason-based competences are those that “properly weigh reasons in the fixing of beliefs” (2011, p. 76). Which competences are reason-based? He offers the following example: “Here, in the first instance, this gauge reads that p1, so it is true that p1; here, in the second instance, the gauge reads that p2, so it is true that p2; here, in the third instance...; etc. So, given our gauge’s well-documented track record, with lots of hits and no misses, we conclude that it is quite reliable” (2011, p. 75). Sosa says that this case of bootstrapping is absurd; the person cannot come to justifiably believe that the gauge is reliable in this way.<sup>56</sup> Why is this so? He claims that when one relies on the gauge to produce the initial premises, one manifest’s one’s implicit commitment to the reliability of the gauge. If one weren’t committed to this, one wouldn’t trust the deliverances of the gauge to support a claim about its reliability. But if one must already be committed, if only subconsciously, to the reliability of the gauge in forming the premises, one cannot acquire any *new* justification for believing that it is reliable. Hence the argument fails to *raise* the probability of the conclusion for the subject. This is why the argument is vicious. Sosa’s analysis helps clarify Vogel’s objection to the original example, viz. that Roxanne isn’t justified in believing the conclusion because she doesn’t have evidence for believing what the gauge says. There she relied only on the stated premises. Presumably the missing evidence was *that the gauge is reliable*. The trouble is that once one modifies the scenario in the way Sosa proposes, the argument exhibits the clearly vicious antecedent-justification circularity.

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<sup>56</sup> Note that this is the same verdict Vogel gives about his own gauge case.

Sosa doesn't provide necessary and sufficient conditions for distinguishing between non-reason-based and reason-based competences. Nonetheless, he offers that some vision (and some perception generally) is a non-reason-based competence. The disposition to believe that things are the way they visually appear to one is one he thinks is endowed at birth, and develops over time through normal early development. What makes this disposition a competence is its "animal reliability". Beliefs produced by animal competences are formed in the absence of any beliefs about the reliability of the disposition; as such he claims such dispositions issue something very much like Cohen's basic knowledge, i.e. knowledge acquired via a source prior to knowing that the source is reliable. (Sosa, 2011, p. 79) Being formed by non-reason-based competences, such beliefs are noninferentially justified. When this is the case, the beliefs of the bootstrapping track record argument will be justified, and so long as a sufficiently rich record can be adduced, one will be able to non-viciously conclude that, e.g., vision is reliable.

Not all non-reason-based dispositions are competences, since not all of them produce true beliefs. This allows Sosa to respond to the objection that epistemic source circularity is vicious because it would imply that crystal ball gazers could argue for their own epistemic principles with equal efficacy as those relying on sensory perception. He responds by undercutting the objection's main assumption. Compare how he evaluates their positions:

On [my] view, the crystal gazers differ from the perceivers in that gazing is not reliable while perceiving is. So the theory of knowledge of the perceivers is right, that of the gazers wrong. Moreover, the perceivers can know their theory to be right when they know it in large part through perception, since their theory is right and perception can thus serve as a source of knowledge. The gazers are, by hypothesis, in a very different position. Gazing, being unreliable, cannot serve as a source of knowledge. So the perceivers have a good source or basis for their knowledge, but the gazers, lacking any such source or basis, lack knowledge. (1997b, p. 427)

Again, not all non-reason-based dispositions can be used to bootstrap one's way to justified belief in its reliability, solely due to being non-reason-based.

There is a general lesson to be learned from his discussion. Sosa thinks that if a belief source can produce knowledge, it can produce knowledge of its own legitimacy. If one suspects that the track record argument is vicious, one needs to reexamine the premises. If one maintains the negative assessment of the conclusion, and all other conditions are met, one must admit that their view doesn't provide a sufficient condition for noninferential justification after all. In sum, he doesn't think epistemic source circularity is vicious in itself; it fails to produce knowledge only when the metaepistemology has other problems. Thus Sosa isn't committed to approving of all instances of epistemic source circularity, only some of them.

### 3.4.2 Van Cleve

James Van Cleve (1979) has defended the ability of epistemic source circularity to produce justified beliefs. His defense comes via what he takes to be a vindication of the circle Descartes seems to rely on in the *Meditations*. Descartes seems to be committed to the following:

- (1) I can know (be certain) that whatever I perceive clearly and distinctly is true (P) only if I first know (am certain) that God exists and is not a deceiver (Q).
- (2) I can know (be certain) that Q only if I first know (am certain) that P.

The worry is that if both statements are true, Descartes can know neither P nor Q. Why not? According to (1), Descartes could only come to know that Q like this:

- 1. P.
- ∴ 2. Q.

What makes him justified in believing the premise? According to (1) above, only if he first knows that Q. Thus, the fully fleshed-out argument looks like this:

- 1. Q.



∴ 2. P.

∴ 3. Q

This argument, however, exhibits antecedent justification circularity; defined in chapter one as one such that a subject S is justified in believing the premise(s) only if S is already justified in believing the conclusion. Descartes has justification to believe the second statement only if he already justifiably believes the first one. Since the first statement is the same as the conclusion, it follows that Descartes has reason to believe at least one of the premises only if he already justifiably believes the conclusion.<sup>57</sup>

Van Cleve claims to extricate Descartes from what seems like a glaringly bad argument by first distinguishing between

(A) For all P, if I clearly and distinctly perceive that P, then I am certain that P.

(B) I am certain that (for all P, if I clearly and distinctly perceive that P, then P).

(A) says that having a clear and distinct perception of a proposition makes one certain of its truth. Later in his article, Van Cleve states that (A) is equivalent to the “Clear and Distinct Perception Rule” (CDPR). By contrast, (B) says that Descartes is certain that CDPR is true. That such a distinction can be made, he thinks, is due to an ambiguity in Descartes’ phrase “I am certain of the truth of clear and distinct perceptions”.

Once this distinction is made, one can reconstruct Descartes’ reasoning in a way that avoids antecedent-justification circularity. In the *Meditations*, Descartes seeks to validate CDPR by showing that the existence of a non-deceiving God guarantees that he is not led astray whenever he believes what he clearly and distinctly perceives. An elliptical but useful reconstruction of this argument looks like this:

1. [Propositions believed due to their being clearly and distinctly perceived]

∴ 2. God exists and is not a deceiver.

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<sup>57</sup> Of course, one could illustrate the problem by showing how Descartes could come to justifiably believe P instead.

∴ 3. (B) I am certain that (for all P, if I clearly and distinctly perceive that P, then P).

The propositions packed into the first premise include Descartes' reasons for believing that a non-deceiving God exists. Are these propositions justified for him? Recall that CDPR, aka (A), states a sufficient condition for a proposition being certain for one. Furthermore, Descartes clearly and distinctly perceives these propositions. But according to (A), this means he is certain of—hence justified in believing—them. This means he is able to justifiably infer the intermediate conclusion that God exists and is not a deceiver, from which he is able to deduce (B), that he is certain that for all P, if I clearly and distinctly perceive that P, then P. Upon coming to know this, the final conclusion of the argument, Descartes has secured knowledge of CDPR without having to already be justified in believing it. As Van Cleve explains, it is enough for his premises to be justified that they “fall under” (A); he does not in addition need to be certain that (A), i.e. (B).

Van Cleve's proposal explains how that Descartes could have come to know that God exists and is not a deceiver without first having to know CDPR. He can thus reject (2) above, which in effect denies the second arc of the circle that we saw is vicious due to exhibiting antecedent-justification circularity. One still might have reservations about Van Cleve's proposal. For the resulting argument 1-3 above still seems to exhibit a different type of circularity, viz. what I have called epistemic source circularity. The initial premises are formed by a belief source the conclusion says is legitimate.<sup>58</sup> Has he traded one problematic type of circularity for another? Van Cleve doesn't think so, as he claims to have provided a “solution to the Cartesian Circle... that is in general outline sound” (1979, p. 74).

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<sup>58</sup> Van Cleve is right to point out that in this context the “Clear and Distinct Perception Rule” functions as a *belief source* for the initial premises of the argument for (B), rather than a *ground* for them. That is to say, Descartes doesn't need to already believe the rule for propositions believed in accordance with it to be certain for him.

How does this show that Van Cleve thinks that externalists cannot avoid permitting epistemic source circularity? After all, he takes himself to have provided a vindication of perhaps the arch internalist, Descartes. On the other hand, if one takes Van Cleve's proposal seriously, Descartes may turn out not to be committed to a version of internalism that leads to vicious infinite regress. Could the externalist rely on the same style of reasoning to arrive at a justified belief in the conclusion of a similar argument?

Elsewhere, Van Cleve (1984) distinguishes between what I'm calling antecedent-justification and epistemic source circularity, and argues that the latter can produce justified beliefs.<sup>59</sup> For any type of circularity to be vicious, it must be true that "a necessary condition of using [the argument] to gain knowledge of (or justified belief in) its conclusion is that one already have knowledge of (or justified belief in) the conclusion" (p. 558). This is true by definition of what I'm calling antecedent-justification circularity. The circularity arising out of Descartes' commitment to (1) and (2) above is of this type. The type of circularity present in Van Cleve's reconstruction of Descartes' reasoning—the two-premised inference three paragraphs above—exhibits epistemic source circularity insofar as "it is sanctioned by a rule of inference one could know to be correct only if one already knew that its conclusion was true" (p. 558). Despite its use of "rule of inference" I think his acceptance of this sort of circularity as non-vicious applies to what I'm calling epistemic source circularity. For there is an important sense in which belief sources and rules of inference are similar: both take something as inputs and output beliefs.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, as we saw in connection with how he thinks Descartes can know the propositions packed into the first premise of the reconstructed argument, it is sufficient that the belief source or inference rule does output

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<sup>59</sup> He uses the terms "epistemic circularity" and "rule circularity" respectively. According to my terminology, producing justified beliefs entails there being justification for those beliefs.

<sup>60</sup> I will return to this issue below in connection with Vogel.

justified beliefs; one doesn't also need to know or justifiably believe that this is the case. If one did, the argument would turn into one that exhibits antecedent-justification circularity. In sum, Van Cleve is sensitive to the distinction between antecedent-justification and epistemic source circularity and still argues that there is nothing wrong with permitting one to be justified in believing the conclusion of an inference of the latter sort.

### 3.4.3 Cohen

While he does not adopt externalism, Stewart Cohen (2002) has pinpointed what he argues is an epistemic principle the rejection of which is sufficient for being unable to avoid permitting bootstrapping. Both externalists and internalists alike will be so committed if they reject

JR: A potential justification source J can yield justification for S, only if S justifiably believes J is reliable. (p. 309)<sup>61</sup>

What can be said in favor of the principle? For example, suppose one comes across a map detailing the location of a large sum of money. If I believe what the map tells me, do I thereby have justification to believe that the money is located where the map says it is? In this circumstance it seems at least initially plausible that I can have justification to believe that the treasure is where the map says it is only if I already justifiably believe that the map is reliable. For if I have no reason to believe the map is reliable, then I shouldn't rely on it, i.e. I shouldn't believe that things are located where it says they are. One might be tempted to generalize from this example and affirm JR.<sup>62</sup> What follows if one affirms it? Cohen argues that doing so will land one in the problem

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<sup>61</sup> In what follows I will remain focused on justification rather than knowledge. Cohen's argument can still be taken as supporting the general point that, if a version of the principle is true with respect to epistemic status E, the having of lower-level beliefs with E requires having higher-level beliefs regarding the legitimacy of the source that themselves have E.

<sup>62</sup> See the concluding section of this chapter for further discussion of this point.

of the criterion, since

[S]urely our [justification] that sense perception is reliable will be based on [justification] we have about the workings of the world. And surely that [justification] will be acquired, in part, by sense perception. So it looks as if we are in the impossible situation of needing sensory [justification] prior to acquiring it. Similar considerations apply to other sources of [justification] like memory and induction. Skepticism threatens. (2002, p. 309)

One can avoid this problem, he thinks, by rejecting JR. Rejecting JR commits one to the possibility of what Cohen calls “basic [justification]”. Basic justification in his sense differs from the foundationalist’s noninferentially justified beliefs in the following respect. The latter requires that a belief be justified independently of *any* other belief; the former requires only that it be independent of the belief that its source is reliable. So all noninferentially justified beliefs will be basic in Cohen’s sense. This will be important later, for any non-skeptical foundationalist must admit the existence of basic justification. The converse doesn’t hold because a belief can be inferentially justified but basic, so long as its inferential justification at no point depends on the proposition concerning the reliability of its source being justified. The crucial move is Cohen’s claim that allowing basic justification requires one to permit at least some instances of bootstrapping. He offers the following example put forward by a reliabilist:

1. The table is red. [Based on visual experience]
  2. My belief that the table is red is produced by my color vision.<sup>63</sup>
- ∴ 3. In this instance, my color vision worked correctly.
- ...
- ∴ N. My color vision is reliable.

Let us suppose that reliabilism is true, one’s color vision is reliable, and that the first

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<sup>63</sup> As an internalist claiming that this premise is produced by introspection, Cohen probably should have said something like, “I’m having a red sensation”. As stated, the premise makes a claim about the cause of his belief, which seems unlikely to be introspectively accessible.

premise is produced by that source. This belief counts as basic since, according to reliabilism, it is sufficient for the belief's being justified that it is produced by a reliable source. Since reliable production is sufficient, it isn't necessary that one first believe that one's color vision is reliable. The second premise, let's say, is produced via introspection (which I shall assume is reliable for present purposes). Combining the first two premises, one can deduce the first intermediate conclusion that one's color vision worked correctly on that occasion. One may continue enumerating favorable cases until one has premises sufficient to provide justification to believe the conclusion that one's color vision is reliable.

Cohen argues that similar remarks hold for any internalist position that allows for the possibility of basic justification.<sup>64</sup> Consider a view according to which one can have justification to believe that X is F on the basis of its looking F, without first having justification to believe that X looking F is a reliable indication of its being F.<sup>65</sup> One might reason like this:

- 1. The table looks red.
- ∴ 2. The table is red.
- ∴ 3. In this instance, my color vision worked correctly.
- ...
- ∴ N. My color vision is reliable.

Nowhere in this argument has it been assumed that being produced by a reliable source is either necessary or sufficient for being justified. What has been assumed is that for one to have justification to believe statements like premise 2, one has some evidence for it. In this instance that evidence stems from premise 1, not from one's antecedent belief that

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<sup>64</sup> Cohen uses the term "evidentialist", but it is clear that he intends this to be a species of internalism.

<sup>65</sup> Whether the belief "that X is F" also counts as noninferential depends on whether one requires one to *infer* it from "X looks F" or not. Either way, the former will count as "basic".

one's color vision is reliable.<sup>66</sup> As such, premise 2 is "basic". Let us grant as well that premise 1 is justified noninferentially via introspection. If this sort of internalism is correct, one is justified in believing intermediate conclusion 3. By repeating the procedure one can eventually amass enough evidence to justifiably believe N.

To sum up, Cohen argues that any metaepistemology that denies JR is committed to the possibility of "basic justification", which in turn makes it possible that there be justification to believe a conclusion based on such premises. If one believed the conclusion on the basis of those premises, that belief would be justified. To avoid permitting bootstrapping, then, one must adopt JR.

#### 3.4.4 Bergmann

The guiding thread thus far has been that externalists are committed to approving of epistemic source circularity in those cases where some of the premises of the argument are justified noninferentially, in virtue of satisfying the antecedent of the epistemic principle underlying the belief source the conclusion says is reliable. Michael Bergmann (2006) is included in this group. What makes his view worth discussing is that he explains in greater detail exactly what the internalist would need to do to resist the conclusion that an inference's exhibiting epistemic source circularity prevents one from being able to justifiably believe the conclusion.

He argues that adopting foundationalism commits one to approving of (at least some instances of) bootstrapping.<sup>67</sup> If one is a foundationalist, he argues, one will think that the following propositions can all be true of a subject at a time:

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<sup>66</sup> One might think it more psychologically plausible that we don't typically perform a *conscious* inference from statements like 1 to 2. This won't change anything essential to the example.

<sup>67</sup> Bergmann calls this type of argument one that exhibits "epistemic circularity", though the terminological distinction will not matter here.

- (a) A subject *S* has belief sources  $X_1$ - $X_n$ , each of which directly produces noninferentially justified beliefs.
- (b) On the basis of the noninferentially justified beliefs produced by the belief sources mentioned in (a)—including beliefs produced by  $X_1$ —*S* relies on valid inductive reasoning to infer (and, thereby, to come to believe on that basis and for the first time) that source  $X_1$  is reliable.
- (c) Justification transfers from an argument's premises to its conclusion when *S* relies on valid inductive reasoning to infer the conclusion (which is then believed on that basis and for the first time) from the already justified premises (unless in making that inference *S* comes to take—or epistemically should come to take—her belief in one of the premises or her reliance on that inference to be epistemically inappropriate).
- (d) In making the inference mentioned in (b), it's false that *S* comes to take—or epistemically should come to take—her belief in one of the premises mentioned in (b) or her reliance on the inference mentioned in (b) to be epistemically inappropriate. (Bergmann, 2006, pp. 187-188)

His argument can be reconstructed as follows:

1. If *S* thinks conditions (a)-(d) are compossible then *S* is committed to approving of bootstrapping.
  2. *S* thinks conditions (a)-(d) are compossible.
- ∴ 3. *S* is committed to approving of bootstrapping.

The first premise is argued for by showing that an argument's meeting conditions (a)-(d) is sufficient for its premises to establish its conclusion. Whether (a)-(d) are true is more contentious. If one is a non-skeptical foundationalist, one should have no objection to (a). Moreover, (b) is relatively unproblematic, insofar as it describes a possible way one could reason. The most interesting claims are (c) and (d). Whether (c) is true depends on whether (d) is true; i.e. whether one really does or ought to take the inference mentioned



in (b) to be epistemically inappropriate. In other words, (c) claims that the premises specified in (a)-(b) can justify the conclusion so long as the subject lacks a defeater. When (d) is true of a subject, he or she lacks a defeater. As we shall see below, some internalists have offered reasons for thinking that the inference in (b) is epistemically inappropriate because the subject acquires a defeater, i.e. because (d) is false of them. If so, then (c) is false. For the moment, let us grant Bergmann's point that if there is no reason to think the inference in (b)—or any of the inferences leading up to it—is epistemically inappropriate, then bootstrapping is permissible.

It is worth noting why Bergmann thinks his argument should hold sway with both internalists and externalists. Both should permit the premises of at least some epistemic source circular arguments to justify their conclusions, he thinks, due to a shared commitment to foundationalism. In particular, in the absence of any reasons to reject the inference, e.g. due to one's acquiring a defeater, everything one could ask for in a good argument is present: the premises are justified and the inference can transmit justification to the conclusion. If one is convinced of foundationalism, as externalism's primary critics seem to be, then in order to avoid permitting epistemic source circularity one must either find a flaw in one of the inferences or identify a defeater that precludes the subject from justifiably believing the conclusion on the basis of the premises in some way. If they cannot identify such a flaw, then they seemingly must allow one to be justified in believing the conclusion of the inference on the basis of the premises.

#### 3.4.5 Kallestrup

Unlike the externalists discussed above, Jesper Kallestrup (2009) argues that reliabilists can avoid permitting bootstrapping. In this subsection I will evaluate his argument for that claim and argue that it is unable to provide the reliabilist with grounds to avoid permitting bootstrapping.

