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DISSOLVING SOME DILEMMAS FOR ACQUAINTANCE FOUNDATIONALISM

by

Ryan Daniel Cobb

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

August 2016

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Evan Fales

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Graduate College  
The University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

Ryan Daniel Cobb

has been approved by the Examining Committee for  
the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy degree  
in Philosophy at the August 2016 graduation.

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To Our Lady of Knock, *sine qua non*

“We are taught that if a man has really bad first principles, that must be partly his fault.”

G. K. Chesterton  
“The Eye of Apollo”

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is a curious fact that intellectual, emotional, and moral debts can never really be “paid up.” I suppose that is why acknowledgements pages exist: if one can never hope to pay off a debt, the next best thing, perhaps, is to at least formally acknowledge the debt.

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## ABSTRACT

This essay purports to be a “negative” defense of *acquaintance foundationalism*. It is “negative” in that I do not do much in the way of advancing novel argument for the position, nor do I extend the position very much. Rather, I focus on demonstrating that the position has the resources to overcome objections that have been proposed to it. In particular, I argue that it can overcome the dilemma proposed by Wilfrid Sellars and developed by Laurence BonJour against foundationalism, as well as dilemmas proposed by Jack Lyons and Michael Bergmann targeting internalism.

*Acquaintance foundationalism* is what I will call any theory of justification that is *internalist* in what may justify us, *foundationalist* in the structure of justification, and relies on the concept of *acquaintance* in justifying our basic beliefs. Internalism requires that what justifies us improves the belief from the perspective of the believing subject. Foundationalism states that the justification for all beliefs depends ultimately on basic beliefs. Finally, acquaintance is a relation between a person and other things such that these other things are before the “mind’s eye” of the subject.

The general idea behind each of these dilemmas, so I will argue, is to claim that acquaintance foundationalism cannot provide *epistemic reasons* for basic beliefs, where *epistemic reason* means something that contributes to justification from the subject’s perspective. Each dilemma will ask whether the alleged justifier has some feature x. However, each dilemma contends that, whether the alleged has the feature x or not, it cannot serve as an epistemic reason. For example, BonJour will ask whether our allegedly basic beliefs are *cognitive* or not. He argues that if they are cognitive, they need justification (and so cannot be basic), but if they are not cognitive, they cannot provide justification. Thus, no allegedly basic belief can serve as an epistemic reason.

I argue that the notion of *acquaintance* allows us to escape such dilemmas because our states of acquaintance allow us to justify our basic beliefs without requiring

justification themselves. I do so by borrowing, in part, Richard Fumerton's theory of non-inferential justification, plus adding on a few epicycles to allow us to *base* our basic beliefs on our acquaintances.

The first chapter sets up the issues of the dissertation: it gives context to the project, defines *acquaintance foundationalism* and *epistemic reason*, and discusses our dilemmas in broad outline. It also summarizes the rest of the essay.

I use *epistemic reasons* in a specialized sense in the dissertation, which necessitates an extended discussion. This is the focus of chapter two. I argue that an *epistemic reason* is a mental complex that consists of Fumertonian acquaintances. When we have an epistemic reason, we have a mental complex that is related in the appropriate way to a belief. This is just what provides justification for the belief. This chapter explicates this notion. It includes an extended discussion of Richard Fumerton's theory of non-inferential justification, which I follow in outline but diverge from in detail. This discussion focuses on his notion of acquaintance, and the items with which we may be acquainted. I then move to a discussion of the metaphysics of epistemic reasons, explaining how they consist of these acquaintances. I also discuss the relationship between epistemic reasons and epistemic justification.

The third chapter is historical in focus. I examine Sellars's famous dilemma for foundationalism, and contend that it can be best understood as an attempt to deny the foundationalist epistemic reasons for his beliefs. I also examine Laurence Bonjour's later formulation of the Sellarsian dilemma, and again argue that it is best understood as denying epistemic reasons to foundationalists. I then review the options that an acquaintance foundationalist has to respond to these dilemmas, as these responses will allow us to see where our more recent dilemmas go wrong.

Chapter four address Jack Lyons's dilemma. I consider what Lyons says about his dilemma at some length. I then argue that it is structurally similar to the Sellarsian

dilemma, and tries to undermine the internalist's (including the acquaintance foundationalist's) ability to offer epistemic reasons for his beliefs. I then argue that Lyons's dilemma only seems persuasive because he misunderstands what is required for experience to provide us with an epistemic reason. When properly understood, his dilemma fails to tell against the acquaintance foundationalism. I also argue that Lyons's version of externalism is much more radical than it might initially appear, helping to motivate acquaintance foundationalism.

The fifth chapter focuses on Michael Bergmann. I give his dilemma an extended discussion, which I follow up by reframing it in terms of epistemic reasons. I argue that his dilemma, while seemingly persuasive, fails to trouble the acquaintance foundationalism. I argue that we may be *strongly aware* (a Bergmannian technical notion) of our epistemic reasons without starting a regress, which vitiates his dilemma. I conclude with some short remarks on possibility of skepticism.

## **PUBLIC ABSTRACT**

How is it possible to provide evidence for our beliefs? It seems that anything we might appeal to will come up short. Whatever the thing might be, it seems we must be able to provide a reason for thinking that our reason really is a reason. For example, if we claim that we have a fever because of the reading on a thermometer, we might wonder why the number on the dial means we have a fever. And it seems we must provide a reason for thinking so. This can seem to trap us in a never-ending chain of reasons.