In keeping with the externalists discussed above, Kallestrup grants that the

premises of a track record argument can be justified so long as their production satisfies the antecedent of the epistemic principle underwriting the source the conclusion says is reliable. This justification can be one of at least three types. It can be basic in Cohen's sense, not requiring that one have a justified belief in the reliability of the source that produced the belief. It can also be an instance of what Kallestrup calls

(Brute Justification) S has justification to believe p as a result of reliable cognitive process r even though S has neither justification to believe r is reliable nor justification to believe r produced the belief that p. (2009, p. 167)

Brute justification is thus more restrictive than basic justification, since the former requires that an additional type of belief—viz. that r produced the belief that p—not be part of what justifies p. Of course, noninferential justification is the most restrictive of the three, not allowing any type of belief to figure into the justification of the target belief.

His approach claims that reliabilists can avoid permitting bootstrapping by denying that the justification of the initial premises (1) *X produced the belief that P* and (2) *P* transfers to the first intermediate conclusion (3) *X produced a true belief*.<sup>68</sup> This denial of transmission implies that a subject believing the initial premises does not acquire justification for believing the intermediate conclusion when basing it on the initial premises. His approach is consistent with a closure principle on justification, which says that when there is justification to believe the premises of a valid argument there is justification to believe the conclusion.<sup>69</sup> The plausibility of his position depends on the truth of the following proposed constraint:

(Basic Constraint) If S has justification to believe that r produced the belief that p,

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<sup>68</sup> In this example, (1) is formed using a source independent of X and (2) is formed using X.

<sup>69</sup> This is Kallestrup's gloss on the closure principle formulated by Wright (2002).

then S has (Basic Justification) to believe p only if S has antecedent justification to believe that r produced a true belief that p. (2009, p. 166)

In defending (Basic Constraint) Kallestrup appeals to intuitions that can be used as part of a response to Bergmann's ultimatum to the internalist: in order to avoid permitting epistemic source circularity, find a way to reject either the subject's justification for believing the premises or the subject's act of inferring conclusion(s) from premises. It's worth emphasizing that Bergmann thought the inference the internalist would need to reject is the one from the positive track record to the reliability of the process. If Kallestrup is right, the objectionable inference comes earlier, at the stage where one tries to justify the claim that the source produced a true belief on a particular occasion. (Basic Constraint) is claimed to be plausible upon considering the difference between (i) noninferential justification, and (ii) basic justification without noninferential justification. The difference is that in the second case one has, in addition, justification to believe that source r—the one the conclusion says is reliable—produced the belief that p. The case thus applies to the argument above (1)-(3), saying in effect that justification fails to transfer from (1)-(2) to (3) since, given (2), one could have justification to believe (1) only if one already had justification to believe (3). He explains the reasoning behind this assessment as follows:

Take a case of [noninferential justification] first. If I have justification to believe p as a result of r, but neither justification to believe r is reliable nor justification to believe r produced the belief that p, then I am non-reflectively relying on r as a source of belief. As long as r is reliable, there's nothing epistemically improper about doing so. It's just that the justification I attain isn't all that sophisticated—as witnessed by the chicken sexers. Now contrast with a case of (Basic Justification) without [noninferential justification]. I have justification to believe p as a result of r, and justification to believe r produced my belief that p, but no justification to believe r is reliable. As the justification I have for believing p is now conjoined with justification to believe r produced that belief, the former justification is reflective in a certain sense. Not because that justification is reflectively accessible: what provides justification is the reliability of r, and I have no reflective access to that property of r, indeed I have no justification at all pertaining to that property. But because the

causal origin of my belief is reflectively accessible: I have justification via introspection to believe that that belief originates in *r*, e.g., visual perception. So, I am reflectively relying on *r* as a source of belief, *and when I do so the question about the epistemic credentials of r arises*. As I lack justification to believe *r* is reliable, I cannot justify my relying on *r*. But it seems epistemically improper to rely on *r* in forming the belief that *p* when I have reflective access to *r* qua cause of belief yet can do nothing by way of rationally defending my so relying. To reflectively rely on a belief source for which I have no justification to believe in its reliability is epistemically irresponsible, even if in actual fact that source is reliable. *What matters is that, for all I can tell, r is unreliable, in which case r shouldn't be trusted as a belief source*. The only way for me to be exempt from epistemic reproach is to attain prior justification to believe *r* produced a true belief that *p*—and that's just what (Basic Constraint) requires. (2009, p. 168, my italics)

Recall (Basic Constraint): If *S* has justification to believe that *r* produced the belief that *p* [i.e. (2)], then *S* has (Basic Justification) to believe *p* [i.e. (1)] only if *S* has antecedent justification to believe that *r* produced a true belief that *p* [i.e. (3)]. Kallestrup is claiming here that justification fails to transmit from (1)-(2) to (3) for *S* because (1) is unjustified, since, also believing (2), *S* doesn't have antecedent justification to believe (3).

Central to Kallestrup's defense of (Basic Constraint) is his account of what happens when, by believing (2), a subject "reflectively relies on" the source that produced (1). Upon doing so, he says, "the question about the epistemic credentials of *r* arises". When one tries to answer this question and realizes they have no reason to think *r* is reliable or not, he thinks the subject should give up (1). This is because a lack of justification to believe that the source of (1) is reliable is supposed to defeat any justification *S* has for (1). The same thing would happen every time *S* tries to show that the source produced any true belief, thus making it impossible to generate a track record argument that would provide justification to believe a source is reliable. If Kallestrup is correct, for this reason the reliabilist can avoid permitting bootstrapping. That said, I think he is wrong. I'll raise two objections to this constraint and evaluate Kallestrup's reply.

The first objection is that (Basic Constraint) appeals to the concept of

propositional justification, viz. that of having justification to believe a proposition. But what business does the reliabilist have talking about propositional justification in the first place? We know what they say about doxastic justification: something along the lines of requiring that a reliable process produce the *belief*. In general, one has a (doxastically) justified belief when one bases the belief on that which provides propositional justification for it. But propositional justification is a property of propositions, not beliefs, and the reliabilist has no account of what makes there be justification to believe a *proposition*. So it is unclear whether the reliabilist can even make sense of the terminology Kallestrup uses to describe his constraint. Despite being a potential problem, I think the reliabilist can adequately respond to this objection either by modifying the account in terms of doxastic justification or else providing an account of propositional justification.<sup>70</sup>

Even if the reliabilist has a way to incorporate propositional justification into his theory, there is a more fundamental worry with the proposed constraint. The consequent of (Basic Constraint) states, “S has (Basic Justification) to believe p only if S has antecedent justification to believe that r produced a true belief that p”. Recall from the above section on Cohen the relationship between noninferentially justified belief and basic belief. Unlike the latter, the former requires for any belief P that there be no other belief Q such that its being justified (or one’s having justification to believe it) is required for P’s being justified. If there was such a requirement, P couldn’t be *noninferentially* justified. We saw there that all noninferentially justified beliefs have basic justification, although the converse doesn’t hold. When a belief P is basic but not noninferential, then (Basic Constraint) may be true of that particular belief. But when P is *both* noninferential and basic, the consequent of the constraint is false, since it says the belief has positive epistemic status only if one has justification to believe *another* proposition (contrary to

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. Kvanvig (2003).

the definition of noninferentially justified belief). These situations provide counterexamples that show that (Basic Constraint) is false and so fails to provide the reliabilist with grounds to avoid permitting bootstrapping.

Despite the constraint being false as presented, it will be useful to further consider what Kallestrup says about it. I will set aside the fact that brute justification is weaker than the noninferential variety, and focus the remaining discussion on the latter, making replacements where necessary. Doing so will also help keep things consistent with the terminology of the epistemologists discussed above.

The crucial part of Kallestrup's position is his claim that, upon believing (2), the subject attains reflective access to *r* as the source of (1) and so must answer a question regarding the epistemic credentials of *r*. Furthermore, he thinks that the only answer to this question that will not provide a defeater for (1) is "*r* is reliable". But is it true that "the question [of the reliability of *r*] arises" in this situation? Perhaps the idea is that a suitably reflective individual will not just believe (2) and move on to infer (3), but will stop to wonder whether *r* is trustworthy. What if *S* doesn't stop to wonder, so that the question doesn't arise in *S*'s mind? To sustain his claim that *S* should give up (1), Kallestrup needs to argue for the truth of something like

Reflective Reliance (RR): Necessarily, for any subject *S* and any belief that *P*, if *S* reflectively relies on a source *r* to believe *P*, then to be justified in believing that *P*, *S* must have justification to believe that *r* is reliable.

Notice that RR only applies in cases where a subject reflectively relies on a source. If it extended to cases of non-reflective reliance as well, it would preclude the possibility of both basic and noninferential justification, such as that which is supposed to be present in (1) before *S* believes (2). But Kallestrup hasn't argued for RR. In addition to the existence of counterexamples to (Basic Constraint), the alleged support for the principle, i.e. RR, is itself lacking in supporting grounds.

I would like to press a final worry. Let's grant Kallestrup's point that sometimes trying to reflectively rely on apparently noninferentially justified beliefs to justify other beliefs doesn't work, i.e. one won't have justification to believe the inferred proposition. We saw this occur only in conjunction with belief that (2), i.e. the one that provided the subject with reflective access to the source of (1). But does the worry extend to cases where I only believe something like (1) and make inferences from it? This is analogous to the other type of case Cohen (2002) says permits easy justification, viz. closure cases. Suppose one reasons as follows:

(1') It seems to me that P.

∴ (2') P.

Since, by stipulation, one has no reflective access to the source of (1'), the question of the reliability of the source of (1') isn't raised. But even in the absence of such reflective beliefs, does the subject's act of inferring itself require antecedent justification to believe the source is reliable? If it does, but having such beliefs would destroy the noninferentially justified status of (1'), then it seems to follow that either (1') isn't noninferentially justified after all or, assuming the subject simply lacks the reflective belief, it is noninferentially justified but it's impossible to infer anything from one's foundations. My purpose here isn't to decide these matters for Kallestrup. Instead, I'm concerned with drawing out some implications of the proposed way out of permitting bootstrapping.

### 3.5 Can Internalism Avoid Permitting Epistemic Source

#### Circularity?

In the previous section I detailed the reasons why externalists mainly affirm that they do not avoid permitting epistemic source circularity. Central to that discussion was their claim that the permissibility of epistemic source circularity follows from a commitment to foundationalism. In this section I will consider whether internalists, most

of whom adopt foundationalism, have a way to avoid permitting epistemic source circularity. A few outcomes are possible. If they are able to do so, it will be important to see whether externalists can adopt the same strategy. If that is the case, then internalists lose one sort of objection to externalism. If not, they will either need to argue that it isn't vicious after all, or adopt some sort of skepticism.

### 3.5.1 Vogel

Jonathan Vogel is one of the most oft-cited internalist opponents to bootstrapping.<sup>71</sup> In this section I will evaluate his proposal for how internalists can avoid permitting it found in his recent (2008). I will argue that it fails for three reasons. First, even if it blocks bootstrapping in some cases, it cannot block it in all possible cases. Second, it fails to provide an illuminating explanation of the supposed problem with bootstrapping. Third, his proposal doesn't provide internalists with grounds to prefer internalism to reliabilism.<sup>72</sup>

Vogel begins his most recent discussion by re-examining one of his earlier thought experiments.<sup>73</sup>

*Gas gauge case:* Roxanne routinely forms beliefs about her gas gauge, although she does not know whether it is reliable. On one occasion, she looks at the gauge, notes that it reads 'F', and believes on that basis "that the tank is full". But she also forms a belief about the status of the gauge itself: "The gauge reads 'F'". Conjoining these beliefs leads her to believe the more complex proposition "The gauge reads 'F' and F", i.e. that the gauge correctly registered the amount of gas in the tank on this occasion. She repeats this procedure several times until she has enough beliefs about the gauge's successes to infer "that the gauge is reliable". (2008, p. 518-519)

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<sup>71</sup> His (2000) along with Fumerton (1995, ch. 6) are typically considered the *loci classici* of internalist opposition to bootstrapping.

<sup>72</sup> In his (2000) he intended to reveal a problem for reliabilism in particular based on its inability to avoid permitting bootstrapping.

<sup>73</sup> The thought experiment originates in his (2000).



Roxanne's reasoning is a case of bootstrapping because it uses the deliverances of a source to argue for the reliability of that source. What is the problem? As Vogel explains, Roxanne "has no evidence" to believe that the gauge is reliable, so she cannot know that it is reliable on the basis of its track record. (2008, p. 519) The sort of internalism he has in mind says that knowledge requires justification and justification requires evidence. Vogel reconstructs what she would need to do as follows, indicating the belief's source after stating its content:

- (1) K(Tank is full at t1). [Reliable Process]
- (2) K(Gauge reads "F" at t1). [Perception]
- ∴ (3) K(Gauge reads "F" at t1 & Tank is full at t1).
- (4) K(Gauge reads accurately at t1).
- ...
- ∴ (N) K(Gauge is reliable). [Induction]

Vogel assumes at this point that bootstrapping is illegitimate. It follows that Roxanne doesn't know the conclusion of the inference, i.e. (N) is false. This generates what he calls "rollback", an undoing of her knowledge. To explain why (N) is false, we must locate what went wrong earlier in the argument. Intermediate conclusion (4) follows from (3), which follows from (1) and (2). He claims that (2) is "not open to dispute" (2008, p. 520); thus, given that (N) is false, so is (1). The reason for this is not that the gauge doesn't really read that the tank is full at t1, let's stipulate that it does; it is that she lacks the evidence required to know it is full. Thus the reliabilist is faced with a contradiction: (1) is true since it meets the reliabilist's sufficient conditions for noninferential knowledge, but (1) is false—due to rollback.

Let's be clear about what the example shows. Reliabilists might reject Vogel's contention that (N) is false, thinking it's a bad example. Roxanne might not actually be able to come to know that the gauge is reliable in the way Vogel suggests. For example, Sosa (2009, pp. 219-220) points out that the inference seems plausible only when

supplemented by the commitment that the gauge is reliable, so he'd agree with Vogel's assessment.<sup>74</sup> Externalists could construct other examples where they find it plausible that the premises support the conclusion without supplementary commitments about the reliability of their source. They'll argue that in the right sort of case something like (N) is true in part because something analogous to (1) is. There seems to be a gridlock of intuitions, where each side begs the question against the other in favor of his or her preferred analysis of noninferential justification.<sup>75</sup> So it is probably best to construe Vogel's use of this case as simply setting up the point at which intuitions between internalists and externalists diverge. So what reason does he give for rejecting bootstrapping otherwise?

In brief, his proposal is that bootstrapping is vicious because it instantiates vicious rule circularity. Vogel defines the latter as occurring exactly when "An epistemic rule R is employed in an argument for the conclusion that the use of rule R is reliable" (2008, p. 530). With this in mind, he presents another thought experiment:

*Record keeping case:* While you are bootstrapping in the grocery store, you keep a record of the results. Your notes have entries like "I remember that we need catfood/Yes, we do need catfood." You go over your notes sometime later. At that point, you mistakenly but justifiedly believe them to record an episode when you were not bootstrapping, but rather checking your memory by reference to the shopping list instead (say the notes were misfiled in the "nonbootstrapping" folder). (2008, p. 535)

Upon going over the notes again, the subject reconstructs her reasoning like this:

- (M1) I seem to remember that I am out of various things. [Memory]  
 ∴ (M2) I am out of various things. [Memory]

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<sup>74</sup> Alternatively, externalists might argue that there is no source properly described as "believing on the basis of a gas gauge".

<sup>75</sup> Vogel doesn't explicitly advocate an analysis of noninferential justification, but his criticism seems to imply that with the right analysis, the premises could provide the subject with at least *prima facie* evidence for the conclusion. See his discussion of the case of memory below.

(M3) Memory produced the true belief that I am out of various things.

[Introspection]

∴ (M4) My memory was successful on that occasion.

∴ (M5) Memory is reliable.

After doing this, the subject realizes that she mistakenly thought her original inference wasn't a case of bootstrapping. Realizing it was, she comes to believe

RC: the support for M5 is rule circular.

Vogel argues that her belief RC defeats the justification for believing M5 on the basis of M4. The defeat occurs by overriding the justification M4 has to transfer to M5. This strategy enables Vogel to deny that M5 is justified while avoiding rollback. I suspect that he regards memory to be a source of evidence, thus motivating him to avoid the consequence of rollback that some of the premises aren't justified.

There are several problems with Vogel's proposal. First, even if he's right about the defeating role the subject's belief that RC plays in some cases, it doesn't allow him to avoid permitting bootstrapping in all possible cases. For that, he needs to argue for something like

ND: Necessarily, if a subject S completes a bootstrapping inference, S acquires a believed defeater RC that prevents S from knowing the conclusion.

If that argument is sound, then there will be no possible case where the connection between M4 and M5 transmits justification from the former to the latter. It would give him the resources to object to bootstrapping in principle. But Vogel hasn't argued for ND.

Indeed, ND seems clearly false. Consider his record keeping case. He notes that at a later time, if the subject realizes that her original inference was rule circular, she will have acquired the believed defeater RC. But what does this imply about her belief that her memory is reliable in the original case? By his own description, that inference was rule circular but the subject didn't believe RC. So in that case, Vogel is unable to say that

the subject is unjustified in believing M5. It's important to point out that it doesn't matter that we, as external observers, might correctly believe RC is true of the subject's original inference. As an internalist, Vogel might not allow such external factors to play a role in the justification of the subject's belief. It will remain true from the subject's own internal perspective that there is no believed defeater RC. Second, consider cases involving unsophisticated subjects who lack the concept of rule circularity. The subject would reason from M1 through M4 to M5 but never believe RC. So Vogel would have to say that his rule circular bootstrapping inference provides him with justification to believe M5. If the subject goes on to believe the conclusion on the basis of the premises, that belief would be justified.

Finally, even the sophisticated epistemologist who possesses the concept of rule circularity could justifiably believe M5. Imagine the epistemologist reasons like the others, coming to believe M5. But before she can reflect any further, she is distracted and pays no more attention to the inference she just performed. Thus, she doesn't believe RC. So she doesn't have Vogel's proposed defeater, leaving her with no further resources to object to her reasoning. Note that it won't help Vogel to respond that, at least in this last case, the epistemologist would have believed RC if she hadn't been distracted, and so isn't justified in believing M5. It won't help because Vogel has argued neither that one *must* believe RC in such cases, nor that even if one doesn't, one *should*. He has failed to provide the internalist with grounds to avoid permitting bootstrapping. He seemingly must permit it in cases where one doesn't believe RC.

A perhaps more charitable interpretation holds that the *truth* of RC defeats the subject's propositional justification, even if RC is not believed. Alternatively, one might hold that so long as the truth of RC is available to the subject on reflection, belief in the conclusion of that argument is defeated. These interpretations fall prey to the objection of this section for the same reason. On either reading Vogel doesn't provide an illuminating explanation of why bootstrapping is problematic. Saying that bootstrapping

is problematic because it instantiates rule circularity isn't very helpful. Why is rule circularity problematic? Intuitions need to be explained. But he hasn't done this; he would simply assert that the inference's being rule circular provides a defeater. Yet it would provide a defeater only if rule circularity is problematic. We're back to the intuition again. His proposal doesn't tell us what, if anything, is wrong with rule circularity.