The solution, I think, is to recognize that some of our reasons have a self-authenticating character to them: it can be obvious to me that something is a reason. In this essay, I take this insight and expand it to solve several puzzles about how it is that we know things.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### ACQUAINTANCE FOUNDATIONALISM AND ITS CRITICS

#### *1. The specter of skepticism*

The reader may be aware of a book of epistemology that begins with the motto, “Knowledge first!” (Williamson, 2000). If I may disagree with so eminent a philosopher, I would like to suggest an alternative: “Skepticism first!” (or perhaps “Ignorance first!”<sup>1</sup>) Such a motto captures the notion that knowledge is an achievement, and we should not profess that it is easy to have while professing ignorance as to what it is. And any consideration of knowledge seems to suggest that it is often a matter of luck whether we know or not.<sup>2</sup> But it seems that, even if we eliminate some kinds of luck, we are still fortunate to know anything—if we do—because such knowledge depends on the cooperation of the world, which is not guaranteed.<sup>3</sup> Beginning with the assumption that we know things and then figuring out what this is seems to get things exactly backwards. Safer, it seems, to begin our search without assuming that we already possess the treasure we seek. And, as knowledge seems to depend on some other notions (truth, for one, and perhaps justification or reasonable belief, for another<sup>4</sup>), it seems we should seek out these more fundamental notions. Of course, that most eminent of philosophers mentioned at the beginning of this chapter will not see things this way. That is the point of the motto “Knowledge first!” I ask only the following question: has “knowledge first!” provided any insights? Has it illuminated that concept, or any others? (I do not intend

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Gregory Stoutenburg for this suggestion.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Pritchard (2006) for a useful discussion.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Fumerton (1985, pp. 193-194).

<sup>4</sup> Or, on a standard view, both. The causal theory of knowledge may be understood as denying the justification condition. See, e.g., Goldman (1967). Furthermore, it is unclear whether reformed epistemologists intend to interpret the justification condition differently or are proposing that we replace it with one requiring warrant. For representative discussions, see Plantinga (1993a; 1993b), and the last four chapters of Bergmann (2006).

this as a denigration. *Knowledge and its Limits* is an important book, containing some very careful and challenging argumentation. But it seems that there are limits to how far this book can take us. “Knowledge first!” has been tried and found wanting, in that it does not seem to have engendered any progress as an approach to epistemic concepts. The book itself has driven much fruitful epistemic debate, but it seems that this approach can only take us so far.) Thus, I propose that we attempt to go back to basics and evaluate other concepts that seem to be building blocks of knowledge, and leave it an open question whether we can analyze what knowledge is, and, when such an analysis is complete, whether we can have it.

This leaves skepticism as a live option. And the specter of skepticism hangs over all of epistemology. This ghostly apparition has driven epistemologists mad with fear, and they are often willing to sacrifice principles to appease this dreadful god. Any demand we make on justification, rational belief, or knowledge may be met with the horror that this will exclude beliefs that must obviously be bits of knowledge (or rational beliefs) from the things we actually do know (or rationally believe, etc.<sup>5</sup>). Even the most intuitive of epistemic principles (an epistemically good belief must be reasonable from the believer’s standpoint) will be abandoned with alacrity at the mere suggestion that some poor soul might be unjustified in believing a matter of “common sense”. This seems to be a primary motivation for the rise of externalist accounts of justification. For instance, one of Alvin Goldman’s primary difficulties with internalism seems to be that it provides far too meager resources for us to justify many of our common-sense, everyday beliefs (1999).

Thus, much of “traditional epistemology” is under attack. The twentieth century saw the rise of both coherentism and externalism due to a perceived failure of traditional

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<sup>5</sup> For a helpful discussion of this phenomenon, see Stoutenburg (forthcoming).

epistemology. Who knows what horrors the twenty-first century will unveil if the tide is not reversed? Thus, it is the goal of this essay to defend, in small part, traditional epistemology. This defense will be limited in the following ways. First, I do not propose to defend all epistemologies that might justly be called “traditional” (nor do I even propose to offer exhaustive criteria for what counts as a traditional position). Instead, I will only defend one position, which I call “acquaintance foundationalism.”<sup>6</sup> This is an internalist, foundationalist position that depends on our “direct acquaintance” with items of epistemic import (perceptual experience, propositions, facts, etc.) to justify our beliefs. We shall discuss this position in more detail presently. Second, this defense is limited in that it only attempts to defuse a particular challenge to the position. This challenge, inaugurated by Wilfrid Sellars, and developed in the form of various “dilemmas” by Laurence Bonjour, Jack Lyons, and Michael Bergmann, concludes that acquaintance foundationalists (and all internalist foundationalists) cannot justify their beliefs (or a certain class of beliefs) to any degree whatsoever. That is, traditional epistemology places requirements on justification that cannot be met without abandoning a tenet of traditional epistemology (either foundationalism or internalism). I will provide a fairly brief rebuttal to Sellars and Bonjour in chapter three, while Lyons and Bergmann get a more exhaustive treatment, with each receiving his own chapter (chapters four and five, respectively). Third, this defense is limited in that it focuses only on justifying basic perceptual beliefs. This is for the following reasons. It simplifies our treatment considerably because it allows us to ignore the problems of a priori knowledge and inferential justification. Both of these require careful treatment. By focusing on basic, perceptual beliefs, we can cover less ground, but more carefully. In particular, I will only propose a theory of non-

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<sup>6</sup> Following, among others, Tim McGrew’s usage in his (2011).



inferential justification (in chapter two), and focus on using this account to justify our basic perceptual beliefs. This limited focus I hope will help us give a clearer refutation of the dilemmas. Also, the dilemmas are often in their most potent form when concerned with perceptual beliefs, so it is vital to address this class of beliefs.

With these caveats out of the way, we are ready to begin our defense. In the remainder of this chapter, I will outline and briefly defend the tenets of acquaintance foundationalism, before outlining the challenges proposed to it. I close the chapter with a summary of the remaining chapters.

## *2. Acquaintance foundationalism defined and defended*

This essay purports to defend traditional epistemology, in the form of “acquaintance foundationalism,” an internalist foundationalism that takes acquaintance between the mind and the world to be the ultimate source of justification. This crude description needs a three-fold amplification: what is foundationalism, what is internalism, and what is acquaintance?

Foundationalism is the view that all justification (or knowledge) may be traced back to a class of propositions that do not depend on any other proposition for their epistemic standing. We might variously say that these propositions are “self-justifying,”<sup>7</sup> perhaps, or are justified by appeal to experiences, facts, or the like—things that are not themselves propositions. I shall adopt this second way of speaking: foundational propositions are, I shall contend, supported by appeal to our experience, and in particular, by appeal to our acquaintances with the world.<sup>8</sup> Foundationalism is opposed

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<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Chisholm’s discussion of the directly evident in his *Theory of Knowledge* (1966), or Conee’s “Self-Support” (2012).

<sup>8</sup> I do not mean to exclude the possibility of “self-supporting” propositions, nor the possibility that some of our foundational beliefs are self-supporting while others are supported by things that are not beliefs. I adopt this way of speaking for convenience, not to suggest that there is nothing to be said for other ways of presenting the issues.

to coherentism, the view that a proposition is justified by appeal to other propositions that support it. Coherentism sees justification as more like a net: each belief is supported by many other beliefs, and each individual belief can be called into question, but we cannot call into question every belief at once.<sup>9</sup>

As the overwhelming majority of epistemologists today espouse foundationalism, I shall not trouble an extended definition or defense of it. (Most externalists, for instance, are foundationalists, although they are at times less than forthcoming about it.<sup>10</sup>) But we should say a word about why we should accept it. The most compelling argument in its favor is a regress argument.<sup>11</sup>

The justification regress contends that for any belief, we must either trace its justification to another justified belief, an unjustified belief, or something that is not a belief. If we trace it to a justified belief, then we have to explain where this belief got its justification, and we start all over. (It is no good to say that a belief gets its justification from a large number of other beliefs. This is probably true in many cases, but we can simply ask the same question about any of the beliefs that together constitute the justification for the original belief. And we are still in the same position: we must trace justification for this justifying belief to another justified belief, or to an unjustified belief, or to something that is not a belief at all.) So simply appealing to another justified belief can only be a temporary move. Appealing to an unjustified belief seems to be no good either: how can an unjustified belief serve to justify a belief? This move, then, appears to be a non-starter. Finally, we can trace justification to something that is not itself a belief:

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<sup>9</sup> For a relatively “standard” treatment of coherentism, see Bonjour (1985).

<sup>10</sup> And, it is difficult to see that coherentism could motivate externalism, or even that “externalist coherentism” is a remotely plausible view. For a good criticism of externalist coherentism, see Fumerton (1995, pp. 154-155).

<sup>11</sup> In what follows, I depend very heavily on Richard Fumerton’s discussion of regress arguments in his (1995, ch. 3, p. 55 ff. and p. 85 ff.). I shall not attempt to track down every place where my presentation is similar to Fumerton’s, nor to anyone else’s. I make no claim to originality in my presentation. Any infelicities are, of course, mine.

an experience, a mental state, an acquaintance, or what have you. But this is just the foundationalist position, ergo, we should be foundationalists.

While this has been a cursory treatment, we shall leave this issue and turn to internalism. Remember that all this essay purports to do is to defend the plausibility of a certain kind of foundationalism; it does not try to give an exhaustive defense of foundationalism. This treatment thus suffices for our current goals.

Internalism proves a bit trickier to nail down. There are several ways we might try to capture the internalist/externalist divide<sup>12</sup>. I will propose several attempts—that I think fail—and then propose a way to divide the two views that I think is successful.

One attempt is “internal state” internalism. This species claims that justification depend on the “internal states” of the believer. Suppose that S believes p. P’s justification—or S’s justification in believing p—depends on S’s internal states. (Usually, this is understood to be something like S’s mental or perceptual states.) So, why is S justified in believing that there is a large, robin’s egg blue beach ball in front of him when the room is well-lit and S is looking at the ball, but not if the room is poorly lit, S has his eyes closed, etc.? It is because, when the room is well lit, etc., S has a visual experience, internal to him, that justifies—or helps to justify—his belief. If S were not to have such a visual experience—if the room is dark, S has his eyes closed or his head turned—then S would lack that justification for his belief.

On this conception, an externalist is someone who does not think that justification depends on “internal states.” For example, a classical reliabilist contends that a belief’s justification depends on its method of production—did a reliable belief-forming process give rise to the belief?<sup>13</sup> On such a view, it makes no difference what the

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<sup>12</sup> In what follows, I follow Fumerton’s (1995) discussion of internalism closely (see especially chapter three, p. 60ff., and p. 80ff. Again, any mistakes or solecisms are mine.

<sup>13</sup> For a standard statement of reliabilism, see Goldman (1979). For an interesting development of reliabilism (by no means standard), see Goldman (1986), especially chapters four and five.

believer's internal state is; rather, it matters whether the belief is connected in the appropriate way to the world. The believer's phenomenal experience might very well be epiphenomenal. Jack Lyons, for instance, thinks that phenomenal zombies—our mental duplicates who lack any phenomenal (or conscious) experience—would have all the same justified beliefs that we do (2009, p. 52). What matters is that these creatures would have reliable belief-forming processes (as they are our cognitive duplicates).

But questions immediately arise as to what counts as an “internal” state. Any attempt to answer these questions shows the unsuitability of using “internal states” to divide internalists and externalists. For instance, intentional states like beliefs seem to be paradigmatically “internal.” But, if we are content-externalists, we may think that the very meaning of a proposition depend crucially on the configuration of the world. And this suggests that a crucial component of the belief is not “internal” in the sense of being “in the mind.” So, if the meaning of “there's some water” depends on whether we are on Earth or twin Earth, then it seems that the belief that “there's some water” is partially outside the mind (Lau and Deutsch, 1014 ). If we instead try to understand “internal states” as “in our brains” rather than “in our minds,” we do not seem to do much better. For instance, the belief-producing processes of reliabilist theories are going on “in our brains,” but are not internal in the sense that they are available to conscious reflection. In short, a notion of “internal state” that can capture the distinction between internalism and externalism proves elusive.

We might instead try to divide the two camps by appeal to access. For a subject's belief to be justified, he must have access to what justifies that belief. So—oversimplifying—we might think of Russell's acquaintance theory as paradigmatically internalist, according to this criterion. Russell contends that, when we have knowledge by acquaintance, our minds are somehow directly acquainted with reality (1982). The idea (I think) is that we have (direct) access to certain facts—to the world as it is.

Someone lacking such access would fail to have this kind of knowledge. More generally, the idea is that internalists require “access” because they want believers to have access to justifiers, whatever those may be (experience or what have you).

An externalist, on this view, is anyone who denies that access to justifiers is a necessary condition on justification. Let’s use the reliabilist as our exemplar. He will contend that what justifies a belief is its causal history. And the believer need not have access to this history for a belief to be justified. So, if I have a reliably produced belief that “there’s a red balloon,” my justification does not depend on whether I have access to this history: I usually do not have such access, nor do I need it. (Again, the reliabilist is merely discussing necessary conditions. If I do have access to this history, that is all to the good. But justification does not depend on it.)