This worry can be sharpened by considering how Vogel treats one way the internalist could resist bootstrapping, viz., by adopting the epistemic principle "No Bootstrapping!" (2008, p. 528) This isn't helpful he thinks because bootstrapping is a "term of art, introduced by examples". Eventually, he describes bootstrapping as occurring whenever one "proceeds from the claim that the use of a rule has been successful on particular occasions to the conclusion that use of the rule is reliable in general" (2008, p. 536). With this rough definition in mind, compare it with how he defined rule circularity: it occurs whenever "An epistemic rule R is employed in an argument for the conclusion that the use of rule R is reliable" (2008, p. 530). As defined, every instance of bootstrapping is also a case of rule circularity; the claim that "the use of a rule has been successful on particular occasions" is itself drawn from uses of the rule to generate premises like "I seem to remember F" and the inferred "F". So bootstrapping is sufficient for rule circularity. Is it also necessary? As defined, no, since bootstrapping is supposed to involve a claim about past successes supporting general reliability that need not be explicitly stated in every case. Nevertheless, the two concepts are very similar. One superficial difference is that bootstrapping concerns itself with the deliverance of belief sources, whereas rule circularity is concerned with the use of rules. This may not be an important difference, however, given that both may be characterized as things taking something as input and outputting beliefs. In a case of bootstrapping, we might see someone have an experience *as of F being reliable* and as a result of the functioning

of the belief source taking that experience as input, one believes “that F is reliable”. In a parallel case of rule circularity, we might see that person perform the following inference:

1. I have an experience as of F.
- ∴ 2. F.

where the move from premise to conclusion was performed by following the rule

F: When a subject S believes that P on the basis of S having an experience as of P,  
S is justified in believing P.<sup>76</sup>

Roughly, rules give instructions and belief sources “follow” or “carry out” the instructions. Again, what is important is that both involve taking something as input and outputting a belief. They may even give the same output given the same input. Furthermore, the conclusions of both types of inference say that the move from input to output is reliable.

The upshot is that Vogel’s claim that “the use of bootstrapping to justify a reliability belief is rule-circular, and therefore illegitimate” (2008, p. 536) is not illuminating. If my criticism is successful, Vogel’s position is dangerously close to exhibiting what he calls premise circularity, where the conclusion of an inference simply repeats a premise. If asked why bootstrapping is vicious, he’ll say because rule circularity is. Not only is the premise dangerously similar in meaning to the conclusion, he doesn’t provide adequate support for the premise. All we’re told is that believing *RC: the support for the conclusion is rule circular* provides the subject with a defeater. But I’ve argued that he has provided no independent reason to believe that’s true. He could fall back on the epistemic principle “No Rule Circularity!” but it should be straightforward at this point why that won’t help. At the risk of belaboring the point, not

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<sup>76</sup> Alternatively, one might describe the rule as something weaker, viz. “When one has an experience as of F, believe F”. The choice of formulation doesn’t matter for present purposes.

only is rule circularity probably also a “term of art” just like bootstrapping, the addition of such a minimal principle seems *ad hoc*.

An additional worry for Vogel is that, even if we grant that his proposal regarding the problem with bootstrapping is correct, there seems to be nothing stopping a reliabilist from adopting his claim about RC as well. If he defended the defeating role of RC on internalist grounds, perhaps the reliabilist would hesitate. But I’ve argued that not only has he not done that, he’s offered no independent reason whatsoever. If Vogel’s aim is to reveal a fundamental problem for reliabilist theories, he hasn’t achieved it. If he is right about RC, that would show that both internalists and reliabilists alike can avoid permitting bootstrapping.

### 3.5.2 Fumerton

Bergmann (2000) and Vogel (2008) have attributed to Fumerton the following principle:

No Self-Support (NSS): One cannot obtain... a justified or warranted belief that a belief source S is trustworthy by relying even in part on source S.

This is motivated by Fumerton’s claim, quoted in section 3.2, that one cannot use memory, perception, or induction to establish the legitimacy of those very sources. In a recent paper, Fumerton stands by his comments on the aforementioned sources, but in effect denies NSS by claiming that it is false when one substitutes direct acquaintance into the schema. (2006) Strictly speaking, the type of inference Fumerton had in mind in that article isn’t bootstrapping or epistemic source circularity since the conclusion is not that direct acquaintance is trustworthy or otherwise legitimate, but only that it exists. The inference looks something like this:

1. I am directly acquainted with my own act(s) of direct acquaintance.

∴ 2. Direct acquaintance exists.<sup>77</sup>

However, such reasoning still has an air of circularity insofar as one is using an apparent source of justification to justify a belief used to infer something about that very source. Just as one might admit that one would be unable to convince one who doubted the legitimacy of memory that it really is legitimate using premises formed via memory, so Fumerton thinks one wouldn't be able to convince one who doubted that there is a relation of direct acquaintance that there is by arguing from beliefs apparently produced by it.

A guiding theme in the externalist positions discussed above is that one who countenances noninferentially justified beliefs should have no problem with epistemic source circularity. As a foundationalist himself, perhaps Fumerton should also permit epistemic source circularity. So how, if at all, can he claim that his version of internalism is superior in this respect? His answer is that even though he and reliabilists alike can use epistemic source circular procedures, his view is distinctive insofar as one couldn't use such a procedure to attain a better epistemic status for beliefs produced by direct acquaintance at the first level. Reliabilists, on the other hand, seemingly must admit that moving up a level could increase the epistemic standing of such beliefs.

He claims that one can find out if one's analysis of noninferential justification is correct by seeing what happens epistemically when one moves up levels. If one runs a track record argument for the legitimacy of a belief source and discovers that one hasn't generated any new justification for believing the conclusion, then one's analysis is correct. The thought is that in forming the premises of the argument one thereby gains (probably noninferential) justification to believe that direct acquaintance is legitimate.

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<sup>77</sup> Fumerton denies that he needs to make this inference for *him* to have justification to believe that direct acquaintance exists. In the paper just referenced, he says this is the argument he'd give in response to someone that wanted a reason for *her* to believe direct acquaintance exists.



How is this supposed to work in Fumerton's own case? Suppose that one tries to use direct acquaintance to produce the premises of a track record argument. One might form beliefs like "I'm directly acquainted with the thought that P, the fact P, and the relation of correspondence between them." His view implies that in such a case one would have first-level noninferential justification for believing P. Moreover, one could infer from this that direct acquaintance produced a true belief. But even if one continued to generate premises in this way, he claims that one's assurance of the legitimacy of direct acquaintance apparently could not be increased. Why not? The answer lies in the fact that, for the argument to exhibit epistemic source circularity, the premises concerning what one is directly acquainted with would also need to be produced by higher-level acts of direct acquaintance. Such second-level acquaintance would, on his view, provide assurance of legitimacy in a self-sufficient manner that would preclude one from feeling the need to ascend to a third-level of direct acquaintance.

Importantly, he does not adopt the view that having noninferential justification to believe P *entails* having second-level justification to believe that direct acquaintance is legitimate. He is concerned that level-connecting principles like this lead to vicious regresses of the sort afflicting some of the versions of internalism discussed in chapter two. Indeed, the principle just canvassed implies that subjects lacking the concept of direct acquaintance cannot have first-level justification via direct acquaintance. Moreover, he argues that facts about what subjects can be directly acquainted with are contingent; there might be facts that are simply too complex or otherwise inaccessible that one is unable to be directly acquainted with. It remains true that a subject with the relevant conceptual sophistication and capacity to be directly acquainted with facts about acquaintance would be able to gain second-level justification for believing that direct acquaintance is legitimate upon reflecting on the fact that one has a justified first-level belief via direct acquaintance.

It is now more obvious why Fumerton must reject NSS: on his view, one can gain justification to believe in the legitimacy of direct acquaintance through the use of direct acquaintance. Were one to believe that direct acquaintance is legitimate on the basis of that justification, one would have a justified belief that direct acquaintance is legitimate that owes both its production and justification to acts of direct acquaintance itself. Thus, uses of direct acquaintance can provide the subject with justification to believe not only that direct acquaintance exists, but also that it is legitimate.

An objection to Fumerton's account can be raised on the basis of the fact that he allows one to have noninferentially justified false beliefs. If this happened often enough, might one cease to be assured that the deliverances of direct acquaintance are true? Furthermore, wouldn't one be able to use the fact that direct acquaintance often produced false (justified) beliefs as a basis for believing that it is unreliable? No. For suppose that one did realize that many of one's beliefs produced by direct acquaintance were either false or had otherwise a low positive degree of justification. That should, he thinks, lead one to simply note that the track record embodies a weak inductive argument, one that one shouldn't use to try to secure justified belief in the reliability of direct acquaintance. Importantly, however, even in this case the premises reporting less-than-ideally justified beliefs produced via direct acquaintance would *themselves* be produced by direct acquaintance. As stated previously, one would have assurance via direct acquaintance—even if it were assurance that some other instances of direct acquaintance produced less-than-ideal justification.

While I think Fumerton can satisfactorily respond to the objection above in the way canvassed, there is a more fundamental worry relating to his ability to avoid permitting epistemic source circularity. In chapter one I defended the position that whether an argument exhibits antecedent-justification circularity depends on what the subject bases his belief(s) in the premise(s) on. We have different sources of justification to believe almost everything we end up believing. For instance, I may have

justification to believe that it is raining outside both because I heard the weather report predict rain and because I looked outside and saw water on the ground. My belief might be more or less justified depending on what I base it on. I now want to argue that similar considerations apply to the conclusions of epistemic source circular track record arguments. Fumerton denies that such an argument can give one more justification to believe the conclusion than one already had before completing the argument. But it is still true that if one did base one's belief in the conclusion on the basis of a positive track record, one would acquire a justified belief. This implies that one had justification to believe the conclusion on the basis of the premises after all.

Recall Fumerton's claim that one cannot use an epistemic source circular track record argument to acquire additional justification to believe direct acquaintance is legitimate, beyond that which one acquired through the use of a second-level act of direct acquaintance in producing the premises. No further justification can be attained because in the situation just mentioned, one is *assured* of direct acquaintance's legitimacy in a way that supposedly satisfies the "philosophical curiosity" that led one into epistemological inquiry in the first place. Importantly, Fumerton is silent on the nature of assurance. What is it for one to be assured of the truth of a claim? Is it the same as having infallible justification for that claim? He does not explicate the nature of assurance, though this point will be unimportant. Whatever it is to have assurance of the legitimacy of direct acquaintance, it is supposed to follow from having it—whatever it turns out to be—that no other way of believing that direct acquaintance is legitimate could provide one with stronger justification to believe in its legitimacy. But having propositional justification for the belief that direct acquaintance is legitimate is not the same as having a doxastically-justified belief that direct acquaintance is legitimate. I argue that in the following case Fumerton must permit epistemic source circularity:

Steven has never formed any beliefs about the existence of direct acquaintance or its legitimacy. One day he decides to see whether it is a legitimate source of belief by investigating its track record.

In forming the premises he gains noninferential justification to believe that direct acquaintance is legitimate. Upon completing the argument, Steven ignores the propositional justification he attained in forming the premises and comes to believe, on the basis of the propositional justification provided by the argument as a whole and *for the first time*, that direct acquaintance is legitimate.

Fumerton might object that the argument cannot provide Steven stronger *propositional* justification than he attained in forming premises using direct acquaintance. But even if true, this is irrelevant to the strength of *doxastic* justification attaching to Steven's belief. Of course, Steven would have had a more strongly doxastically justified belief in the legitimacy of direct acquaintance were he to have based that belief on the propositional justification he acquired at the second-level in producing the initial premises. Yet in the case described, he does *not* do that, basing belief on the weaker propositional justification provided by the argument instead.

It's worth emphasizing here that having propositional justification to believe P, no matter how strong, does not entail that one gains a doxastically justified belief that P. Steven's case might seem psychologically implausible to many of us, as we might immediately believe that direct acquaintance is legitimate after forming the premises produced by direct acquaintance. But the intelligibility of his procedure establishes the present point that in this case not only does Fumerton lack grounds for objecting to Steven's reasoning, he must also concede that Steven's *belief* that direct acquaintance is legitimate is more strongly justified after completing an epistemic source circular inference than it was before. After all, since this is the first time Steven formed that belief, *any* degree of justification it had upon completion of the argument would be higher than it had before, i.e. none.

A possible reply to this proposed counterexample is that, as a matter of logical necessity, whenever one gains justification to believe that direct acquaintance is legitimate, one believes that direct acquaintance is legitimate on the basis of that propositional justification. If true, the case of Steven is impossible. In forming the initial premises of the inference he would already have a justified belief in the legitimacy of

direct acquaintance with an epistemic standing so high that no track record argument could give him a more strongly justified belief in its legitimacy. This reply is not available to Fumerton however. For he claims that young children lacking the concept of direct acquaintance as well as non-human animals incapable of forming beliefs can be directly acquainted with things. (1995, p. 74) Either case shows that a subject can be directly acquainted with something without believing that direct acquaintance is legitimate.

I conclude that even if Fumerton is able to avoid relying on epistemic source circularity, he is unable to avoid *permitting* it. More generally, the distinctively internalist feature of his foundationalism—that the noninferential justification one gains to believe that the source of one’s beliefs is legitimate provides greater assurance of truth than what a bootstrapping inference could provide—plays no essential role in the case of Steven. If internalist foundationalists can justifiably believe that their sources are legitimate on the basis of bootstrapping inferences then—all else being equal—so can externalists.

### 3.5.3 McGrew & McGrew

In a recent book, the McGrews (2007) give detailed reasons for rejecting epistemic source circularity. A virtue of their discussion is that they take the externalist’s *tu quoque* head on, arguing that even foundationalist internalists can avoid permitting epistemic source circularity. I will first summarize their views on epistemic source circularity and explain why they think they can avoid permitting it. I will then evaluate their proposal.

Their focus is “epistemic circularity”, which is slightly different if not a more schematic version of the epistemic source circularity that is the focus of the dissertation: “epistemic circularity is present whenever p appears in the defense of an ascription of

epistemic status to  $p$ ” (2007, p. 67). Consider how this sort of circularity would arise for a reliabilist, where  $p = \text{“X is reliable”}$ :

[Track record premises]

$\therefore$  N.  $p$ .

This argument is not epistemically circular on their definition, since it is only an argument for  $p$ . To generate epistemic circularity, one must first move to the meta-level and defend the claim “S is justified in believing that  $p$ .” Part of this endeavor would require showing that the premises of the object-level argument just presented are themselves justified, for only if this condition is met could there be justification for S to believe the conclusion of that argument on that basis. If one is a reliabilist, doing this will require pointing out both that X produced at least some of those premises *but also* that X is reliable. This is the point at which  $p$  appears in the argument for an ascription of positive epistemic status to  $p$ . This way of describing how epistemic source circularity arises may seem less straightforward than the definition I proposed in chapter one, but they are nonetheless the same. Alston clarifies this point when he notes that if one were to ask whether one is justified in believing the conclusion of a track record argument, a persistent interlocutor would push the subject to defend the positive status of that argument’s premises, which would require the subject to make explicit his commitment to “X is reliable” (1986, p. 22). By doing this one reveals one’s commitment to the truth of the conclusion as a presupposition that one is justified in believing its premises. What the McGrews’ definition does is help make explicit where this commitment is located—at the meta-level, not at the level of the track record argument itself. This, as they say, shouldn’t be surprising, since epistemic source circularity is distinct from those types where the conclusion is stated as a premise of the object-level argument.

Before explaining why they reject epistemic source circularity, it is worth noticing the relevant structural similarity between this type of reasoning and the infinite regress of

reasons associated with familiar regress arguments.<sup>78</sup> Both cases involve an infinitely long chain of reasons. In the latter case, one continues to offer premises not previously introduced. In the former case I'm interested in here, one never stops giving reasons but at least some of the offered reasons have been given previously. We saw that in a defense of the meta-level claim "S is justified in believing that X is reliable" the subject needed to assert "X is reliable" to explain how the premises of the meta-level argument were justified. Now one might ask whether it is true that "S is justified in believing that S is justified in believing that X is reliable". The response to this would be structurally identical, but it would appear not one but two levels higher than the one containing the original track record argument. In order to defend that claim, S would need to show that the premises of the second argument were justified, which as before would require appealing to their production via X and the fact that "X is reliable". By now it should be clear that an interlocutor might raise the question of the subject's having justification to believe the conclusion of that third-level argument as well, and so on *ad infinitum*. Since the regress began in response to a request for a defense of the meta-level claim "S is justified in believing that X is reliable", this is dubbed a *metaregress*.

The McGrews avoid permitting the metaregress by arguing that any putative epistemic principle that generates one is inconsistent with the truth of two principles. The first they call the Strong Modal Principle:

SMP: For any term E intended to indicate positive epistemic status, if it can be the case for some belief *p* that *Ep* while it is not in principle possible to show decisively that *Ep*, then E is not in fact a type of positive epistemic status.<sup>7980</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> For an overview of this argument and a detailed discussion of the options, see Moser (1985).

<sup>79</sup> They intend "in principle" to cover all beings, including an omniscient being.

<sup>80</sup> This principle is considered a general version of which the following is a specific case: MP: If it is in principle impossible to show decisively that S's belief that *p* is justified, then S is

The critical concept “show decisively” is explicated as follows:

For any term E intended to indicate positive epistemic status, one has *shown decisively that Ep* iff one has exhibited a hierarchy of metalevel trees such that every hierarchy terminates, in a finite number of levels, with a tree including only claims for which it is not possible rationally to doubt that they have the property E. (2007, p. 74)

If *Ep* cannot be shown decisively, it is “invincible” (2007, p. 73). The idea is that if one gets mired in a metaregress, one will be unable to show decisively that one’s belief(s) have positive epistemic status. Even if the externalist thinks the higher-level argument “shows” that the lower-level claim attributing epistemic status to one of S’s beliefs has positive epistemic status, it would not show it “decisively”, i.e. in a way that could remove rational doubt. Why not? Whether the ascription of positive epistemic status to S’s belief about the reliability of X is accurate depends on whether a contingent empirical condition holds, viz. whether X is reliable. But any truth depending on this sort of claim is open to rational doubt; being contingent, its falsehood is consistent with one’s total evidence. One could thus entertain rational doubt with respect to both its obtaining and thus to the truth of the ascription of positive epistemic status that depends on its obtaining. According to SMP, those beliefs will lack positive epistemic status.

Crucially, the McGrews argue that internalists who deny that production by a reliable source is either necessary or sufficient for being justified do not need to introduce new, contingent empirical information at the meta-level. The internalist’s epistemic principles are analytic necessary truths knowable *a priori*. One apparently grasps such truths in a way that removes rational doubt, stopping the metaregress. I will not evaluate their own metaepistemology, since its truth is independent of their argument against epistemic source circularity. I will argue below that that argument fails, and so it doesn’t matter if their view can avoid a metaregress.

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not justified in believing that p. The general version is required since externalists may not impose a justification requirement, perhaps preferring a concept like warrant instead.



I have thus far avoided the question of whether SMP is plausible. The first reaction one is likely to have to it is that it is far too strong. The McGrews begin their defense of it by noting important differences between SMP and JJ-theses that require that S be justified in believing that she is justified in believing *p* as part of what constitutes her justification for believing *p*. First, SMP does not require that the subject actually vindicate her beliefs; all that is required is that she be able to do so. Second, in response to the new worry that unsophisticated subjects lacking the concepts of justification and being unaccustomed to reflection would be unable to vindicate his or her beliefs, they reply that all SMP requires is that someone—perhaps an epistemologist or an omniscient being—be able to do this, if not the subject. This reply doesn't seem wholly plausible to me, but I will not press this worry further since there is a more fundamental objection to their position.