The access requirement, however, is also unhelpful. As it stands, it is probably too vague to be of much use. If we attempt to make the requirement more explicit, then it seems we still do not end up with a useful distinction. Consider the following way of understanding access. We may think of access as being “strong” or “weak.”<sup>14</sup> Strong access requirements demand that someone actually have access to what justifies his belief, and access to the fact that the justifier makes his belief likely to be true. A “weak” access requirement demands only that the subject be able to access the justifier and the fact that it makes the belief likely to be true.

What’s the problem? As Richard Fumerton (1995) has noted, a strong access requirement seems to set the internalist on a vicious regress, and a weak access requirement does not seem to distinguish between internalists and externalists at all (pp. 62ff.). Let’s consider strong access first. Suppose S has access to p, which justifies his belief that q. S must also have access to the fact that p makes q probable (if S is to have a

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<sup>14</sup> Here following Fumerton (1995, pp. 62-66).

justified belief in q). But how are we to understand access? If we mean something like knowledge, or rational belief, then we are off and running on a nasty regress. For, to be justified in thinking that p makes q probable, S must have access to whatever justifies him in thinking that p makes q probable, *and* access to the fact that this new justifier does in fact makes it probable that p makes q probable. But access to this last fact means that we are not done yet. We must also ask whether S has access to whatever justified him in believing that there is a fact that makes p make q probable, *and* he must also have access . . . we shall never finish. Put this baldly, it seems that no one would have any truck with internalism.

Instead, we might try weak access. “Weak” access means this: we must only *be able* to access the justifier and the fact that the justifier makes the belief likely to be true. So, perhaps on reflection, the subject could “access” the justifier and its connection to the belief in question. But this weaker requirement no longer seems to exclude the externalist. After all, the reliabilist may say that he *could* access such facts, even though he only rarely, in fact, does. So, he would seem to be an internalist, as well. And this just seems to make “access” an unhelpful way to divide up internalists and externalists.

A third way we might attempt to distinguish between internalists and externalists is by appeal to naturalism. Externalists, so the story goes, seek to naturalize epistemology and internalists don't. But what does it mean to “naturalize”? Two related possibilities present themselves. First, we may think that naturalism requires that all distinctively epistemic terms be “discharged.” We must replace epistemic terms with non-epistemic terms, or that a successful analysis will leave behind no epistemic terms. For example, Alvin Goldman tries to explain “justification”—an epistemic term—in the language of “reliability”—an allegedly non-epistemic term (1979). Or, alternatively, we might say that reliability is a term that is capable of being given a non-epistemic reading: we might think that we can deliver the cash value of reliability in terms of how likely

something is to produce true beliefs. (We should also be careful to note that Goldman avoids claiming to “analyze” justification (1979). But I think what he does is similar enough to fall into the naturalizing pattern we’ve described above.) Reliability is—allegedly—open to empirical investigation. We could devise, in principle, a test that determines which methods reliably produce true beliefs. It is much more difficult to determine if a belief is justified if we refuse to naturalize our epistemic terms. (For instance, if we say that justified beliefs are “good” ones—epistemically good—then it isn’t clear we’ve made any progress toward understanding justification. And so it goes for any other epistemic terms we might use to understand justification—rational, well-supported by evidence, etc. If we refuse to naturalize these terms, how are we to give a non-circular definition (or analysis) of them?)

To be clear, if naturalism in epistemology requires discharging epistemic terms, then externalists, so the story goes, are naturalists, and internalists aren’t. A causal theorist thinks that the epistemic status of beliefs depends (solely) on their causal history, so epistemic terms must be spelled out in terms of the causal history of the belief (Goldman, 1967). Reliabilists refine this dependence on causal history: they think that we should understand epistemic terms, like justification, in terms of the methods the believer uses to acquire the belief. If the methods are connected in a non-arbitrary way with truth, then the belief is *prima facie* reliably produced and therefore justified.<sup>15</sup> (This eliminates several important epicycles from the reliabilist story. I hope no reliabilist feels cheated by this representation.) Proper functionalists try to explain justified beliefs in much the same way—justified beliefs are (oversimplifying) those beliefs that arise from our sense organs and brain operations in circumstances like those in which they were designed to function (Plantinga, 1993a). (The teleological talk may worry the

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<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., Lyons (2009), especially chapters four and seven, for a relatively contemporary defense of this position.

reader—more on this presently.)

Internalists do not attempt such projects. Instead, they seek to explain epistemic terms by appeal to other epistemic terms. They hope to avoid circularity by appeal to certain fundamental, unanalyzable epistemic terms. So, Chisholm (1966) uses “more probable than” as a fundamental epistemic term (p. 23). Russell (1982) uses “acquaintance” (chapter five). Evan Fales has “transparency” (1996, p. 155-165). Descartes (1984) has “clear and distinct” ideas (especially Meditation Two). The inspiration for each of these theories is to find something basic on which we may construct our conceptual edifice. The difficulty, of course, is that we may wonder how it is that we understand an epistemic term that cannot be explained in any other terms. We shall return to this worry in our discussion of method (in the next section) and again in chapter two.

The externalist’s talk of empirical investigation of terms provides another way to think of naturalism in epistemology. We may think of naturalism as the thesis that epistemology is contiguous with the natural sciences. Of course, “contiguous” is ambiguous. Generally it means that there is no sharp divide between questions that are best answered by the sciences and ones that are best answered by philosophy. That is, there aren’t sharply demarcated domains—say, philosophy versus psychology. Instead, there is inquiry into humans and, in the case that presently concerns us, their knowledge. This thesis comes in varying strengths. An extreme version may propose turning over epistemic inquiries to neuroscientists and psychologists, who, so the story goes, are in a much better position to tell us what we know, while a weaker version may suggest only that the scientists may help answer important questions about our knowledge. Alternatively someone may argue that the contiguity is in method: there are no distinct philosophical or scientific methods, and we should investigate these questions by whatever means we can. So, again, we might think that a neuroscientist can



tell us more about what we know than the average epistemologist sitting in his armchair and staring at the ceiling.<sup>16</sup>

This idea of contiguity may—so the story goes—help us demarcate externalism and internalism. Externalists are, roughly, those who think epistemology is contiguous with psychology. So, a reliabilist can (and usually does) rely on input from psychology and cognitive science to shape his discussions of belief-forming mechanisms.

Internalists, conversely, think that some questions and methods are distinctively philosophical. The key questions of epistemology—concerning justification, knowledge, evidence, etc.—are among the distinctly philosophical questions. Psychologists can tell us lots of things, but they cannot inform us about what constitutes a rational belief.

Naturalism, however, fails as a criterion for distinguishing internalism and externalism. Consider “discharging” epistemic terms. Fumerton (1995) has contended that this “discharging” takes the form of appeal to nomic regularities—the externalist posits a law-like non-accidental connection between a belief and the environment (pp. 66-67). Refusing such discharge marks one as an internalist. The trouble is in delineating what counts as nomic discharge and what counts as giving an unanalyzable primitive. Consider our stock externalist, the reliabilist. What does he mean by a “reliable” process? It depends. It might mean that, if we were to put the subject in identical (not mathematically identical) circumstances fifty times, he would form a true belief at a high percentage—perhaps forty-five, perhaps forty-nine times. Or, perhaps it means that he would form a true belief in a large number of “nearby” possible worlds (whatever those are). How different is this approach from Chisholm’s primitive, “more reasonable to believe than not”? The “repeat testing” and “nearby possible worlds” might simply be a convoluted way of saying that some methods produce beliefs that are

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<sup>16</sup> For a very useful discussion of varying naturalist strains in epistemology, see Haack (1994), chapter 4.

more reasonable to believe than not.” And now it isn’t clear how the reliabilist has discharged the epistemic terms. (Or, if we think that he has done so, we can merely push the other way: we can analyze away “more reasonable to believe than not” by appeal to possible worlds.) We thus have a case for saying that no one is really a naturalist: everyone’s got epistemic primitives—possible worlds talk is not an *analysis* but rather a way to help us understand the concepts. But we also have a case for saying that *everyone* is a naturalist: some philosophers try to give us epistemic primitives, but these are just useful stopping points until we work out the science. For instance, we might argue that Chisholm’s “more reasonable . . .” locution awaits a rigorous possible worlds treatment, or that Falesian transparency is simply a special kind of psychological state that awaits further investigation. Thus, naturalism is not the proper way to divide sheep and goats. At best, it seems to be an indicator—a self-proclaimed epistemic “naturalizer” will also likely be an externalist; internalists will be more likely to deny that they are (epistemic) naturalists. Nor will talk of “contiguity” help us make the divide. For, while it is true that many internalists are amenable to “armchair” philosophy, even the most hardened will probably agree that some questions of interest are probably best settled by empirical investigation.<sup>17</sup> And, it also seems that this criterion is not useful unless we have a clear idea of the proper domain of philosophy and the sciences, and it isn’t clear that we do have such a divide (without begging important questions). So this version of naturalism doesn’t seem to do any better.

How, then, shall we divide up internalism? Recall that most epistemologists today are foundationalists. The major divide is between internalists and externalists. I think the clearest way to understand this division is by appeal to what constitutes our foundations. I propose that internalists think that *epistemic reasons* are our

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<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., Fumerton (1985, pp. 22-23)

foundations, while externalists deny this. But what is an epistemic reason?

It is perhaps the central concept of the dissertation, and thus merits an extended discussion. I therefore devote the second chapter to it. But we need at least a working idea of what epistemic reasons are. Consider the following scenario: Hume and Pascal are discussing the existence of God. Pascal claims that God exists. Hume wants to know why Pascal believes this. Suppose that Pascal responds with his famous wager (Pascal, 2005, sec. 233). Pascal believes in God because that is the smartest way to bet: if God exists and Pascal does not believe, things turn out very, very bad; conversely, if Pascal believes, things turn out good no matter what. Hume is unpersuaded. Pascal has given us a psychological or pragmatic reason to believe that God exists. But Hume didn't want *that kind* of reason. He asked for some reason to think that the proposition "God exists" is true (at least, this is a plausible interpretation of Hume's question). We might say that Hume is looking for evidence for the proposition. Or, to use a more contemporary expression, we may say that Hume was looking for a justifier for the belief. Or, we might say—and I will say—that Hume is asking for *epistemic reasons*<sup>18</sup>. Epistemic reasons thus contribute to, or partially constitute, our justification.

In addition, we need a working concept of the metaphysics of epistemic reasons. I suggest that an epistemic reason is a mental object, in the sense that it exists only in the mind. Furthermore, epistemic reasons are a "complex"—they consist of several smaller bits—"simples," we might say. And, most importantly—and probably most controversially—I think that the mental bits are "acquaintances," in the sense that Richard Fumerton (1995) uses that term (p. 73ff.). The reader should note, however, that the general outline of this story may be right, even if the particulars are wrong. The

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<sup>18</sup> Note that Paul Moser uses this term in his *Knowledge and Evidence* (1989). I do not claim the term in the way that Moser uses it, nor do I intend to suggest that he ought to use the term in the way I will describe.

reader may find himself persuaded about the general existence of epistemic reasons and their role in justifying beliefs. But he may vehemently disagree about what constitutes an epistemic reason. (Fumertonian acquaintances are hardly a trendy item to place in one's ontology.) This is all to the good. I encourage the reader to develop a contrary account of what bits make up epistemic reasons. I defend a particular account because I think it is helpful to have one when considering the dilemmas that the internalist faces—a vague outline of what epistemic reasons are would not be optimal for evaluating the competing claims of the internalists and their opponents. If someone else wants to come along and say that epistemic reasons are really composed of seemings, or transparent propositions, or what have you, that is good—it shows that the core idea of an epistemic reason is sound. (Or, perhaps, it is merely confused, or so vague as to be useless.)

Before moving forward, we should address some initial objections. One objection is that I am really just discussing evidence under a different name. I do not wish to embrace this equivalence because of the wide variety of uses evidence has. For instance, there is a debate about whether evidentialism is an informative thesis.<sup>19</sup> If we interpret evidence broadly, then the thesis that “justification supervenes on evidence” sounds tautological. If all we mean by evidence is “whatever justifies,” then we don't have a way to distinguish internalism and externalism. The dispute will be about what counts as evidence—which really means it will be about what justifies belief—which we probably already knew. Conversely, if we have a more particular view of evidence, then we may have a sharper division of internalists and externalists, but then we must engage in a debate about the proper definition of evidence, including consideration of the many accounts of evidence.<sup>20</sup> I am not interested in completing this task, which seems to be

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<sup>19</sup> See, e.g., some of the conflicting accounts (of both evidence and evidentialism) given in Dougherty (2011), in which Goldman's contribution suggests that reliabilism and evidentialism are compatible.