More troublesome is the worry that since the metaregress doesn't need to be generated in the first place, it doesn't matter if the epistemic status of one's beliefs is invidicable in their sense. Let's suppose that McGrew and McGrew are right that reliabilism will generate a metaregress if one asks whether one is justified in believing the conclusion of the track record argument. But why would one ask that question in the first place? To their credit, they don't argue that one *needs* to ask it, as a matter of meeting the conditions for being justified in believing that X is reliable. That would be to uncharitably foist upon the reliabilist the contradictory position that, roughly, a belief is noninferentially justified only if it isn't (since its justification would depend on the existence of further reasons). Alston provides a typical externalist rejoinder:

[W]hat my *being* justified in believing that *p* depends on is the existence of a valid epistemic principle that applies to my belief that *p*. So long as there *is* such a principle, that belief is justified whether I know anything about the principle or not and whether or not I am justified in supposing that there is such a principle. (1980, p. 170)

The point is simple: as a matter of logical necessity, if a belief *P* satisfies the antecedent of a true epistemic principle whose consequent describes the belief's being justified, it is justified. Even if the meta-level claim about the epistemic status of *P* is open to rational doubt, due to that status depending on the satisfaction of a contingent empirical proposition, that will not prevent *P* itself from being justified, if it is. For the externalist's epistemic principles do not require one to be able to answer meta-level questions about the belief's formation.

The McGrews try to convince their reader to adopt some sort of higher-level requirement that only internalists will be able to satisfy. Externalists can deny SMP for reasons just given. In their book, the McGrews explicitly state that they will not be arguing for the truth of SMP but for a different principle also inconsistent with permitting epistemic source circularity:<sup>81</sup>

SMP': For any term *E* intended to indicate positive epistemic status, for any putative epistemic principle *PR* stating sufficient conditions for *E*, and for any belief *p*, if it is possible that *p* has *E* solely in virtue of its satisfying the antecedent of *PR*, while it is not in principle possible to show decisively that the satisfaction of the antecedent of *PR* is indeed sufficient for *E*, then *PR* is not in fact an epistemic principle and *E* does not in fact denote a type of positive epistemic status.

The main difference between this principle and SMP is that the former also requires that the truth of one's epistemic principle(s) be vindicable. The McGrews argue that even externalists will want to adopt SMP', for without it they will lack a principled basis for doing something they think they can do, viz. rejecting seemingly absurd epistemic principles like:

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<sup>81</sup> See footnote 15 of the chapter "What's Wrong With Epistemic Circularity" of their (2007). I suspect they decline to argue for SMP because they recognize the cogency of Alston's reply quoted above.

FP: If S believes that *p* because *p* has been expressed to S by someone who wears mismatched socks, then S is justified in believing that *p*. (2007, p. 81)

Why not? Their defense begins by pointing out that one could defend the truth of FP using an epistemic source circular track record argument. The same goes for any other epistemic principle the externalist relying on contingent facts about the environment might advocate. If one continued to object to FP, the proponent could respond: but what *different* type of reason do you have available to defend your own epistemic principles? Of course, the objector could respond in the way similar to Sosa: “The difference between us is that my epistemic principle is true and yours isn’t. And I don’t just believe that’s true, I *know* it is.” The proponent of FP might reply by pointing out that the source of that supposed knowledge is an epistemic principle he himself knows is false, *if* his principle is true. Stepping back one might worry that this debate is going to go on forever, neither party being able to convince the other. The McGrews would make just this assessment, accounting for it on the grounds that both parties have adopted epistemic principles that are invincible. But they would go even further: *in principle*, neither party could convince the other (or, to boot, themselves) in a way that removes rational doubt. A version of this claim may be what Alston had in mind when he rejected epistemic source circularity on the grounds that its use doesn’t give one a way to “discriminate” between true and false epistemic principles. Notably, the concept of discrimination he employs is an irreducibly internalist notion.<sup>82</sup> For the crucial concept of discrimination that Alston appeals to is something that cannot be provided by having an externalist-style apparently noninferentially justified belief that one’s epistemic principle is true (even if it is). For anyone can seem to have that, as evidenced by the defense given for FP.

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<sup>82</sup> Fumerton makes this point in his (1995, p. 179). I will argue for a similar point when I discuss Alston specifically in chapter four.

The McGrews argue that SMP' is true and that this is inconsistent with the claim that epistemic source circular arguments are sometimes permissible in the sense assumed in this chapter. Why do they believe that SMP' is true? They argue for it on the grounds that the concept *invincible epistemic principle* is incoherent. Their argument is worth quoting at length:

For on [the assumption that epistemic principles can be invincible] one can have an epistemic principle that is absolutely worthless, epistemically—incapable of doing any epistemic *work* in the way of showing that some beliefs, as opposed to others, really do have positive epistemic status. Yet it is obvious conceptually that the *raison d'être* of an epistemic principle is to tell us unequivocally (rather than only conditionally) that some types of beliefs do have positive epistemic status. [...] An invincible epistemic principle cannot do the job that, by definition, an epistemic principle does. (2007, p. 82)

The incoherence claim is false. An epistemic principle can be true even if its truth is rationally dubitable. There are several problems with the above quotation, though they all rely on failing to distinguish between the *truth* of an epistemic principle and the epistemic status of one's *belief* that the principle is true. First, the McGrews are right that epistemic principles “tell” us something, viz. that beliefs satisfying its antecedent are justified. But that is all they do. Nothing in the statement of an epistemic principle includes the claim that some beliefs satisfy its antecedent; it “shows” us nothing beyond that. What it does include is exactly the unconditional *conditional* claim just mentioned. If the principle is externalist, it may be that the positive epistemic status of one's *belief* that the epistemic principle is true is conditional on the subject's halting the metaregress. But the truth of the principle and the nature of one's beliefs about it are clearly distinct. Second, that there is logical space for skeptical foundationalism shows that epistemic principles can be invincible. A radically skeptical foundationalist believes that some foundationalist epistemic principle is true, but denies that any beliefs satisfy the antecedent. In particular, the belief that the principle is true doesn't satisfy the antecedent, so the principle is invincible. The position may be uncommon, but it is not

incoherent. Finally, there are plausible counterexamples to their claim that invidicable epistemic principles are “useless”. Suppose that one forms a belief that satisfies the antecedent of a true epistemic principle that is invidicable. Surely that this belief is justified shows that the principle is good for something? I conclude that the McGrews have failed to provide the internalist grounds to avoid permitting epistemic source circularity.

Despite my negative assessment of their argument against epistemic source circularity, I would like to briefly waive that objection and ask whether the McGrews *themselves* can avoid permitting epistemic source circularity, even if some metaepistemologies cannot. My assessment will be that they cannot, for the same reason Fumerton cannot.

The McGrews argue that their epistemic principles are analytic, non-trivial necessary truths knowable *a priori*. Moreover, they argue that one can know such principles to be true in a way that stops the metaregress. Whether beliefs formed in that way are justified does not depend on whether a contingent empirical fact obtains. The only information that does exist at the meta-level is such that one *can* know it in a way that precludes rational doubt. For example, they’d argue for the truth of something along the lines of

AP: If one has an *a priori* intuition that P, one is justified in believing that P.

The type of justification they have in mind is noninferential. They consider the objection that even the satisfaction of the antecedent of this principle is open to rational doubt, since one may be in a state that is not an *a priori* intuition but is phenomenologically indistinguishable from one that is.<sup>83</sup> In brief, they deny that one can come up with a phenomenologically indistinguishable counterpart to an *a priori* intuition where the belief is false.

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<sup>83</sup> The objection comes from Plantinga (1993).

How do the McGrews supposedly know that AP is true? Their position is that one can have an *a priori* intuition of AP that provides one with infallible and indubitable justification. Having this intuition enables one to block the metaregress, since “genuine *a priori* grasping is a unique form of epistemic experience that grants not only assurance of the truth of the proposition in question *but also of one’s own indubitable justification in accepting it*” (2007, p. 106, my italics). On this account, having genuine noninferential justification to believe P entails that one has justification to believe that the source of that justification is legitimate.

For the same reasons given in reply to Fumerton’s view, the McGrews are probably unable to avoid permitting epistemic source circularity. Even if one acquires infallible, indubitable noninferential justification to believe that *a priori* intuition is legitimate upon using it even once, one could fail to base one’s belief on that justification, opting to base it *for the first time* on the propositional justification provided by a track record argument. I include the “probably” qualifier only because I do not know if McGrew and McGrew would argue that necessarily, having that meta-level justification to believe *a priori* intuition is legitimate entails that one actually bases the belief that it *is* legitimate on that justification. My best guess, nevertheless, is that they would deny this, only because in doing so they’d be committed to a subject’s having an infinite number of beliefs, all of which were entailed by—but weren’t part of what constituted—the having of a justified belief at the level directly beneath it. But even if they did accept this that would show only that they are able to avoid using epistemic source circular inferences. They would still lack grounds to avoid permitting it in principle.

### 3.6 Shared Metaepistemological Commitments

So far in this chapter I have argued that neither externalists nor internalists have the resources to avoid permitting epistemic source circularity. In virtue of what has this

been the case? In the next section I will highlight the metaepistemological commitments shared by internalists and externalists, leaving open the possibility that the only views that can avoid permitting epistemic source circularity either contain significant elements of both or are versions of skepticism. The purpose of this section is to move beyond specific externalist and internalist views in order to determine whether *any* version of either can avoid permitting epistemic source circularity in a non-arbitrary or *ad hoc* manner.<sup>84</sup>

### 3.6.1 Noninferential Justification

The externalists discussed above argue that a commitment to foundationalism requires one to permit at least some instances of epistemic source circularity. Since many internalists also adopt foundationalism, perhaps they too ought to permit it. Indeed, I've argued that even placing strict internalists requirements on what can *be* noninferentially justified won't keep one from having to permit epistemic source circularity in some cases. Permitting epistemic source circularity seems to be a symptom of adopting a certain sort of view about noninferential justification, viz. that some beliefs can have it. The idea is that if the premises of a track record argument really are noninferentially justified, that justification can potentially transfer to almost anything, including the claim that the very source of those beliefs is legitimate. Given the noninferential nature of the justification, track record arguments avoid the obviously vicious antecedent-justification circularity that occurs whenever one explicitly presupposes that one is *justified* in believing the conclusion of the argument in the course of adducing premises for it. The reader may refer back to the first chapter for an in-depth explanation of this crucial difference between these two types of circularity.

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<sup>84</sup> The requirement is designed to rule out views that reject epistemic source circularity solely on the grounds of asserting an otherwise unmotivated "No epistemic source circularity!" principle.

I also argued that internalist foundationalists are unable to avoid permitting epistemic source circularity, even if they think that they have propositional justification for believing that the relevant source is legitimate before inferring it from the premises. The reason is that one may base one's belief on something else, viz. the justification provided by the argument itself. That the argument could do so depends essentially on the premises formed by the relevant source being noninferentially justified. Hence it is in virtue of their foundationalism that internalists cannot avoid permitting epistemic source circularity either.

### 3.7 Conclusion

If the arguments of this chapter are sound, neither internalist nor externalist foundationalists can avoid permitting epistemic source circularity. The final chapter of the dissertation will ask whether such circularity is always vicious. Answering this question in the negative will be crucial if one desires to avoid a fairly extreme version of skepticism. In this final subsection I seek to draw out some implications of the dissertation thus far in a way that foreshadows the issues to be discussed in the final chapter.

A remaining reason to suspect that epistemic source circularity should not be permitted after all comes from the fact that certain instances of it still seem to be obviously bad. For instance, consider the person who uses the deliverances of tealeaves to generate a track record argument for the legitimacy of tealeaf reading. Surely, some would claim, one is *not* justified in believing the conclusion of that inference on the basis of the premises. In keeping with the issues discussed in this chapter, one might diagnose the apparent problem with the argument by claiming that one can justifiably rely on the leaves' deliverances only if one already justifiably believed that tealeaves are a legitimate source. In other words, something like JR is true of that source. Such arguments would be best seen as enthymematic. Not only would the proposition about the legitimacy of



tealeaves need to be justifiably believed before one could be justified in accepting its deliverances, that proposition would need to be included as a premise of the argument as well. If so, it would follow that the tealeaves do not constitute a source capable of producing noninferentially justified beliefs. In addition, the expanded argument would exhibit clearly vicious antecedent-justification circularity. This would explain why some epistemic source circular arguments seem bad.

No matter how tempting it is to accept JR in cases like this, I've argued that foundationalists cannot accept JR as a general principle. In the cases where they will permit the premises of an epistemic source circular inference to justify the conclusion, those premises must be noninferentially justified if the inference is to avoid the problem described in the previous paragraph. The foundationalist, then, must determine the scope of JR. In the next chapter I will develop an internalist account of source legitimacy that will facilitate such determinations.<sup>85</sup> Minimally, in keeping with the objections to reliabilism discussed in chapter two, the account makes a source's production of mostly true beliefs neither necessary nor sufficient for its being legitimate.

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<sup>85</sup> Vogel (2008) notes that it is open to internalists to adopt a version of JR (he prefers a version applicable to knowledge) that applies to some but not all sources. He does not specify how one determines the principle's scope.

## CHAPTER 4

### IS EPISTEMIC SOURCE CIRCULARITY VICIOUS?

#### 4.1 Introduction

An inference exhibits epistemic source circularity when at least one of the premises is formed by a source the conclusion says is legitimate. This chapter is concerned with determining whether beliefs formed on the basis of such an inference can be doxastically justified. This issue must be distinguished from whether the premises of an epistemic source circular argument can provide propositional justification to believe the conclusion. Recall that inferences are distinguished from arguments insofar as the former exists only if one actually believes the conclusion on the basis of the premises. One can consider an argument even if one has no intention to use it to get a justified belief. One can also ask whether the premises of an argument provide justification to believe the conclusion without trying to obtain a justified belief in the conclusion by basing it on the premises. This pair of distinctions is important insofar as I argued in chapter three that if foundationalism is true, the premises of some epistemic source circular arguments can provide justification to believe the conclusion. I have not argued for or against foundationalism. Precisely because having justification for a proposition is not sufficient for having a justified belief in that proposition, a possible position asserts that any attempt to gain a justified belief in the conclusion of an epistemic source circular argument on the basis of the premises will fail. According to such a position, any justification for believing the conclusion on the basis of the premises will be defeated.

#### 4.2 Rejected Reasons for Thinking that Epistemic Source

##### Circularity is Vicious

Before considering a new reason to think such justification will be defeated, I'd like to briefly review a reason previously considered and rejected as well as a modification that I claim is also unsuccessful. Both are consistent with the

foundationalist's implicit permission that the premises of an epistemic source circular argument can, in the absence of defeaters, provide propositional justification to believe the conclusion. It is worth reminding the reader that, for this reason, foundationalists shouldn't appeal to something like Vogel's (2008) proposal "No Bootstrapping!" as a general way of defeating the justification the premises of an epistemic source circular argument apparently provide for the conclusion. At the very least, the foundationalist would need an account of *why* that claim is true. Without such an account the claim seems miserably *ad hoc*. The proposals that follow can be seen as ways of making explicit the apparent problem with epistemic source circularity.

First, consider the worry addressed in chapter one:

Indiscrimination: one can justify the legitimacy of any source using an epistemic source circular inference.<sup>86</sup>

By restricting itself to belief sources, this claim is narrower than a similar one made against antecedent-justification circular inferences, viz. that if they are permitted one can justify any proposition whatsoever. The claim asserts that the *inference type*, viz. epistemic source circular inference, is indiscriminate with respect to which sources can use it to justify their legitimacy. Indiscrimination is rejected on the grounds that "justify" is being used here as a success term, and illegitimate sources will be unable to produce justified premises that can serve as a basis for justifiably inferring the legitimacy of that source. Thus Indiscrimination is false and so cannot serve as a general explanation as to why epistemic source circular inferences are vicious. A related but importantly distinct claim, which will be discussed below, is that since the legitimacy of any source can be argued for in an epistemic source circular manner, *we* will be unable to discriminate which sources are legitimate if the only evidence available is an epistemic source circular

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<sup>86</sup> See Moser (1993), Boghossian (2000), and Schmitt (2004) for discussion.

inference.<sup>87</sup>

Second, one might reject Indiscrimination on the above grounds but offer a principle restricted to legitimate sources:

No-Lose: an epistemic source circular inference cannot fail to justify its conclusion.

The worry gains traction upon considering the structure such an inference typically takes, a structure produced by following the rule: “If source B produces the belief that P, believe P”.<sup>88</sup> One uses a source A to produce the premise that a source B produced the belief that P and then one uses B to produce the next premise that P. From these premises one can infer that on that occasion B produced a true belief. The claim is that by repeatedly following *this* rule one cannot fail to produce a positive track record argument for the legitimacy of B. Cohen puts it this way: “But if I can know, before carrying out the test that it will justify me in believing that my color vision worked correctly, then surely carrying out the test and becoming so justified cannot confirm the reliability of my color vision” (2011, p. 143). The idea is that arguments that cannot produce a negative result, i.e. that the source is illegitimate, cannot give positive results—even when, taken at face value, the premises do seem to provide adequate inductive support for the conclusion. (Titelbaum, 2010) Epistemic source circular inferences seem to be no-lose in this sense. Moreover, proponents of No-Lose suggest that a true epistemology will not permit such procedures to justify their conclusions all things considered.

There are counterexamples to No-Lose. The common feature of each case is that the source is self-undermining, providing evidence for its own illegitimacy. Consider a

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<sup>87</sup> This is a version of a worry found in Alston (1993) that such inferences do not give us grounds for distinguishing legitimate from illegitimate sources.

<sup>88</sup> See Cohen (2011). He uses the more specific rule, “If x looks f, infer that x is f”.

person whose memory is failing that tries to generate a track record for the legitimacy of her memory:

1. I seem to remember seeming to remember that P. [Memory]
2. I seem to remember that not-P. [Memory]
- ∴ 3. Not-P. [Memory]
- ∴ 4. On one occasion memory produced a false belief.
- [Repeat]
5. Memory produces mostly false beliefs.
- ∴ 6. Memory is legitimate.

The argument exhibits epistemic source circularity because the initial premises are produced using the source the conclusion says is legitimate. But in this case the premises fail to provide evidence for the conclusion's truth.<sup>89</sup> Hence, some epistemic source circular procedures are not No-Lose. It follows that No-Lose cannot provide a general explanation of the apparently vicious nature of epistemic source circularity.

The common feature of these rejected ways of explaining the vicious nature of epistemic source circularity is that they implicitly interpret "legitimate" as "reliable".<sup>90</sup> Since epistemic source circular track record arguments are designed to provide inductive support for the conclusion, premises offering a list of apparent past successes will seem

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<sup>89</sup> Similar examples are available: suppose one asks a Magic 8 Ball whether it is legitimate, usually tells the truth, produces justified beliefs etc. It is conceivable that the 8 Ball continually answers these questions in the negative, thus providing evidence against its own legitimacy. Interestingly, counterexamples can also be generated using the very sorts of sources and belief-forming rule Cohen discusses as paradigmatically No-Lose. Imagine a person who looks at a wall at t1 and forms the belief that the wall is red on the basis of the wall seeming to be red. The subject closes her eyes, and at t2 forms the belief that the wall is blue on the basis of the wall seeming to be blue. Suppose the color of the wall continually changes color in this way. Given plausible background assumptions, e.g. "walls don't normally change color", the premises of such an argument would be formed in Cohen's suggested fashion but would nonetheless provide evidence against the legitimacy of her vision.