<sup>20</sup> The literature is so voluminous here that it is probably impossible to give a “representative” sample. For an older (but still very good) discussion of some varying concepts of evidence, see

largely of linguistic or sociological interest. It seems to be more philosophically perspicuous to find useful terms, even if that means using somewhat artificial or technical terms. And an advantage of using “epistemic reasons” over “evidence” is that it is more obvious that a technical term is in use. This hopefully prevents misunderstandings.

The same reasons apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to why I do not use the term “justifier” for “epistemic reason.” I think that the two are probably pretty much co-extensive, depending on the peculiarities of the account. That is, I think that one could have an epistemic reason in favor of a proposition without being justified in believing the proposition—the epistemic reason might be “weak,” or there might be competing epistemic reasons that tell against the proposition. This use of epistemic reason seems to be pretty much equivalent to how “justifier” gets used. But the same reasons tell against using “justifier” as against “evidence”—justifier is used in many ways, some of them inconsistent.<sup>21</sup> By using “epistemic reason,” we can be clearer that we are stipulating a definition.

We should also recall that as this essay focuses on basic, perceptual beliefs, we will not discuss how beliefs are justified via inference. I will give a more complete account of non-inferential justification in chapter two. We will also ignore cases of purely *a priori* beliefs, instead focusing on simple cases of perception (assuming there are any simple ones). We should also remember that, as this essay is largely “negative” in character—trying to defend acquaintance foundationalism from various externalist calumnies—our focus will be on seeing if the account we outline can withstand the challenges we will consider, not on giving the most complete defense possible of the

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Achinstein, (1983b) (especially Achinstein’s contribution to the volume (Achinstein, 1983a). For a relatively contemporary overview, see Kelly (2014), especially the bibliography.

<sup>21</sup> See, e.g., Lyons (2009, p. 21ff.), where he argues that “justifier” is ambiguous.

account.

Finally, we should say a few words here about acquaintance. (It, too, will receive a more detailed discussion in our next chapter.) Although we will follow Fumerton's account of acquaintance in outline, I intend the view to be inclusive enough to include the four horsemen of traditional foundationalism (BonJour, Fales, Fumerton, and McGrew).<sup>22</sup> The central contention of acquaintance foundationalism is something like this: our minds are capable of "latching" onto the world in a way that can justify beliefs. Our minds can be related to the world such that we have certain items (facts, propositions, or what have you) "immediately before consciousness," to borrow a phrase from Fumerton (1995, 75). This relation between our minds and the world we call acquaintance. And, although our four horsemen will differ in particulars, this central idea binds them together. There seems to be a two-fold motivation for accepting acquaintance. First, we are aware of something like acquaintance: we know what it is like to be related to the world versus, say, merely having a description of it. Second, these states seem to be epistemic "unmoved movers"—they can justify without themselves needing further justification. This allows us to put an end to the epistemic regress and rest the edifice of our knowledge on the foundations of beliefs supported by acquaintance. (The reader may be curious: didn't I just say that epistemic reasons provided the foundations? Yes: epistemic reasons—at least in the case of non-inferential justification—*consist of* acquaintances. We will explain and defend this idea in the next chapter.)

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<sup>22</sup> My primary criterion for listing these four was time: they all did well-known work on acquaintance foundationalism in the 90's. For samples of their work on (some aspect of) acquaintance foundationalism, see BonJour (1998), Fales (1996), Fumerton (1995), and McGrew (1995)

### *3. The challenge*

The problem, in its most general form, has to do with the stated goals of internalism (and, in particular, acquaintance foundationalism). Of course, different internalists may have different goals, but it seems that two of the goals of acquaintance foundationalism are to define what justification is<sup>23</sup>—something that makes our beliefs epistemically good and is available to the subject, etc.—and show how we are justified in believing the various things that we do believe (beliefs about the past, about math, about the table in front of us, about the proper epistemic positions, etc.).<sup>24</sup> The challenge, put most broadly, states that the goals of internalism are incompatible. I think most externalists grant that it is possible to state a coherent account of justification that counts as internalist (or, in our particular case, as acquaintance foundationalist). The difficulty is in satisfying our second goal, once we have placed internalist (or acquaintance foundationalist) constraints on the first goal. In short, the challenge to the project is this: if we are internalists, we cannot justify a crucial subset of our beliefs. This is a strike against internalism.

How so? The internalist, so the story goes, claims that lots of beliefs may be justified on an internalist perspective. If it turns out that they cannot, then it seems that the internalist may have a certain kind of inconsistency in his account: he claims to do something he can't. By itself, this might not be much of a worry. However, if we take it as a datum that certain kinds of beliefs can be justified, and it turns out that they can't, then it seems that internalism has missed the mark. For instance, most internalists think it is possible to justify perceptual beliefs—the focus of this essay. If it turns out that perceptual beliefs cannot meet internalist standards for justification—even in principle—then it seems that internalism “gets it wrong.” Internalist theories of justification would

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<sup>23</sup> A preoccupation of Fumerton (1995).

<sup>24</sup> A focus of Evan Fales, among others (1996).

be using the term in a much more limited—and probably less interesting—way than we previously thought. (That is, if it turns out we are justified in believing almost nothing, we might suspect that we should use some other epistemic term to describe our common doxastic situation and practices—if justification is something that no one ever has, we might wonder why we should spend so much time talking about it.) More troubling is the idea that, if a large enough swath of beliefs are unjustified, the belief in internalism itself is a victim. So, if internalism cannot justify any beliefs—including, presumably, the belief that internalism is correct—then internalism is in trouble.

This is just the strategy that Jack Lyons and Michael Bergmann pursue.<sup>25</sup> Lyons focuses on basic perceptual beliefs, while Bergmann takes broader aim at all beliefs (we will limit our discussion of Bergmann to basic, perceptual beliefs, as well). Lyons and Bergmann are both quite thorough in their approach. They try not to tailor their arguments to address on particular internalism, but instead hope to target internalism more generally. I contend that they both try to show that internalists cannot provide epistemic reasons for their basic perceptual beliefs. This would, I think, show that the two stated goals of internalism—or, at least the internalism I am interested in defending—are inconsistent. And this would probably count as a mark against internalism, even if it doesn't show that it is self-defeating.

The reader may notice a certain structural similarity between these two dilemmas and the infamous Sellarsian dilemma.<sup>26</sup> Both Lyons and Bergmann note the similarity, but do their best to distance themselves from Sellars. (For one thing, Sellars argues for coherentism and both Lyons and Bergmann are foundationalists.) But I contend the structure of the dilemmas is the same. (More on this in our chapters on the dilemmas.)

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<sup>25</sup> In Lyons (2009, chapter three), and Bergmann (2006, chapters one and two), respectively.

<sup>26</sup> For the dilemma in its initial form, see Sellars (1956). For a useful discussion of it, see the SEP article on Sellars (deVries, 2015).



It is interesting that Bergman notes in passing that even if internalists have an adequate response to Sellarsian dilemma, they do not have an adequate response to his dilemma. We shall see if this claim is apt. In chapter three, we shall examine both Sellars's dilemma and Laurence Bonjour's restatement of it, and see what solving those dilemmas would require. This will, I hope, prepare us for addressing the new set of dilemmas in the last two chapters.

But enough of generalities—let's discuss the dilemmas in more detail.

Jack Lyons's dilemma focuses on perceptual beliefs. Lyons proposes two ways in which internalist foundationalists might justify these. We may either appeal to *sensations* or *percepts*. A sensation is "raw" input from the senses. It is unconceptualized—James's "blooming, buzzing confusion" (James, 1981). Conversely, percepts have conceptual content. They are not raw experience, but require conceptualization. We must perceive a thing as having some property, or, to borrow a phrase from Anscombe, "under some description" (1957). For example, we may only sense—or have a sensation of—a certain sound. But, in sensation, we are only getting raw input. We cannot conceptualize it, even as a sound. Conversely, we can perceive of a sound as a sound (or as an instrument playing, or as a flute playing, or as a high C, etc.). Here is the difficulty. A sensation—which, by definition, lacks conceptual content—cannot justify a belief. Our sensation of the sound cannot justify the belief "I hear a flute" because this requires applying a concept. So, the sensation cannot do this work. Conversely, if we try to use percepts, we can perhaps justify the belief—if we perceive the sound as a flute, this seems to provide some justification for the belief "I hear a flute." But how do we justify this perception? ("Justify" here is probably the wrong term—it seems that we justify beliefs, not percepts. But there is an analogous concept here—why should we think that the percept is accurate?) Suppose we have a low-level percept, one with minimal informational content—just, say, that I hear something. But this cannot

justify a belief that I hear a flute. It lacks the information to do so. If we have a “high-level”—information-rich—percept, this does seem to have the resources to justify us. So, if we perceive the sound as a flute, this does justify the belief “I hear a flute.” But this high-level percept just strikes Lyons as being almost the same as the belief. In fact, very high-level percepts seem to have identical content with the belief. But now, it isn’t clear that *experience* does any justifying. And, if it did, it would itself require justification. We will need a closer discussion of this point to see if Lyons is right. This is the focus of chapter four.

Bergmann (2006) begins with the concept of *awareness* (p. 13). He contends that the distinction between internalism and externalism is this: the internalist requires that a subject be aware of what a belief has going for it to be justified in having that belief, while the externalist denies this. But awareness comes in two varieties—strong and weak. Strong awareness requires that the subject be aware of what justifies his belief and aware that this justifier is positively relevant to the justification of the belief. Conversely, weak awareness only requires that the subject be aware of the justifier: he need not “see” that it contributes to the justification of his belief. The difficulty is this: if we require strong awareness, then we start a vicious regress. If we only require weak awareness, then it seems that the belief—from the believer’s perspective—is a mere hunch. This undermines what was supposed to be advantageous about internalism to begin with. So, the internalist is out of luck whether requires strong or weak awareness. Bergmann’s dilemma and my response are the subject of chapter five.

#### *4. Chapter summaries*

Here’s the plan for the rest of the essay.

In chapter two, we will examine the concept of epistemic reasons more closely. While we cannot possibly offer a full account of epistemic reasons—that would probably

be its own book—we will attempt to give a working account of what an epistemic reason is. We will also consider the fault-lines of contemporary epistemology in terms of epistemic reasons: we will see how epistemic reasons divide internalists and externalists, and coherentists from foundationalists. We will also give examples of how epistemic reasons work in the case of particular beliefs, including perceptual beliefs.

In chapter three, we provide some context for our dilemmas. Sellars's dilemma, I argue, is identical in structure to our more recent dilemmas. Showing this requires a close inspection of Sellars's dilemma. After discussing the dilemma, I attempt to reformulate it in terms of epistemic reasons. This reveals a parallelism in structure with other dilemmas—BonJour's, Lyons's, and Bergmann's. We shall also consider what a good response to Sellars (and Bonjour) might look like. We shall do this by considering what qualities a good response must have, and then determining what responses are available. I will also argue that the view defended in chapter two can handle this challenge.

Chapter four continues our discussion of Lyons's dilemma. In it, we consider his dilemma at some length, including reframing the structure of the dilemma in terms of epistemic reasons. This will allow us to see what any good response requires. I then propose my solution of Lyons's dilemma and consider several objections.

The last chapter turns our attention to Bergmann's dilemma. The chapter is structurally similar to chapter four: we consider Bergmann's dilemma in some detail, and reconstruct it in terms of epistemic reasons. We consider what features an adequate response must have, and outline a response. We then consider what objections Bergmann might propose, and attempt to defuse them. The chapter—and the essay—closes by considering what the failures of these dilemmas mean for epistemology, and by returning to the worries about skepticism with which we began.

## CHAPTER TWO

### EPISTEMIC REASONS AND NON-INFERENTIAL JUSTIFICATION

In chapter one, I contended that *epistemic reason* was the central concept of the essay. I shall use it to diagnose the disagreements between internalists and externalists. More importantly, we will recast our target dilemmas in terms of epistemic reasons. This will allow us—I hope—to show how acquaintance foundationalism may respond to these dilemmas. To complete these tasks, we need a better understanding of epistemic reasons, which is the task of this chapter.