<sup>90</sup> See chapter two for Goldman's explication of "reliability" that has been presupposed in the dissertation.

to support that conclusion. At the beginning of chapter three I noted an important difference between internalist and externalist treatments of bootstrapping and epistemic source circularity. Bootstrapping inferences use a track record to infer that a source is reliable, i.e. produces mostly true beliefs, whereas an epistemic source circular one infers that a source is legitimate. Given some externalist analyses of “legitimate” as “reliable”, apparently successful bootstrapping inferences can trivially be turned into apparently successful epistemic source circular inferences. Internalists who resist treating a source’s being reliable as either necessary or sufficient for its ability to produce justified beliefs cannot as easily infer that a source is legitimate from the fact that it produces mostly true beliefs.<sup>91</sup>

#### 4.3 Begging the Question as Grounds for Rejecting

##### Epistemic Source Circularity

In this chapter I will be concerned with identifying an internalist account of source legitimacy that has no conceptual connection with reliability. I suggested in chapter one that internalists and externalists may be focusing on complementary, rather than competing, epistemic concepts due to the differing perspectives they take when doing epistemology. Externalists typically ask questions from the third-person perspective whereas internalists often work from the first-person perspective. I will not argue further for the claim that these differing analyses are best construed as complementary, but in what follows I will defend my choice to identify an internalist conception of legitimacy on the grounds that I, in writing this dissertation, seek to answer such first-person questions as: “How do I figure out which of my beliefs are true or false?” or “Are any of my beliefs are justified?” or “What ought I to believe?”

In what follows I will be especially concerned with the view that epistemic source

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<sup>91</sup> As I indicated in that same section, internalists might have other less trivial, probabilistic ways of inferring a source’s legitimacy from its reliability.

circular arguments prevent one from attaining a justified belief in the conclusion on the basis of the premises when such arguments are question begging.<sup>92</sup> I will explain why not begging the question against oneself is best considered a first-person issue, perhaps most at home within an internalist approach to epistemology. I will consider two ways of understanding the nature of begging the question. According to the second way that I endorse, roughly, when someone objects to an argument on the grounds that it is question begging, there is something one does not accept which one must in order for one to justifiably believe the conclusion on the basis of the premises. Something along these lines seems to explain why many types of circular inferences are sometimes said to be question begging. Regarding epistemic source circular arguments in particular, if one must in some sense already assume or be convinced of the truth of the conclusion of an argument for one to accept its premises, anyone who does not already accept this won't be convinced of the conclusion. Often one will have formed no opinion whatever regarding the legitimacy of a source. Upon considering an epistemic source circular inference for its legitimacy, one might find oneself thinking, "Surely I cannot justifiably believe that this source is legitimate in this way". At the end of the previous chapter I suggested that foundationalists might adopt a less general version of JR, according to which some sources are such that one can be justified in believing its deliverances without first being justified in believing that it is legitimate. This might lead one to argue that the way to determine the scope of JR in practice is to identify those sources which are such that epistemic source circular inferences used to support their legitimacy are criticized for being question-begging. JR will be true for such sources.

#### 4.3.1 What is it to Beg the Question?

Philosophers often object to the arguments or positions of others on the grounds

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<sup>92</sup> Markie (2005) takes this position. See Cohen (2005) for discussion.

that they are question begging. Most of the time, however, they specify neither what the charge amounts to nor what follows for a question-begging position. Does begging the question show that one's position is false, unjustified, indefensible, or something else? Matters are complicated by the fact that theories attempting to analyze begging the question often focus on dissimilar aspects of an argument in making the assessment. Such attempts fall into two categories. Some diagnose begging the question as an epistemic fault, in terms of a failure to attain justification or knowledge. Others diagnose it as a dialectical fault, in terms of violating the rules of debate. The tendency among contemporary epistemologists is to assume that the problem, if any, raised by begging the question is dialectical in nature. Matters are complicated even further by the fact that some philosophers discussing begging the question do not distinguish between such arguments from those that are circular in some sense. For instance, Kent Williams (1988) calls an argument "viciously circular" in exactly those cases where it is said to "beg the question" and vice versa.

My concern with begging the question is not necessarily to uncover a plausible analysis of the concept that explains all attributions of begging the question in a unified way. I am concerned with determining the sense, if any, in which epistemic source circular arguments are question-begging. Thus, analyses that fail to explain epistemologists' intuitions about such arguments will be excluded from the discussion. It may turn out, as a result of this narrowed focus, that the charge of begging the question really reflects a distinct or perhaps more fundamental defect in this sort of argument.

#### 4.3.1.1 Epistemic Conceptions of Begging the Question

Epistemic conceptions claim that if one's argument begs the question, one fails to have propositional justification to believe the conclusion on the basis of the premises. Whether one's argument begs the question has nothing to do with the particular context in which it is given. One can determine whether an argument begs the question by



examining the justificatory structure of the premises to conclusion and vice versa. I will discuss two types: the first involves the claim that one's premises must be better known than one's conclusion; the second locates the problematic feature of begging the question in an inference's being unable to provide one with more reason to believe the conclusion than one already had.

Historically, one epistemic conception of begging the question revolves around the claim that one's premises must be better known than one's conclusion. (Aristotle, 1989) If that is false of one's argument, then it not only begs the question but also prevents one from justifiably believing the conclusion on the basis of the premises. It is admittedly initially unclear why the premises' being "better known than" the conclusion should be relevant to determining whether the argument is vicious. If this means only that one is more strongly justified in believing the premises than one is in believing the conclusion, the epistemic conception of begging the question seems unable to explain why question-begging arguments are vicious. First of all, this formulation is silent on whether the relevant items for comparison are the propositions listed as premises and conclusion (i) as they occur in this particular argument or (ii) for the person considering them in general.

To revisit an example discussed in chapter three, suppose one decides to determine whether it is true that "all bachelors are unmarried" on the basis of interviewing bachelors to see whether they are married or not. The premises would consist of propositions like "Jason is a bachelor and Jason is unmarried". If we interpret "better known than" as ranging over (ii) situations not limited to the argument currently under consideration, it would be plausible to think that one has stronger justification for believing the conclusion "all bachelors are unmarried" than one has for believing any premise to the effect that any particular interviewee is telling the truth. It seems that one could have very strong, perhaps infallible, justification for believing that "all bachelors are unmarried" just by considering the meanings of the component terms. So, interpreted

in this second way, the premises are not “better known than” the conclusion, but that fact doesn’t seem to render the argument vicious. But even if we take on the first interpretation of “better known than”, viz. (i) that the premises as they occur in this particular argument be better known than the conclusion, the proposal still seems unable to explain why the argument is vicious. Consider the argument just discussed. It seems that, if one interviewed a sufficiently large number of bachelors, the inductive justification the premises provide for the conclusion would make the conclusion more strongly justified than any particular premise considered on its own. Regarding any particular premise, one might have reason to believe that the interviewee was lying that makes one’s justification via testimony weaker than the justification enjoyed by the conclusion.

The foregoing suggests that a more subtle analysis of “the premises must be better known than the conclusion” is required if it is to provide even initially plausible grounds for thinking that question-begging arguments with that feature are vicious for that reason. Biro (1977) makes this claim more precise by arguing that we determine whether an argument begs the question by examining “the relative epistemic status of the propositions we assert” (p. 263). He defines the critical notion of a proposition being “more justifiable” than another as: “[A] proposition which forms part of an argument is more [justifiable] than the other propositions in that argument if it is [justifiable] *independently* of [being justified in believing] the others” (p.256).<sup>93</sup> This suggests an epistemic priority of premises to conclusion: justification for believing the premises of a non-question-begging argument should be available in the absence of any justification for believing the conclusion. If the premises cannot be justifiably believed independently of being justified in believing the conclusion, then the justification of the conclusion is epistemically prior to the justification of the premises. Biro claims that any argument

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<sup>93</sup> Biro’s discussion is carried out in terms of knowledge rather than justification.

that violates this requirement is not “epistemically serious”.<sup>94</sup> One would be inclined to classify a track record argument this way when one thinks it is properly considered enthymematic, fleshed out by adding the claim that the source is legitimate—which also occurs as the conclusion—as a premise from which one derives at least some of one’s grounds for being justified in believing any of its deliverances. The argument would thus be, all things considered, best characterized as one exhibiting antecedent-justification circularity.

Can the present epistemic conception explain why some epistemic source circular arguments are said to be question begging? As seen in chapter three, the premises of epistemic source circular arguments are typically said to be justified noninferentially if justified at all. From the definition of noninferential justification it follows that these premises are justifiable independently of any justification to believe any other proposition, including the conclusion. All that is required of the conclusion for the premises to be justified is that the former be true—it does *not* need to be justified. Thus, an epistemic source circular argument is *not* question begging in Biro’s sense.

That being said, other types of circular arguments might very well be question begging in this first epistemic sense. Indeed, as already hinted at above, the requirement that an argument be epistemically serious amounts to the claim that it does not exhibit what in chapter one I called antecedent-justification circularity. Circular arguments of that sort fail to be epistemically serious since, by definition, having justification to believe the premises requires already—in both a logical and temporal sense—having justification to believe the conclusion. In other words, one cannot have justification to believe the premises of such arguments independently of having justification to believe the conclusion. This confirms that the epistemic conception of begging the question diagnoses the issue in terms of the argument’s failure to articulate a structure one’s

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<sup>94</sup> He borrows this term from Butchvarov (1970).

justification for believing the conclusion on the basis of the premises could have. But the justification, if any, present in epistemic source circular arguments does not have this structure.

The second epistemic conception identifies arguments as question begging when it is impossible for one to use that argument to acquire more justification for believing the conclusion than one already had before considering the argument. Insofar as a central goal of arguing for a proposition is to gain reason to believe its truth, such arguments fail to meet that goal. Many of the types of circularity discussed in chapter one exhibit this epistemic variety of begging the question. Perhaps most obvious are those exhibiting simple logical circularity, which occurs iff the conclusion is identical or logically equivalent to at least one of the premises. So, for instance

1. P.

∴ 2. P.

seems such that one couldn't *increase* one's justification for believing P on this basis. Note that such an argument begs the question in the present sense even if the subject actually is justified in believing P and has no doubts about either it or the inference.<sup>95</sup> No matter the level of justification enjoyed by P, one not only would not, but could not, use this inference to increase one's justification for believing P. This argument exhibits additional types of circularity. Trivially, it also exhibits lexical circularity, which occurs iff the conclusion is equivalent to at least one of the premises given substitution of synonymous predicate expressions. Since P is synonymous with itself, the above inference exhibits lexical circularity.

It is less clear whether all arguments exhibiting antecedent-justification circularity beg the question according to the second epistemic conception. This type of circularity

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<sup>95</sup> The dialectical conception of begging the question, discussed below, trades on factors such as whether one doubts or otherwise doesn't accept any of the premises or the inference.

occurs iff a subject S is justified in believing the premise(s) only if S is already justified in believing the conclusion. Since this type of circularity requires one to be justified in believing the conclusion before one completes the inference, it is possible that the level of justification one has for believing that same proposition after completing the inference is no higher than it was initially. In such a case, one *would* not be able to use that inference to acquire additional justification for believing the conclusion. But to exhibit this type of question begging, it must also be the case that one *could* not increase one's justification for that proposition in this way. Consider this example from chapter one:

1. All men are mortal.
  2. Socrates is a man.
- ∴ 3. Socrates is mortal.

Suppose that S believes the first premise on the basis of completing a survey of men who died up to that point. If the survey did not include Socrates, the support for this premise could be inductively strong despite S's not having come to justifiably believe the conclusion in the process. But even if the survey did include Socrates, it is possible that S acquires additional justification to believe the conclusion on the basis of this argument. It is possible that the degree of justification one acquired for believing "Socrates is mortal" as part of the basis for believing the first premise is *less* than the degree of justification one has for it upon completing the inference. In such a case, one would be able to use this argument to acquire justification for believing the conclusion that one did not already have. Hence some but not all antecedent-justification circular arguments will be question begging according to the second epistemic conception.

Are epistemic source circular arguments question begging according to this second epistemic conception? No. An argument exhibits this type of circularity iff at least one of the premises is produced by a source the conclusion says is legitimate. All that is required of the conclusion is that it be true, thus enabling the premises produced by the source it specifies to be justified; it is not also required that one already be justified in

believing the conclusion to be justified in believing the premises. One can justifiably believe the proposition that occurs as the conclusion of an epistemic source circular argument for the *first* time upon inferring it from the premises, thus enabling one to trivially acquire more justification to believe it than one had before, viz. none.

Despite having rejected both epistemic conceptions of begging the question as a way of identifying what makes epistemic source circular arguments vicious, there is at least one lesson to be learned. Anyone who has read a fair bit of analytic philosophy should be familiar with the charge that a particular argument or inference is “circular”. Unfortunately, the import of this charge is often just as nebulous and imprecise, if not also as frequently encountered, as the charge that the argument or inference is “question-begging”. It is thus important to specify the different ways in which an argument or inference can be circular. Chapter one of the dissertation seeks to do just that. This subsection and the next can be seen as an attempt to do something similar for the concept “question-begging”. The result of this subsection can be glossed as follows: both epistemic conception of begging the question are unable to explain why epistemic source circular arguments are vicious, if they are. Uncovering these terminological interconnections (or lack thereof) is important for conceptual clarity and philosophical progress.

#### 4.3.1.2 The Dialectical Conception of Begging the Question

The dialectical conception claims that necessarily, an argument begs the question *against* someone. In contrast to the epistemic conception, one cannot tell if the argument begs the question just by examining the justificatory structure of the statements composing it. One must look to the actual doxastic attitudes of person(s) considering the argument, i.e. one’s believing, disbelieving, or withholding judgment regarding the premise(s) and conclusion. When an argument begs the question against someone, that

person won't secure a justified belief in the conclusion. In contrast to the epistemic conception, this one targets doxastic rather than propositional justification.<sup>96</sup>

Defenders of the dialectical conception seek to explain how different persons can be justified or unjustified in believing the conclusion of an argument by appealing to distinctive features of each person's doxastic attitudes towards the premise(s) and conclusion. I will discuss the common starting point theory but argue, in agreement with Walton (2006), that this is best considered as way of filling in the more general claim that begging the question against a person involves a failure of the argument to fulfill its "probative function" for that person. In other words, the common starting point theory can be seen as providing a framework that specifies *how* the argument comes to lack probative function for a person. In brief, the probative function of an argument has to do with the "forward movement whereby the premises are used to prove the conclusion" (Walton, 1991, p. 293). Thus, if the argument fails to fulfill its probative function for a person, that person fails to justifiably believe the conclusion on the basis of the premises.

According to the common starting point theory, the presenter of an argument and the respondent assess it with a set of background assumptions. These assumptions may be either explicit or implicit. When they share the same relevant assumptions, they have a common starting point. An argument begs the question against the respondent when the presenter makes certain relevant assumptions that the respondent does not share. Several variations of the theory exist in the literature, depending on what the presenter assumes as part of his starting point. It may include claims about the truth or justification of the premises or conclusion, or about the legitimacy of the inference(s) from premise(s) to conclusion. By explaining begging the question in relatively broad, unspecific terms,

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<sup>96</sup> As I shall explain in greater detail below, proponents of the dialectical conception argue that an inference's begging the question against one implies that one has a defeater for whatever propositional justification the premises may provide for the conclusion; it doesn't imply that those premises are unable to provide propositional justification for the conclusion even in the absence of defeaters.

the common starting point theory is able to accommodate diverse statements of the issue. For instance, Sidgwick claims that “to beg a question is simply to slur over, in a dispute, any doubts which the opponent may be asking us to consider” (1910, p. 213). In effect, the presenter begs the question against the respondent by arguing in a way that presupposes that certain propositions aren’t in doubt or are otherwise true or justified, despite the fact that the respondent, perhaps by the very nature of his position, will not grant that for the sake of argument. According to Moser, one avoids begging the question if one will “not simply assume a point needing support in light of skeptical questions” (2000, p. 209). That the respondent genuinely questions the truth of some of the presenter’s assumptions shows that they do not share a common starting point.

It is important to distinguish between genuine dialectical challenges or questions and those where the respondent prefaces her remarks with something along the lines of, “I don’t really believe this, but....” The respondent might simply be enquiring into *why* the presenter believes what he does, without actually doubting the belief in question. In addition, the respondent might simply be curious as to what the presenter would say in response to a particular objection, without actually advocating it. This distinction is especially important when one is being reflective and inquiring into one’s own reasons for one’s beliefs. Parallel remarks apply to this special case as to cases of apparent peer disagreement just mentioned. While I am not here concerned with specifying necessary and sufficient conditions for a challenge’s being genuine, the following seems true: the failure to respond adequately—if at all—to a challenge need not imply that the presenter’s belief is unjustified.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, one might fail to flesh out the details of one’s reasons to oneself precisely because one knows that the answer one would give

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<sup>97</sup> Circumstances where the questioned or challenged belief would be justified noninferentially in this particular situation, if justified at all, are an important case given the discussion of foundationalism throughout the dissertation. One might refuse to give backing reasons for one’s belief but deny that this implies that it isn’t justified.



would rely on, for example, a source one already accepts as legitimate. Even though further questions could be raised, in principle, the answer one would give would be the same.

A key consequence of the dialectical conception is that the same argument can beg the question against one respondent but not against another. Consider this example:

1. The Bible is infallible.
  2. The Bible says that God exists.
- ∴ 3. God exists.

In the first scenario I'll consider, the presenter and respondent share a common starting point that includes the proposition that God exists. The argument does not beg the question against the respondent. Let's assume that the respondent has never considered her grounds, if any, for believing that God exists, so that her belief in the conclusion becomes justified for the first time. In effect, the argument is presented to the respondent to explain how she can support her belief in the conclusion based on propositions she already believes. In a second scenario, the respondent is an atheist. The respondent rejects the first premise because it assumes the truth of a proposition, viz. that God exists, not included in his starting point. Let's stipulate that the respondent believes the second premise. Furthermore, the lack of a common starting point gives the respondent reason to doubt that the second premise alone supports the conclusion. Thus the respondent in the second scenario fails to justifiably believe the conclusion on the basis of the premises because he doesn't believe the conclusion at all. This is explained on this account by the fact that he lacks a common starting point with the presenter.

Can the common starting point theory explain why epistemic source circular arguments have been charged with begging the question? It can. Consider the following scenario: B doubts whether sense perception is legitimate while A does not.<sup>98</sup> A presents

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<sup>98</sup> This case can be also interpreted as one where B's doubt is only apparent; B may "just want to know" what A's reasons are. They may have a common starting point.

B with an argument using premises formed by sense perception to support the claim that sense perception is legitimate. B points out that the premises produced by sensory perception are justified only if sense perception is legitimate, i.e. only if the conclusion is true. Since B doubts whether sense perception is legitimate, he has a defeater that prevents him from having justification to believe the premises produced by sense perception. Lacking justification for the premises, B lacks justification to believe the conclusion on that basis. Thus A's argument does not convince B and so B does not believe the conclusion, justifiably or otherwise, claiming that it begs the question against him.

The common starting point theorist explains B's charge that the argument begs the question in terms of A and B lacking a common starting point. To have this, A and B must both assume that sense perception is legitimate. This assumption need not take the form of a belief, at least not initially. Since B doubts whether sense perception is legitimate while A does not, they lack a common starting point. It is in virtue of the differences of their respective starting points that A is convinced but B is not. Since A doesn't doubt that sense perception is legitimate, he is willing to accept the premises formed using it. Assuming that the premises are justified, A has justification to believe the conclusion. Thus the common starting point theory can explain why an epistemic source circular argument is labeled question begging in certain contexts. Furthermore, it explains the difference between presenter and respondent in terms of a dialectical, non-epistemic starting point. To determine whether an argument begs the question one must look at the actual background assumptions of the presenter and respondent.

The common starting point theory can explain how an epistemic source circular argument comes to beg the question against a respondent. As a result, such arguments fail to have what Walton calls "probative force" for the respondent. An argument has probative force for a person if the premises are accepted and the inference joining premises to conclusion is regarded as legitimate. When an argument begs the question

against someone, it is unable to fulfill its probative function for that person. As Alston describes it, question-begging epistemic source circular arguments “cannot rationally produce conviction” of the conclusion in someone who does not accept the conclusion “in any way”, i.e. in neither a doxastic or non-doxastic practical sense. (1986, p. 15)

If the dialectical conception of begging the question is correct, we can make sense of the common claims both that question-begging arguments are unable to convince skeptics and that this fact does not preclude non-skeptics from having justified beliefs. Skeptics can be viewed for present purposes as persons whose starting point lacks the assumptions required for a particular argument to have probative force for them. The range of propositions included in his or her starting point can thus be used to distinguish skeptics. The most extreme skeptics include nothing, or would include nothing upon reflection, thereby precluding themselves from having any justified beliefs. According to the common starting point theory, if the only thing preventing an argument from having probative force for a person is that something relevant is missing from his or her starting point, it is open to someone whose starting point does include it to justifiably believe the conclusion on the basis of the premises.

*Is* the dialectical conception of begging the question, based on the common starting theory, true? Note first of all that in the above discussion I confined myself to the question of whether the common starting point theory could explain *attributions* of begging the question in cases of epistemic source circularity.<sup>99</sup> To that end, I believe that the common starting point theory succeeds. Whether the theory really is true or not doesn't matter in this circumstance; I am concerned in this chapter with considering new reasons for thinking that epistemic source circularity is vicious, and the present theory can do just that.

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<sup>99</sup> Here I am ignoring the clearly distinct usage of “begs the question” similar in meaning to “raises the question” etc.

Up to this point I have provided a characterization of what it is for an argument or inference to beg the question. Of the two epistemic conceptions considered, the first—that an argument begs the question when it violates the requirement that the premises be better known than the conclusion—was rejected on the grounds that it could not explain why such arguments are vicious generally. The second epistemic conception—that an argument begs the question when one could not use it to increase one’s justification for believing the conclusion—succeeded in identifying a feature that makes some types of circularity vicious, but it was argued that epistemic source circular arguments cannot always be vicious for this reason. Finally, I considered a non-epistemic dialectical conception, according to which necessarily, an argument begs the question against someone due to their not sharing a relevant common starting point with the presenter.<sup>100</sup> I argued that this conception alone is able to explain why begging the question would make some epistemic source circular inferences vicious. In addition to these points, the above discussion serves to provide a background for thinking about the concept of begging the question in general.

#### 4.4 Can One Justify One’s Beliefs about the Legitimacy of All of One’s Belief Sources Without Epistemic Source Circularity?

In chapter three I was primarily concerned with whether any metaepistemologies are able to avoid permitting one to be justified in believing the conclusion of an epistemic source circular inference on the basis of the premises. The position I argued for is that any foundationalist position must permit it in some cases. I have not sought to determine

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<sup>100</sup> This characterization assumes that the argument does not beg the question against the presenter as well, as would be false in a situation where only atheists considered an argument that requires having the existence of God in one’s starting point.

whether foundationalism is true. The present chapter suspends judgment on whether foundationalism is true, and seeks to determine whether there are good reasons to believe that foundationalists are mistaken when they say that epistemic source circular arguments need not be vicious. I thus leave it open at this point whether epistemic source circularity is vicious or not. This being the case, it is worth determining whether one can avoid relying on epistemic source circular arguments to justify all one's beliefs. If it is vicious but one can justify all one's beliefs without the justification of any of them relying essentially on an epistemic source circular inference, then the viciousness of epistemic source circularity will be relatively inconsequential.

Whether the question of this subsection is answered in the affirmative or negative depends on two factors: first, which beliefs one has; second, how those beliefs can be justified. In order for epistemic source circularity to arise, one must believe that at least one of one's belief sources is legitimate. Otherwise, there will be no possibility of epistemic source circularity since it can only arise in connection with justifying beliefs about the legitimacy of one's sources. I will thus confine the present discussion to cases where one does believe that all one's sources of belief—or at least those that one is prepared on reflection to accept—are legitimate. Can such a person apparently justify all those beliefs without the alleged justification of any of them relying essentially on epistemic source circularity?

Bergmann (2006, ch. 7) argues that one can avoid relying on epistemic source circular inferences in apparently justifying the legitimacy of all one's belief sources. He begins by arguing that one doesn't need to rely on inference at all to become justified in such beliefs. All of one's beliefs about the legitimacy of one's belief sources could be produced noninferentially. The following attempt *would* run aground on epistemic source circularity: using a noninferential source A to believe that A is legitimate.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> I'm using "noninferential source" to pick out belief sources that produce beliefs noninferentially. It leaves open the possibility that these beliefs aren't actually justified.

Bergmann says that epistemic source circularity attaches to this belief in the sense that the belief used to justify the proposition that one's belief source A is legitimate—in this case, the very same proposition—is itself justified only if A is legitimate. The belief is justified only if it is true, and so is formed in an epistemic source circular fashion. The McGrews similarly distinguish between arguments and beliefs infected with epistemic source circularity. (2007, p. 67) To avoid this circular sort of noninferential support, Bergmann asks one to imagine the following scenario: S has exactly two sources of belief, X1 and X2. S uses X1 to form the belief “X2 is legitimate” and X2 to form the belief “X1 is legitimate”. Since neither belief concerns the legitimacy of the source that produced it, neither is formed in an epistemic source circular manner. If both X1 and X2 are legitimate, then one has (noninferentially) justified beliefs in the legitimacy of all one's belief sources without any of them relying essentially on epistemic source circularity.

If we individuate belief sources in the way Bergmann does, then the answer to the question of this subsection is “Yes”: one can apparently justify all of one's beliefs in the legitimacy of all of one's sources without epistemic source circularity. However, it isn't clear that we must individuate belief sources in the way Bergmann does. Given the Pyrrhonian's concern with the ability to justify beliefs in the legitimacy of *all* one's belief sources without epistemic source circularity, why not pack all one's belief sources into one? Alston does something similar when he chooses to determine whether one can justify belief in the legitimacy of sensory perception: instead of asking whether one can justify belief in the legitimacy of one's eyes, ears, nose, etc. separately, he asks about our ability to justify the legitimacy of relying on sensory perception generally. On this way of carving up sources, he is left with the apparently non-sensory source of *a priori* intuition as a potential means of justifying one's belief about the legitimacy of sensory

perception.<sup>102</sup> Perhaps one can be *a priori* justified in believing that sensory perception is legitimate. Or, as Reid suggests, we can use the faculty of “common sense” (2002, p. 433) as an independent means of verifying the legitimacy of sensory perception.

Even if these epistemologists are right that the legitimacy of sensory perception can be justifiably believed without epistemic source circularity, the Pyrrhonian will respond: you still haven’t justified the legitimacy of *all* your belief sources: what about *a priori* intuition or common sense? I propose that we avoid this problem by making the proper target of analysis all one’s belief sources, call it M. Can one apparently justify the legitimacy of M without epistemic source circularity? No. For any argument for the legitimacy of M would, by necessity, include premises produced by M. Even using M to noninferentially believe “M is legitimate” would be epistemic source circular. Thus, it is impossible to justify the belief that M is legitimate without epistemic source circularity.

One might object to my suggestion that the proper focus is on M. If one is asked to justify the legitimacy of all of one’s sources, it will be impossible for any supposed justification to be non-question-begging. This objection will be damaging only if one thinks that question begging precludes justification. I will return to this issue below.

#### 4.5 Can One Justify One’s Beliefs about the Legitimacy of All of One’s Belief Sources Without Begging The Question?

This subsection assumes the truth of the dialectical conception of begging the question. This assumption is made because it explains epistemologists’ claims about why epistemic source circular arguments are vicious in certain contexts and not others. According to that conception, an argument cannot beg the question unless there is a respondent that lacks the starting point of the presenter. One interesting question is

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<sup>102</sup> I leave the exact nature of *a priori* intuition open. Whatever it turns out to be, it is a source of belief in the sense relevant for present purposes.

whether there are any such persons. Answering this involves, minimally, determining whether one is a skeptic oneself.

Greco (2000, p. 22) argues that, even if question-begging arguments are vicious, that's inconsequential because there are no skeptics such that arguments for the legitimacy of M beg the question against them. No one, he thinks, actually suspends judgment on the legitimacy of M. While Greco's historical claim may be correct, the relevant issue seems to be whether someone *could* raise the global question of the legitimacy of M, even if he or she did not become explicitly skeptical in the process. Recall the distinction made above regarding genuine and "merely dialectical" challenges. Historically there haven't been at least three philosophers who were willing to ask such global questions: Descartes, Hume, and Sextus Empiricus. Descartes famously suspended judgment in the beginning of the *Meditations*, initially doubting the legitimacy of all his belief sources.<sup>103</sup> Sextus Empiricus similarly suspends judgment in *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. Finally, Hume adopts something like this sort of skepticism in the *Treatise of Human Nature*. Below I will consider the work of contemporary epistemologist Barry Stroud, whose work seeks, among other things, to identify a cognitive goal which is such that attaining it would require one to avoid begging the question of the legitimacy of any belief source, no matter how that is specified—including M. To avoid begging any such questions, one would need to effectively suspend judgment on the legitimacy of M at the beginning of inquiry. To the extent that one finds Stroud's goal worth pursuing, one will not be dissuaded by Greco's observation.

All that follows from the existence of global skeptics is that arguments for the legitimacy of M will beg the question against them. The dialectical conception leaves room for non-question begging epistemic source circular arguments of the legitimacy of

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<sup>103</sup> See Newman & Nelson (1999) for a defense of the claim that Descartes was concerned in the *Meditations* with responding to the Pyrrhonian skeptic.



M when the respondent and presenter have a common starting point.

#### 4.6 Internalist Source-Legitimacy and Begging the

##### Question

Many non-skeptical epistemologists seem to wield the dialectical conception of begging the question in their favor when they claim that, “one doesn’t need to refute or successfully respond to the skeptic in order to have justified beliefs.” Even if it is true that one does not need to successfully respond to skeptical challenges to have justified beliefs, in virtue of providing non-question begging reasons, it does not immediately follow that one can easily attain justified beliefs. One might, in the course of inquiry, realize that one is a skeptic oneself. Or, if one isn’t actually a skeptic, one might realize that one is still willing to question one’s most basic presuppositions. Thus “convincing the skeptic” might require “convincing oneself”.<sup>104</sup> I suspect that even non-skeptics at least implicitly accept this latter requirement, although they would probably not describe it in the present terms. After all, many people are skeptical of at least some things. With respect to those things, one is not convinced of their positive epistemic status. Similarly, those domains that one is not skeptical of are such that one *is* convinced of those propositions’ positive epistemic status. I will presently consider how one might go about determining the scope of one’s skepticism.

As I already hinted at above, an internalist conception of source-legitimacy rejects the view that producing mostly true beliefs is either necessary or sufficient for being legitimate. Since legitimate sources are ones that can produce justified beliefs, it follows from the internalist conception that a belief’s being likely to be true (in a frequency sense) is neither necessary nor sufficient for it to be justified. This dovetails nicely with

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<sup>104</sup> Foley (1992) suggests that one reach a place where one is immune from self-criticism. In particular, when one is convinced by the deliverances of a source one would be immune from the self-criticism that one has begged the question in accepting those deliverances.

the internalist objections discussed in chapter two against Goldman's analysis of justified belief in terms of reliability. According to those objections, a belief's being produced by a reliable source is neither necessary nor sufficient for its being justified.

I propose that an internalist conception of legitimacy explains how epistemologists begin theorizing about the criteria for justified belief. The remainder of this subsection provides an overview of the conception. I will return to it in the final subsection of the chapter when I discuss the problem of the criterion as it relates to begging the question. For starters, in this chapter I've been considering the position that, if one is a foundationalist, one will judge an epistemic source circular argument vicious in exactly those circumstances where one claims the presenter to have begged the question in relying on or using the premises produced by the source the conclusion says is legitimate. On the other hand, in those cases where one examines such an argument and does *not* find it problematic, this fact is at least partially explained by the fact that the person considering (or giving) the argument doesn't take it to be question begging against him or her. In other words, one finds nothing problematic with the background assumptions required to accept the premise(s) or the inference to the conclusion.

An important difference between the internalist account of the vicious nature of such arguments and the rejected accounts Indiscrimination and No-Lose is that the former identifies the viciousness not in the production of the premises as such, but in the mind of the person considering the argument. In rejecting the latter accounts I pointed to the fact that the foundationalist cannot explain what goes wrong with such arguments in general. My suggestion here is that a better strategy is to look at doxastic attitudes—or lack thereof—of the person considering it. According to the internalist conception of source-legitimacy, an epistemic source circular argument is vicious if it begs the question against one. If it doesn't, then one at least implicitly accepts the source as legitimate and is prepared to accept its deliverances. Such a person will be willing, for example, to use those deliverances as a basis for making further inferences.

#### 4.7 An Objection to the Internalist Conception of Source- Legitimacy

In this subsection I will consider an objection to the internalist conception of source-legitimacy that is related to an objection Moser (1993) has made against views that permit question-begging grounds. Briefly, the objection is that the internalist conception of source-legitimacy allows sources to be legitimate that intuitively strike many of us as obviously illegitimate. Imagine a person who sincerely believes on the basis of reading tea leaves that reading tea leaves is a legitimate source. This person is assured of the truth of beliefs based on the leaves in the same way and to the same extent that others might feel assured about the deliverances of introspection, memory, etc. But surely, goes the present objection, the tea leaf reader is mistaken in believing that the tea leaves constitute a legitimate source. It doesn't matter if the tea leaf reader doesn't object to epistemic source circular arguments for the legitimacy of tea leaves on the basis of its begging the question against himself or herself if the rest of us are *right* to reject the argument as vicious. In other words, we should not accept the portion of the presenter's starting point that includes tea leaves being legitimate. Thus the internalist conception of legitimacy, which implies that the tea leaf reader is not at fault and that tea leaves are a legitimate source, is false.

##### 4.7.1 Moser

Moser's dialectical conception of question begging squares with the common starting point theory discussed above, and requires that to beg the question one assume the truth of a proposition under dispute in the course of justifying it. (2004, p. 136) It follows from the definition of epistemic source circularity that, necessarily, such an argument given in the context of a dispute over the truth of the conclusion will be question begging. Such an argument concludes that a belief source is legitimate, and the

justification of the premises requires that one assume—in a pragmatic, non-doxastic sense—that the conclusion is true.

I discussed a version of Moser’s argument against question begging in chapter one, and the following presentation will add little new material.<sup>105</sup> My evaluation of that argument will draw on the conclusions I’ve argued for in earlier chapters. He says

Philosophers, among others, usually seek non-questionbegging supporting evidence for a simple reason: Questionbegging evidence fosters arbitrariness, in that it is easy to produce for *any* claim under dispute. If questionbegging evidence is permissible in a dispute, all participants will enjoy support from permissible evidence for their claims: They need only support their disputed claims *with the disputed claims themselves*. (1993, pp. 4-5)

In this passage Moser focuses on the sort of question begging found in arguments exhibiting antecedent-justification circularity. As he describes it, however, begging the question is not limited to cases where the content of the question-begging claim is identical to the conclusion. It also occurs when one implicitly non-doxastically presupposes the truth of the conclusion of an epistemic source circular track record argument in offering premises to support it.<sup>106</sup> In chapter one my response to this

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<sup>105</sup> That chapter was concerned only with different ways arguments and inferences can be circular, not with being question begging. I have already indicated the connection between epistemic source circular inferences and begging the question in the first paragraph of this subsection.

<sup>106</sup> The concept “non-doxastic presupposition” may strike one as unclear at best or even incoherent at worst. Often, a “presupposition” is construed as a type of doxastic state with propositional content, the latter being that which has been presupposed. I’ll briefly give some examples coming from works already discussed in earlier chapters. Alston (1986) refers to one’s practical acceptance of a source being made manifest in one’s relying on its deliverances either inferentially or noninferentially. Cruz and Pollock (1999) claim that justified beliefs are those held in accordance with correct epistemic norms, and that one internalizes these norms in the sense that one follows them without articulating them in any doxastic sense. When one believes in accordance with a norm one is doing something like manifesting a disposition to follow certain patterns, e.g. believing that S is P when one has an experience as of S being P. Sosa (2009) speaks of our having “habits” (p. 63) of forming beliefs in ways that would be sanctioned by the conclusions of epistemic source circular inferences. We can, of course, make our non-doxastic, practical, un-articulated or habitual presuppositions the object of critical scrutiny. In doing so, we may ask what reason one has for thinking that the norm or epistemic principle that would make beliefs formed in accordance with it justified. In other words, we can require that one make explicit what was previously left implicit. A central lesson of the foundationalist’s permission of epistemic source circularity is that, if foundationalism is true, these non-doxastic presuppositions

argument was limited to the observation that simply being question-begging is not sufficient for the relevant claim to be justified. I take it that no one wants to adopt an epistemic principle according to which it is *in virtue of* a claim's being offered in a question-begging manner that it is justified. In this sense being question begging does not by itself generate "permissible evidence". These remarks formed the basis for my above rejection of Indiscrimination as an account of the vicious nature of epistemic source circularity.

Given the discussion of foundationalism and epistemic source circularity in chapter three, a second line of response is available. If foundationalism is true, then beliefs satisfying the antecedent of a true epistemic principle are justified even if they would beg the question in a particular context. Noninferential justification is not necessarily non-question-begging justification. Moser is a foundationalist and will thus distinguish between beliefs that are noninferentially justified and those that are not. To sustain the charge that permitting begging the question fosters arbitrariness in a sense that is problematic, we need an account of a belief's being arbitrary that is consistent with its being noninferentially justified.

It will help to introduce a distinction Sosa (1994) makes between "formal externalism" and "formal internalism". According to the latter, "a belief can be justified and amount to knowledge only through the backing of reasons or arguments" (p. 264). In essence, all justification is inferential. Versions of internalism discussed in the second chapter that impose regress-generating access requirements provide the clearest examples of formal internalism.<sup>107</sup> The formal internalist requires that, in order to have a justified belief, one must have actually inferred it from another justified belief. Looking ahead a bit to the discussion of Alston, the formal internalist collapses the distinction between

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need not be made explicit (nor be explicitly defended) for beliefs formed by those sources to be justified.

<sup>107</sup> Infitism is also formally internalist. See Klein (1999), (2002), (2004), and (2005).

*being* justified and *justifying* a belief. The process of justifying a belief, according to the formal internalist, requires inferring it from another justified proposition, which is itself justified only if one has justified it to oneself in the same way, either *ad infinitum* or in a circle.<sup>108</sup> Formal externalism is the “denial of formal internalism” (Sosa, 1994, p. 266), holding that some beliefs can be justified without an inferential backing. Notice that in this sense even versions of internalist foundationalism, in virtue of being foundationalist, count as formally externalist. Now, the offering of an inferential backing is something that can only be done by a person. But if a belief can be justified without an inferential backing, it can be justified even if the person has never even considered whether it is produced by a legitimate source. Thus, one might see people going around claiming anything they please—including that they see no problem with inferences relying on the legitimacy of reading tea leaves. Such a person might have no familiarity with epistemology whatsoever, but this wouldn’t prevent their beliefs from being noninferentially justified *if* they are formed using a legitimate source. I think this helps illuminate Moser’s worry that question begging fosters arbitrariness: one could believe any proposition whatsoever, even an *arbitrarily* selected one, and one would be justified if the proper conditions were met. (1998, p. 73)<sup>109</sup> If one can have a justified belief simply by forming it in the right way, anyone could claim, if questioned, that his or her belief *was* formed in the right way, no matter its content. And that second-level belief about the legitimacy of the source of the first-level belief would itself be noninferentially

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<sup>108</sup> In his (1985) *BonJour* tried to convince the foundationalist, aka the formal externalist, that one could be *justified* in believing a proposition only if one succeeded in *justifying* that belief by inferring it from other beliefs. He correctly noted that adopting such a requirement involves giving up on the possibility of noninferentially justified belief. As a coherentist, BonJour was willing to countenance the possibility that the process of justifying went on indefinitely, but circled back on itself when a proposition used early in the justificatory process was repeated. Perhaps this is not all that surprising, since BonJour sought to defend a robust, nonfoundationalist version of internalism in that book.

<sup>109</sup> As we’ll see below, implicit reference to “proper” conditions might give one a reply to BonJour’s arbitrariness charge against foundationalists.

justified as well, so long as it too was formed in the right way. Again, Moser distinguishes between beliefs that are noninferentially justified and those that are not, so the objection to begging the question seems to be that it allows arbitrariness *in practice*.

This interpretation helps make sense of his further assertion that “We cannot simply beg [the] question, if we wish to make genuine philosophical progress” (Moser, 1993, p. 46). To return to my original example, if two people disagree about the legitimacy of reading tea leaves, no progress will be made if one person uses that very source in order to convince the other of its legitimacy. Moreover, if one has doubts or otherwise withholds belief on the legitimacy of a belief source, one cannot make any progress through considering an argument that assumes the legitimacy of that process. If making progress in philosophy involves philosophers coming to agree about the truth of propositions in a way that makes it “the received view” or that “lays the groundwork for further research” etc., such progress will not occur if philosophers are caught in a gridlock where no one is able to convince anyone else because everyone’s arguments beg the question against everyone else. This worry is not restricted to philosophical practice, of course. As truth-seekers generally, Moser seems to suggest that we ought to avoid begging the question.

I’ve argued that the arbitrariness attaching to question begging positions is best construed as arbitrariness in practice, not necessarily as a lack of justification. But what does practice have to do with metaepistemological theorizing? In particular, why does Moser think that the arbitrariness allowed by begging the question has *epistemological* consequences? He suggests that non-question-begging reasons are not forthcoming, given global skeptical questions about the legitimacy of *any* of our ways of forming beliefs. How is the unavoidability of begging the question in a particular context supposed to imply that we *epistemically* should “withhold judgment on the truth of” the questions begged? (1993, p. 41) Why should we withhold judgment, especially since he concedes that we might *be* justified in believing the proposition we relied on in a

question-begging manner? The answer lies in his claim that the problem is that we cannot “effectively discern” that our begged question is justified or true, even if it is. I think the only way to make sense of Moser’s remarks is to treat “effective” as “non-question begging”. In fact, this seems to be precisely what he says when he talks about our “*effectively* discerning (that is, discerning with non-questionbegging evidence)” that we are justified in believing things. (1993, p. 41) But now it is hard to find a reason available to Moser for moving from “you cannot avoid begging the question as to whether P” to “you should withhold judgment as to whether P”. In particular, Moser hasn’t adequately defended the move from “the tea leaf reader begs the question against the rest of us in relying on the deliverances of the tea leaves to argue that tea leaves are a legitimate source” to “the tea leaf reader is unjustified in believing that tea leaves are a legitimate source.”

One situation where that inference would seem plausible is if one is the person who is on the receiving end of a question begging argument. This is captured by the platitude that question-begging reasons for P cannot convince one who doubts P. What Moser does not defend is the claim that the person who gives the question-begging reason—the tea leaf reader for instance—should himself withhold judgment or claim to be unjustified in believing that tea leaves are legitimate. Such a person might agree that his belief is “arbitrary” in the sense of being justified without an inferential backing, but deny that this is a problem because the belief *is* noninferentially justified.<sup>110</sup> I conclude that it is not clear that he has formulated a cogent objection to the internalist conception of source-legitimacy. Below I’ll consider similar discussions by Alston and Stroud to see if this gap can be filled. In the process I shall seek to uncover exactly which

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<sup>110</sup> For discussion of the meaning of “arbitrariness” as it relates to noninferentially justified beliefs, see Klein (2004) and the responses of Bergmann (2004) and Howard-Snyder (2005).



metaepistemological view(s) one must accept to draw skeptical consequences from question-begging support.

#### 4.7.2 Alston

I am examining the objection to the internalist conception of source-legitimacy that it incorrectly implies that, for example, tea leaves can be a legitimate source of belief. Moser would point out that the tea leaf reader begs the question against the rest of us in relying on tea leaves; we do not accept the legitimacy of tea leaves. We can imagine, however, that the tea leaf reader makes the same claim about the rest of us: we beg the question against him in claiming that our preferred sources are legitimate. There is the temptation at this point to say something along the lines of “the difference between our sources and yours is that ours are legitimate and yours is not.” On what grounds could one make this claim to have discriminated legitimate from illegitimate sources? Seemingly, neither side can argue for the legitimacy of its preferred source without arguing in a question-begging epistemic source circular fashion.

William Alston has several publications that discuss epistemic source circularity and its effects on our cognition.<sup>111</sup> While he is generally sympathetic with the externalists discussed in chapter three regarding the apparently harmless nature of this sort of circularity, he has tried to make explicit exactly the way(s) in which it might leave us unable to achieve some of our deepest epistemic ambitions. In this subsection I will be primarily concerned with his comments on the latter issue. When possible, I will indicate how his position helps clarify Moser’s worries about begging the question.

Alston is in agreement with Moser that a belief can be justified for one even if one cannot justify it to someone else in a non-question-begging manner. This further confirms my claim that begging the question is best viewed along the lines of the

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<sup>111</sup> See his (1980), (1986), (1991), and (1993).

dialectical conception. In his (1986, p. 16) he claims that being justified is a *state* whereas justifying a belief is an *activity*; one can be in a state of having a justified belief even if one cannot actively justify that belief in a non-question-begging manner. Moreover, his view is in broad agreement with the thesis of chapter three, viz., that if one adopts foundationalism one will be unable to avoid permitting epistemic source circularity.<sup>112</sup> It does not matter if the belief one seeks to justify is a first-level claim about, e.g., one's environment or a second-level belief that one is justified in that belief about one's environment, or even the third-level claim about the legitimacy of the source of belief that produced the second-level belief. So long as the premises of the argument are justified and the inference is a good one, its conclusion will be justified when believed on the basis of those premises. Furthermore, if one is not satisfied with that conclusion's being justified on the basis of those premises, one is free to enquire into the higher-level claim *that the argument has justified its conclusion*. At this still further level up, the answer is the same: so long as the premises are justified and the inference is a good one, the conclusion will be justified and, in this case, this argument will have succeeded in *showing* that the argument one level lower has indeed justified its conclusion.<sup>113</sup> Hence, Alston denies that epistemic source circularity precludes the possibility of having justified beliefs at any level.

If this sort of circularity prevents neither the *having* of justified beliefs nor the possibility of *showing* that one's beliefs are justified, what epistemic goal does it prevent us from attaining? On this point Alston's view becomes less clear. He suggests that, "when we ask whether one or another source of belief is reliable, we are interested in *discriminating* those that can reasonably be trusted from those that cannot" (1993, p. 17).

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<sup>112</sup> Indeed, it would probably be accurate to say that the position defended in his (1986) influenced many of the epistemologists discussed in chapter three, rather than the other way around.

<sup>113</sup> Here, and in what follows, I follow Alston in using "show" in a factive sense.

His use of the term “discriminate” must have technical import if this quote is to be consistent with the claims of the previous paragraph. Before attempting to make precise the nature of discrimination, it is worth quoting the surrounding passage in which it occurs.

But even if I am right about [the optimistic claims made in my (1980)] and it is possible to establish the reliability of sense perception and other basic sources of belief by simple track record arguments, these arguments still do not satisfy the usual aspirations of those seeking to determine whether a basic doxastic practice like [sense perception] is reliable. The reason is this. What I pointed out in the previous paragraph is that *if sense perception is reliable*, a track record argument will suffice to show that it is. ...But even granting that point, the argument will not do its job unless we *are* justified in accepting its premises; and that is the case only if sense perception is in fact reliable. This is to offer a stone instead of bread. We can say the same of any belief forming practice, no matter how disreputable. ...Hence merely showing that *if* a given source is reliable it can be shown by its record to be reliable, does nothing to indicate that the source belongs with the sheep rather than the goats. ...Hence I shall disqualify [epistemic source] circular arguments on the grounds that they do not serve to discriminate between reliable and unreliable doxastic practices. (1993, p. 17)

Notice the similarity between the reason just given for epistemic source circularity’s leaving us dissatisfied and Moser’s claim that question begging is problematic because it leads to “arbitrariness”. Moser was worried that one could offer a question-begging argument for any proposition one chose, by using that very proposition as a premise. As such, Moser may have been more worried about antecedent-justification rather than epistemic source circularity. But the worry can easily be extended to the sort of circularity that is the focus of both Alston’s work and this dissertation. If a source is legitimate, it can produce justified premises that can be used to support the proposition that the source is legitimate.

The point remains, however, that not all sources of belief actually are legitimate, and so not all epistemic source circular inferences will have premises that justify their conclusions. The task for Alston is to explain how one can use an argument to “show” that a belief source is legitimate even though one cannot use it as a basis for

“discriminating” this source from the illegitimate ones. That this cannot be done using the resources of his (1993) can be demonstrated as follows. Suppose one has shown that a source is legitimate on the basis of a track record argument. Upon believing the conclusion on the basis of the premises, one can reason to oneself “I have shown that this source is legitimate; thus, it is legitimate; thus, I have discriminated that this source belongs with the sheep rather than the goats”. Nothing in Alston’s discussion suggests a reading of “discriminate” that is stronger than, or not entailed by, having a justified belief that one has shown a given source to be legitimate. So, just as I argued that Moser wasn’t able to explain why suspension of judgment at the next level is supposed to follow from begging the question one level lower, Alston also seems unable to explain why epistemic source circularity is supposed to leave us in a position of being unable to discriminate (surely a higher-level epistemic achievement) legitimate sources from illegitimate ones. In making this comparison I am assimilating the absence of suspension of judgment at the next level due to a non-question-begging justification at the lower level with having discriminated at the next level that one’s lower level belief is justified.

Despite the explanatory shortcomings of his more recent (1993) discussion just considered, I believe that Alston’s comments in the final sections of his earlier (1986) do identify a cognitive goal that epistemic source circularity precludes us from attaining. To his credit, he does not seek to attain this goal. Nonetheless, as I shall argue below, only by having something like it in mind will one have grounds for lamenting one’s inability to “discriminate” between legitimate and illegitimate belief sources.

To be bothered by epistemic source circularity, he claims one must seek “fully reflective justification” (1986, p. 20) (FRJ) for one’s beliefs. A belief is FRJ exactly when one has completed the process of justifying it. Upon completion, there are no epistemic loose ends; no questions about the justification of any reason employed are left unanswered. An important consequence of seeking FRJ, he claims, is that one must refuse to distinguish between being justified in believing P and justifying P. (1986, p. 24)

If one made the distinction, one could be content with stopping inquiry into the credentials of one's reasons when one identified a belief that one is justified in believing in the absence of having offered a justifying argument for it. By not seeking a further justifying argument, one stops reflecting on the matter. In collapsing the distinction between being justified in believing P and justifying P, one who seeks FRJ for P will never be able to complete the process of justifying P, i.e. one will be unable to (fully and reflectively) justify P. Hence, by one's equating justifying and being justified, no belief can be justified either. Any belief one uses to justify P (or the belief one uses to justify the belief that one uses to justify P, etc.) will be justified if it has the right epistemic credentials. One will always be able to ask whether the belief has those credentials.<sup>114</sup> If one doesn't bother to justify the claim that it has those credentials, then no belief located earlier in the inferential chain will be FRJ. It follows that no belief is FRJ unless one completes the process of justifying it. But that process will go on indefinitely. The viciousness of this infinite regress lies not in the fact that it is generated, but that one must *complete* it to attain FRJ. When one completes a process one stops, but a process that cannot by nature stop cannot be completed. Thus FRJ is impossible to attain.

Can we explain Alston's remarks about epistemic source circularity preventing us from "discriminating" legitimate from illegitimate sources in terms of our inability to attain FRJ for beliefs regarding the legitimacy of those sources? Yes, and for reasons independent of his observation that one cannot complete the requisite infinite chain of justifying reason giving. Suppose one wants to attain FRJ for one's belief that source X is legitimate. If X is what Alston calls a basic source, then it will be impossible to argue

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<sup>114</sup> Bonjour's (1985, pp. 30-33) arbitrariness argument against foundationalism can be seen as highlighting the fact that one can refuse to ask or answer such questions at whatever point one wants. The apparent problem with foundationalism is that it permits arbitrariness in the choice of the belief that one refuses to answer questions about its credentials. Of course, the foundationalist will respond to this by pointing out that when the belief's source is legitimate the absence of an answer to such a question won't preclude that belief from being justified.

for it without at least some of the premises being formed using X.<sup>115</sup> Now either X is a basic source or it is not. If it is, when one asks whether the premises of the argument for the legitimacy of X are justified, one will eventually need to appeal to the supposed legitimacy of X to explain why they are justified, viz. justified in virtue of their being produced by a supposedly legitimate source. But in so doing one has used as a premise the very proposition one sought to attain FRJ for. One will, sooner or later, be led into vicious antecedent-justification circularity. On the other hand, if X is not a basic source, then antecedent-justification circularity will arise in trying to justify whatever basic source Y one relied on in justifying the premises of the earlier argument. How long it takes to run into this problematic sort of circularity will depend in part on how many sources one has, as well as how long it takes one to reach a basic source in the process of critical reflection.<sup>116</sup> In terms of the block-quoted discussion of “discrimination” above, we can see that one seeking FRJ will refuse to rest content with the Alston’s claim that, “*if sense perception is reliable, a track record argument will suffice to show that it is*”. By refusing to inquire into the epistemic status of the antecedent, one ends the process of justifying claims and thereby lacks FRJ. So epistemic source circularity prevents us from discriminating *in a FRJ manner* between legitimate and illegitimate belief sources.

Given that FRJ is impossible to acquire, it is worth considering why one might want to attain it. Would attaining FRJ put us in a desirable place epistemologically? One might claim that having FRJ is sufficient for some desirable end, but for its

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<sup>115</sup> It is not clear whether Alston is right about this if Bergmann is right that one could use a basic source X to noninferentially produce the belief that basic source Y is legitimate and vice versa. That said, some basic sources do always seem in play, e.g. memory. Justifying any other source with a non-memory source will take time, and it isn’t clear that in so doing one has relied on memory.

<sup>116</sup> The argument assumes that there is no plausible way of carving up sources so that one has an infinite number of them. In principle, if one had an infinite number of beliefs, one could count sources in terms of “the source that produced this belief” in way that avoids this objection. That said, I will ignore this sort of response since I’ve already argued that one can plausibly ask about *all* one’s sources taken as a whole.

unattainability to be lamentable, it must also be necessary for achieving that end.<sup>117</sup> In the next subsection I consider whether Stroud's work provides motivation for desiring FRJ.

#### 4.7.3 Stroud

The discussion up to this point has touched on or hinted at issues surrounding epistemic source circularity, begging the question, and foundationalism. I have indicated at several points in this chapter thus far how those concepts are related. In this subsection I will examine the work of Barry Stroud. While the issues he discusses are familiar in the context of Moser and Alston's work, I find that Stroud speaks to certain details that will allow the tying up of several loose ends.

Stroud's focus is different from mine in two important respects. Like many of the philosophers I have discussed, he is concerned with the concept of knowledge rather than justification. Second, he is concerned with knowledge of an extra-mental world whereas my enquiry includes that plus absolutely everything else, e.g. that allegedly produced by introspection, memory or *a priori* intuition. Nonetheless, his aim is to uncover the "structure" of the situation we find ourselves in when we set for ourselves certain epistemic goals. As such what I say about his work will be extended to the more global, i.e. the most global, question of whether it is possible to have a philosophical understanding of justification of any sort.

Stroud makes explicit reference to neither epistemic source circularity nor begging the question.<sup>118</sup> Nonetheless, I will argue that he, like Alston, seeks to identify an epistemic goal that we will be unable to attain due to question-begging epistemic source circularity. The goal one will be unable to attain is a "general philosophical

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<sup>117</sup> See Amico (1995, p.133) for discussion.

<sup>118</sup> The following draws on his (1989) and (1994).

understanding of justification”. One seeks such an understanding when one asks “Is justified belief possible?” Implicit in that question is whether *any* justification is possible. For such a person, the questions of an external world skeptic are not skeptical enough. To such a person, a positive answer restricted to the most private of sensations will nonetheless be satisfactory.

Attaining a fully general understanding of whether, and if so how, one could have any justified beliefs imposes certain restrictions on permissible moves one can make in trying to attain that understanding. To have the fully general understanding is to see oneself as having a reason to accept a theory that would explain the positive justificatory status of one’s beliefs if it were true. (Stroud, 1989, p. 117) The explanandum is one’s entire set of allegedly justified beliefs, so a fully general understanding of that set requires appeal to an explanans outside that set. Stroud points out that the explanans must be “epistemically prior” to the explanandum in the sense that the former can be had independently of any member of the latter. For suppose that it was not. One would use some of one’s supposedly justified beliefs as a basis for explaining why the others are justified. But, in relying on that bit to do the explaining, one takes for granted that this piece *really is* justified. For if it weren’t, one wouldn’t be able to appeal to it to have a reason to believe that one had explained all one’s justification. As Stroud explains, one’s explanation cannot assume that one has some justified beliefs in a given domain if one seeks to understand how one has *any* justified beliefs in that domain. By making that assumption, one has assumed that one has some of what one wanted in the process of trying to see whether one really has any such thing. In so doing, one begs the question against one’s generality-seeking self.

Stroud is quick to point out that it is impossible to attain such an understanding. The requirement that one not assume one has some of what one wants to explain in the course of offering an explanation precludes one from having anything one could use as an explanans. Suppose one has identified justified belief(s) that seem to be able to explain



one's set of justified beliefs. The trouble is that these beliefs, being apparently justified, are by stipulation a part of the explanandum. If any of those beliefs actually are justified, they will be due to being produced by a legitimate source. In effect, attaining a philosophical understanding of one's justification in general requires that one use a source to produce an explanation of the legitimacy of all of one's sources that is not itself part of that set of sources. But by definition, any source one uses will be a part of the set to be explained, and so no source is available to furnish the desired explanation. Moser describes the impossible condition set by the non-question-begging requirement as demanding that "we stand somewhere while we are not allowed to stand anywhere. ...Necessarily, if all [sources] are under question, then *none* will be non-question-begging" (2004, p. 141).

When framed in this way, the alleged impossibility of meeting the non-question begging requirement seems almost too obvious to explain why philosophers have continually given attention to the issue.<sup>119</sup> Stroud seeks to explain our attraction to non-question-begging reasons by looking closely at the way an "externalist" would claim to gain such philosophical understanding. He uses "externalism" in Sosa's sense of formal externalism, the view that some beliefs can be justified in the absence of justifying reasons. Thus all the internalist foundationalists discussed in chapter three are externalists in this sense. Furthermore, Stroud himself adopts this sort of externalism. (1994, p. 299) He thinks that some beliefs can be noninferentially justified.

So suppose the externalist asks herself how it is possible for anyone, including herself, to have justified beliefs. She locates a legitimate belief source X that could give her justified beliefs that she could use to explain how it is possible for her and anyone else to have justified beliefs. She uses X to believe both that X is legitimate and that X

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<sup>119</sup> I add the qualifier "alleged" because below I will consider an objection to the effect that it is possible to get oneself into a position where one doesn't beg the question against oneself.

can explain how justified belief is possible. Since I've stipulated that *X* is legitimate, her beliefs are justified, including her belief that she has an explanation of how justification is possible. This is where the externalist aspect of her metaepistemology comes into play. She stops inquiring and feels confident that she has what she was looking for. At this very point Stroud raises his criticism. He points out that in the example the subject assumed the truth of the proposition *that X is legitimate* in forming the beliefs used to apparently provide her with a philosophical understanding of justification in general. Even in giving the example, the truth of that assumption was stipulated from a third-person perspective, not the subject's first-person point of view. Such a person would find herself in the following scenario: "I wonder whether I understand how my [justification] is possible? I have a lot of beliefs about it. If what I believe about it is true, I do; if it is not, I don't. Of course, I believe all of it is true, so I believe that I do understand my [justification]. But I wonder whether I do" (1994, p. 302). He claims that this position is an "inadequate" (1989, p. 115) one precisely because it prevents one from seeing oneself as having a fully general understanding of justification.

One will not have an account that explains all one's justification because the beliefs that provide the account are themselves unaccounted for—unaccounted for in what sense though? One can account for them from the third-person in the way just specified. The worry is that from the first-person perspective it is difficult to be happy with the assertion that one's beliefs *are* justified. That's because there is always an undischarged conditional "If my theory is true..." that cannot be affirmed *from that perspective* without begging the question against one's goal to have a fully general philosophical understanding. The epistemological project as Stroud sees it must be started and finished from the first-person perspective. Even if one has a reason to believe one's theory is true and that would thereby explain one's justification, having a reason

does not necessarily enable one to *see oneself as having a reason*. The latter can be had from a third-person point of view, the former cannot.<sup>120</sup>

Stroud clearly intends philosophical understanding to be a higher-level epistemic state. Minimally, it occurs one level removed from the supposed justification one sees oneself as having. This invites the charge that Stroud has snuck in some version of a formal internalist level-connecting requirement: you cannot have justified beliefs unless you are justified in believing that you have them.<sup>121</sup> Similarly, one might think Stroud has in mind something like the following: one cannot have a general philosophical understanding of justification unless one sees oneself as having that understanding.<sup>122</sup> His initial reaction to this objection is to deny that he accepts any such principle. What he doesn't do is fill in the details of what principle one *would* need to accept to find the "externalist" position unsatisfying.

I propose that the best way to object to Stroud's externalist is to adopt a non-question-begging requirement. I will show that the results of adhering to this requirement in practice are equivalent to those following the adoption of a version of the formal internalist's higher-level requirement. But first I will show how this proposal provides a way to see why Stroud is worried about the un-discharged conditional one level up that led to the externalist's apparently inadequate soliloquy. Here we find him in a similar position as Alston: both believe that one can have noninferentially justified beliefs, but this position leaves both of them unable to pinpoint how question-begging epistemic source circularity could be troublesome. Despite that fact, both find it troublesome.

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<sup>120</sup> This is another reason why he thinks his imagined "externalist" is in an unsatisfactory position.

<sup>121</sup> In his (1989) Stroud focuses instead on what he calls the KK thesis: to know P you must know that you know P.

<sup>122</sup> Stroud isn't clear on whether this sort of "seeing" implies positive epistemic status.

We saw that the common starting point theory explicates question begging in terms of a lack of shared commitments between the presenter of an argument and the respondent. Thus the antecedent of the conditional “If my theory is true, then [my beliefs produced by it are justified]” one level up must not only *be* true for one to have a philosophical understanding, one must have a reason oneself for believing it. Otherwise, in claiming that one *has* a philosophical understanding one will be tacitly assuming the truth of that antecedent in a question-begging manner. The quest for a general philosophical understanding of justification apparently requires having the truth of no such propositions within one’s starting point—if they were in the starting point, the resulting claim of generality would be tarnished due to one’s exempting some of those propositions from critical scrutiny. Now Stroud seems hesitant to say that he *has* a philosophical understanding, I suggest, because having that requires having a non-question-begging reason for having it. This is in keeping with Alston’s claim that FRJ requires giving up on the distinction between being justified and justifying. Even if one is justified in believing the consequent of the conditional, one won’t be able to *see oneself as having a reason* to accept a theory that would explain one’s justification without *justifying one’s acceptance of the antecedent of the higher-level conditional*. Upon justifying that antecedent to one’s satisfaction, one would be prepared to affirm it in a way that made appealing to *it* non-question-begging in the initial case described at the beginning of this paragraph. The trouble is that whatever source one used to affirm that antecedent will have succeeded in creating a new conditional that cannot be assumed to be true at the next level up without begging the question all over again.

Thus there are grounds to object to Stroud’s “externalist”, on the basis of begging the question, that are independent of formal internalist higher-level requirements on justification. Despite these grounds being independent, the outcome of adhering to them in practice is the same: one will never have a theoretical basis to stop ascending to higher levels, no matter the content of the beliefs at any given level. This helps draw out

connections between Alston's claim that epistemic source circularity precludes us from attaining FRJ and Stroud's regarding our inability to attain a general philosophical understanding of justification. In an important sense they are the same goal, and both are unattainable for the same reason. Attaining either requires non-question-begging reasons, and to have that one must complete an infinite regress of reason giving.

#### 4.8 Conclusion: Internalist Source-Legitimacy and the Problem of the Criterion

In this chapter I have considered whether an epistemic source circular inference's begging the question against someone can prevent him or her from justifiably believing the conclusion on the basis of the premises. I have argued that if one does not in some way assume that a belief source is legitimate as a part of one's starting point, the inference in question will be vicious due to its begging the question.<sup>123</sup> On the other hand, if the following three necessary conditions are met, one can be justified in believing the conclusion on the basis of the premises: (i) the premises are sufficiently justified to be able to justify the conclusion, (ii) the inference joining premises and conclusion is able to transfer that justification to the conclusion, and (iii) nothing required for the truth (i)-(ii) begs the question against one. This is the internalist conception of source-legitimacy that claims that producing mostly true beliefs is neither necessary nor sufficient for a belief's being justified. The immediate worry with this proposal, as described in the section on Moser above, is that anyone could claim that (i)-(iii) are true for their preferred source, no matter how implausible (i) or (ii) seems to the rest of us. We would charge the tealeaf reader with begging the question of the legitimacy of tealeaves against us in claiming to

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<sup>123</sup> This, of course, assumes that the person is sufficiently cognizant to notice that the source of the premises is one whose legitimacy one does not accept.

have shown that the tealeaves are legitimate; moreover, we might claim that we are *right* to reject the tealeaves as illegitimate.<sup>124</sup>

This objection to the internalist conception of source-legitimacy comes from one who adopts the claim that producing mostly true beliefs is either necessary or sufficient for producing justified beliefs. In chapter two I pointed out that internalists and externalists might be best construed as defending complementary, not competing, accounts of what makes a source legitimate.<sup>125</sup> The person raising this objection still confronts the following problem: how do *we* discriminate between legitimate and illegitimate sources? Any attempt to do so will use a source whose own legitimacy cannot be established without the same question begging epistemic source circularity the tealeaf reader was criticized for relying on. To illustrate this point, I examined Alston (1986) where he endeavors to explain exactly why epistemic source circularity will be, if one is pushed back far enough, unavoidable when one tries to show that a particular source is legitimate.

In the section on Alston I went to some length to distinguish “having discriminated a source’s legitimacy” from “being justified in believing that a source is legitimate”, for only in so doing can one preserve his remaining intuition in his (1993) that epistemic source circularity leaves us in an unsatisfactory cognitive situation. His worry is that even if one is justified in believing that a source is legitimate on the basis of an epistemic source circular track record inference, one still will not have “discriminated” that the source is legitimate, since the very same procedure would seem to show that one is justified in believing that, for example, astrology is legitimate. But, he claims, such a

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<sup>124</sup> According to the dialectical conception of begging the question that I argued can alone explain attributions of question-begging to epistemic source circularity, question begging only occurs in a dialectical context wherein one begs the question *against* someone (possibly oneself).

<sup>125</sup> Internalists who deny that producing mostly true beliefs is sufficient for producing justified beliefs may still want to claim that it is necessary. The intuition behind this claim is that justification must be somehow connected to truth.

source seems obviously illegitimate, so we cannot use epistemic source circular inferences to discriminate “the sheep from the goats”. If he collapses that distinction, it is unclear why he doesn’t have what he wants. Yet he retains it. I suggested that elsewhere Alston does identify a sense of discrimination that epistemic source circularity will prevent us from attaining, viz. discriminating the legitimacy of a source in a *fully reflective* manner. He argues that fully reflective discrimination is impossible to attain.

One response to the impossibility of attaining fully reflective discrimination of a source’s legitimacy is to deny that this fact has skeptical consequences. In other words, attaining such discrimination is not necessary for some other epistemic desideratum. I neither pursued nor endorsed this response, but instead argued that Stroud’s work does pinpoint an epistemic goal that cannot be attained in the absence of fully reflective discrimination, viz. a “general philosophical understanding of justification”. I considered Stroud’s reasons for rejecting the externalist’s claim to have attained that understanding and argued that he can sustain this objection only by adopting a non-question-begging requirement. Finally, I noted that the practical implications of refusing to violate the non-question-begging requirement are identical to that of the formal internalist that rejects the foundationalist thesis that some beliefs can be justified in the absence of justifying reasons.

Suppose that the inability to avoid begging the question in seeking a general philosophical understanding of justification precludes one from attaining such understanding. How damaging is this? Sosa, for one, claims that if such an understanding is impossible to attain, skepticism is true. Indeed, he identifies that negative claim with skepticism itself. (1994, p. 263) Unfortunately he is silent on *why* he identifies this claim with the skeptical thesis. In the remainder of this subsection I will draw on the material covered in this chapter to begin filling in the details of that identification.

The foundationalist might offer the following explanation of why attaining a fully reflective discrimination of the legitimacy of one's belief sources might not be cognitively important. Consider what happens when, in the process of reflecting on the epistemic status of one's beliefs, one stops because one takes oneself to have identified a belief that is justified in the absence of supporting reasons. One doesn't see the point of enquiring into its epistemic credentials, for at this point one is *assured* of the truth of the belief in a way that keeps one from complaining that one has begged the question in stopping here. The foundationalist might argue that what one really wants is assurance of truth, or perhaps assurance of the legitimacy of the source of one's beliefs. Moreover, this assurance can be had despite the fact that, by definition, ceasing reflection precludes one from discriminating that the source is legitimate in a *fully reflective* manner. Indeed, by accepting the deliverance of that source at this point one gives up the possibility of having of a *general understanding* of how one's beliefs can be justified: one rests content with this belief being (apparently) justified and so doesn't bother trying to "see oneself as having reason to accept the theory that would explain one's justification [for this belief] if it were true". One doesn't bother seeing whether one has reason to accept the antecedent of the conditional "If this source is legitimate, then this belief is justified" but doesn't lament that fact.

One who trades attaining fully reflective discrimination and a general philosophical understanding of justification for having apparently noninferentially justified beliefs might still wonder whether their preferred stopping (or starting) point is actually justified. There are those who have stopped or began inquiry at other points, feeling assured of the truth of beliefs produced by sources that we ourselves might think could not possibly be legitimate. Both parties have reached a state where they wouldn't criticize themselves or others for begging the question in accepting the deliverances of their preferred source due to being assured of the truth of those beliefs. Alternatively, one might consider this to take place at the beginning of inquiry: one starts by accepting



the deliverances of exactly those sources one wouldn't criticize oneself or others for begging the question in doing so.<sup>126</sup> At this point there seems to be no way to defend one's preferred starting point without begging the question against someone who didn't include that source's legitimacy as part of their own starting point. Since one has stopped—or started, depending on how one came to this point in the process of reflection on the matter—with what one takes to be a basic source, anything one says in defense of its legitimacy will depend on its deliverances.

One way to diagnose the situation this foundationalist finds himself in is in terms of wrestling with the acceptability of the internalist conception of source-legitimacy. This foundationalist is content with the beliefs he claims are noninferentially justified, but worries about the fact that others have come to the same conclusion about the deliverances of sources he finds to be obviously illegitimate. What else could be his grounds for accepting the noninferentially formed beliefs he does, beyond the fact that he finds himself assured of their truth?

An excellent example of this sort of scenario arises in connection with the so-called problem of the criterion. I will discuss this scenario only as an illustration of begging the question at the beginning of inquiry. There are clearly other epistemological similarities and connections between various types of circularity and the problem of the criterion, but I will ignore them. In brief, the problem apparently arises when one tries to identify the criteria for justified belief, or, which amounts to the same thing, which source(s) are legitimate so that one can formulate epistemic principles of the form "When a belief is produced by source X, X is justified". Following Chisholm's (1973) exposition, the problem arises when one tries to identify the criteria for justified belief by

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<sup>126</sup> See Conee (2004) for a discussion of the problem of the criterion as relating to fundamental issues relating to how one starts doing epistemology.

providing answers to the following questions:<sup>127</sup>

A: What are we justified in believing?

B: What are the criteria for justified belief?

The particularist proceeds by claiming to be able to answer B by first having an answer to A. He does this by identifying particular instances of purportedly justified beliefs. With some particulars in mind, he formulates criteria that explain why those beliefs are justified, thus enabling him to answer B. The methodist works in the opposite direction, claiming to be able to answer A only by first answering B. She answers B by identifying the criteria for justification, then uses the criterion to pick out beliefs that meet the criterion; thus answering A. The skeptic argues that one cannot answer A without first answering B, but also that one cannot answer B without first answering A.<sup>128</sup> To answer A, one needs to show that the source of those beliefs is legitimate; that is, one must already have an answer to B which one uses to identify the justified beliefs. To answer B, one needs to show that the beliefs produced by the source are justified; that is, one must already have an answer to A which one uses to confirm that the source is legitimate. Thus, one must have an answer to either question before one can answer the other, making it impossible to answer either. Chisholm suggests that epistemological theorizing regarding the criteria for justification *begins* by taking the particularist, methodist, or skeptical stance. Furthermore, he claims that one who takes any stance begs the question against anyone taking one of the other two. (1982, p. 75)

I propose to explain the fact that one cannot avoid begging the question in this circumstance in virtue of the fact that the particularist, methodist, and skeptic have

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<sup>127</sup> As is now familiar, I am focusing on justification whereas Chisholm discusses the problem in terms of knowledge.

<sup>128</sup> Here Chisholm is using “skeptical” in a technical sense, viz. one who suspends judgment on the legitimacy of *all* sources due to being unable to solve the problem of the criterion. This skeptic may very well be *the* skeptic, in the sense of most extreme.

different starting points when they begin doing epistemology. Consider Greco's discussion of why he endorses particularism rather than skepticism:

But still, it seems to me that a non-skeptical theory that explains our intuitions remains overwhelmingly preferable, other things being equal. This is because a non-skeptical theory accounts for our common sense intuitions about what we know by showing that they are for the most part *true*. A skeptical theory accounts for those intuitions only by showing that they are false, and by adding an explanation about why we do not normally realize they are false. Only a non-skeptical theory, therefore, explains the majority of our intuitions in a sense that *preserves* them. But if such a theory is preferable, then the methodological assumption that radical skepticism is false is warranted. For the purposes of theory construction we should assume that radical skepticism is false, and we should work out a position that entails this. (2000, p. 117)

Greco adopts particularism because he thinks that our common sense intuitions about particular beliefs being justified are true. We begin epistemological theorizing by identifying apparently justified beliefs, thus answering A; the goal of theory construction is to identify the criteria that would show how those beliefs are justified, thus providing an answer to B. Simplifying quite a bit, one might determine what the sources of those beliefs are and conclude that they must be legitimate. After all, if they weren't legitimate, the beliefs one takes to be intuitively justified wouldn't be after all.

Anyone opposed to particularism will find Greco's methodology maddening. He claims that, "we should assume that radical skepticism is false". But what justifies this assumption? What reason is there to believe that our common sense intuitions are correct? Anyone who does not share those intuitions about the justificatory status of our beliefs will find the particularist's approach wrongheaded from the literal start. Indeed, Greco makes no attempt to justify his particularism. Elsewhere he makes similar claims in response to other skeptical arguments. Regarding the Pyrrhonian regress argument, he says that the argument is "mistaken somewhere—that much is a working assumption of the present methodology" (Greco, 2000, p. 83) Regarding Humean external world skepticism, "Again, whether Hume is correct in all of this is not the question; I take it for granted that he is not correct, and that skepticism about the world is false" (2000, p. 70).

Not only does he fail to defend those assumptions, it seems implicit in the discussion that they *cannot* be defended—at least not in a non-question-begging manner. The particularist *begins* epistemological theorizing this way; it is not a position he arrives at through argument. In other words, the particularist's starting point is adopted noninferentially.

How does this example relate to worries regarding begging the question? I propose we explain the difference between particularists, methodists, and skeptics in terms of what each philosopher includes in his or her starting point. Particularists include propositions describing specific beliefs being justified, methodists include propositions describing epistemic principles, skeptics include nothing. What one includes in one's starting point will determine, among other things, when one will claim that a position or inference begs the question against them. If accepting a proposition as true or justified requires having another proposition as part of one's starting point, but the latter is *not* included in one's starting point, then one will claim that the position is question-begging.

We saw above that the particularist begins by positing the existence of justified beliefs. But being formed noninferentially must not be confused with being noninferentially justified. The natural question to ask at this point is this: *what rationally ought to be contained within one's starting point?* Which starting points are noninferentially justified and which aren't? The worry is that if one's starting point contains undefended assumptions, and one takes Greco's stance that this is altogether proper epistemic procedure, then one can start wherever one wants. This echoes Moser's objection that permitting question begging leads to arbitrariness in practice. If it is permissible to begin epistemological theorizing with whatever propositions one wouldn't criticize oneself (or others) for begging the question in holding, then one will be left with the problem of trying to discriminate which starting point one rationally ought to have. As should now be familiar, anyone trying to do this will quickly face Alston's worry that one can defend one's preferred starting point only in a way that ultimately exhibits

epistemic source circularity. As Williams describes the situation, the trouble with the particularist's response to skepticism lies in this:

[E]pistemological theories can be seen as the result of assuming that the conclusions of skeptical arguments are false and arguing, on this basis, either that the arguments are invalid or that they contain false premises. Such a strategy, it seems to me, amounts to an attempt to show that [justification] is possible, given that it is possible. (1999, p. 2)<sup>129</sup>

Anyone seriously asking whether it is possible for there to be justified beliefs will charge this methodology with begging the question; such a person will not include the proposition that justification is possible within one's starting point. The particularist position may not exhibit antecedent-justification circularity, since one need not assume that one is *justified* in believing that justification is possible. Nevertheless, by assuming that it is *true* that justification is possible, one will inevitably run into epistemic source circularity. Thus, anyone who asks what it is rational to include in one's starting point will eventually run into question-begging epistemic source circularity or the clearly vicious antecedent-justification circularity. For such a person, epistemic source circularity will indeed have the most extreme of skeptical consequences: unable to avoid question-begging epistemic source circularity in answering one's question, one will be led to global suspension of judgment. In this dissertation I have asked that question and sought to determine how, if at all, epistemic source circularity precludes one from having a satisfying answer to it. This chapter argues that, even if foundationalism is true, being question-begging is what will ultimately make otherwise-acceptable epistemic source circularity vicious.

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<sup>129</sup> Williams conducts this portion of his discussion in terms of knowledge. Later in the book he turns to justification.

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