It may be helpful to break such a complex task into smaller bits. It seems that we have three tasks before us. First, we must get clear on the notion of an epistemic reason. Second, we must explain the relationship between epistemic reasons and justification. Finally, we should be clear on the importance of epistemic reasons for the internalism/externalism debate. I shall take up these tasks in turn, by answering the following questions: What is an epistemic reason? What role do epistemic reasons play in providing justification? How do we make sense of the internalism/externalism controversy *via* epistemic reasons?

#### 1. *What is an epistemic reason?*

We could have several issues in mind when asking this question. We may look for an answer in terms of functional role: what do epistemic reasons *do*? Conversely, we might want to ask about the metaphysics of epistemic reasons. What things can *be* epistemic reasons, or what items can realize the role of an epistemic reason? I shall attempt to address both issues by answering the following two questions:

- 1) What role do epistemic reasons play in our epistemic lives?
- 2) What constitutes being an epistemic reason?

Answering these two questions constitutes an answer to our big question of what epistemic reasons are.

### 1.1 WHAT ROLE DO EPISTEMIC REASONS PLAY IN OUR EPISTEMIC LIVES?

Recall that, in the last chapter, we discussed the possible equivalence of *epistemic reason* with *justifier* or *evidence*. I think that, in general, we use the terms interchangeably, although “epistemic reason” is less common. We did not discuss this alleged equivalence at any length, as we wanted to avoid an entangling discussion over the nature of evidence and justifiers. But we might attempt to start our discussion about the role of epistemic reasons by appeal to the roles of evidence and justifiers. That is, at first pass, we might think of epistemic reasons as playing the same role as evidence (or justifiers). This threatens to give us a different problem: there seems to be no consensus about what roles, say, evidence fills.<sup>27</sup> It seems difficult to try and explain a technical concept (epistemic reason) by appeal to a vague concept (evidence). However, we should see if this sheds any light on our question.

Rephrasing, then: what is the role that these concepts—epistemic reasons, evidence, justifiers—play in our epistemic lives? It seems that they are *epistemic indicators*. They show us which way to believe, when we are concerned only with *epistemic goodness*. The reader may be frustrated at this point. What, pray tell, is *epistemic goodness*? This requires a brief digression.

It seems that we may accept a belief on different grounds.<sup>28</sup> For instance, we mentioned in chapter one the difference between *pragmatic* and *epistemic* reasons for belief (from whence the name of the concept under discussion). And we may multiply

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<sup>27</sup> Tom Kelly has discussed this problem at length in his SEP article on Evidence (Kelly (2014)).

<sup>28</sup> For a good discussion of the various reasons for which we may accept a belief, as well as a discussion of the difficulty of pinning down what is unique to epistemic goodness, see Fumerton’s discussion in (1995, pp. 8-20).

types of reasons: moral reasons, perhaps even legal reasons,<sup>29</sup> and it is difficult to pin down what separates these from epistemic reasons. We might say that pragmatic reasons show why a belief has good consequences, but not why it is *true*. Moral reasons show that a belief is morally sound, but not necessarily true—and *mutatis mutandis* for the other kinds of goodness belief can have. In other words, if we care only about truth, then it seems that we should only appeal to epistemic reasons. But even this formula is a bit misleading. As Fumerton and others have pointed out,<sup>30</sup> we may concoct elaborate scenarios where a motivation to believe truths makes someone ignore their epistemic reasons. Here's one: suppose that, inspired by reading Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, I come to believe that if Christianity were true, and I were to become a good Christian, I would someday come to know the truth in a very profound way, and no longer "through a glass darkly." However, suppose further that I recognize that my evidence for Christianity is not good enough for belief, and I realize that I cannot be a good Christian unless I also believe in the truths of the Christian religion. It seems that I now have good reasons—from a perspective merely concerned with truth—to try and get myself to believe those things. This is an epistemic Pascal's wager: if my bet pays off, I get to know lots of true things—perhaps all the true things—whereas if I am wrong, I only believe a few false things. (The truths of even a complicated faith like Catholicism could probably all be stated in a large book. Even if they are all false, this is a small number compared to the total things I believe.) But is my belief in Christianity *on these grounds* epistemically good? By no means! This is so despite the belief being motivated by a desire for truth.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> A Muslim living under Sharia law has good legal reasons to remain a Muslim; Mormons had good legal reasons for changing their position on polygamy, etc.

<sup>30</sup> See footnote 2, this chapter.

<sup>31</sup> This case is similar to ones raised by Fumerton, but it is of my own devising. Any weaknesses are mine.

But it is still difficult to pin down what epistemic goodness *is*. We could try instead to define epistemic goodness in terms of something else, like “following one’s evidence.” But this would be unhelpful, for we must say that evidence is what determines which belief are good—presumably—*epistemically* good—and this is just circular. It isn’t clear, then, that appealing to other concepts will help us get clear on epistemic goodness.

This difficulty is, perhaps, what we should expect. We discussed in chapter one the possibility that we could “naturalize” epistemology, where this meant discharging epistemic terms. One proposal—with which I have some sympathy—is that we cannot discharge this term and retain the normativity of epistemology. Epistemology makes normative judgments about belief (justified or not, rational or not, etc.). And, if we get rid of our normative terms, we turn epistemology into a very different sort of exercise. We can describe what people believe, and perhaps say something about what makes certain beliefs more likely to be true. But we will give up the idea of passing judgment on beliefs (or believers). There is an analogy with ethics here: we must retain some normative terms to maintain the normative force of ethical judgments. So, we can define good in terms of right, and so on, but we must have some ethical primitives if we are to keep ethics a normative discipline, and not merely as a description of human action. In a similar way, we must maintain some normative epistemic primitives to maintain epistemology as a normative discipline. Perhaps “epistemic goodness” is one of these terms.

Recall that the point of our digression about epistemic goodness was to clarify what we meant by calling an epistemic reason an “epistemic indicator.” We can see now what an epistemic reason indicates is epistemic goodness, which may end up being a primitive notion. Perhaps another analogy will be helpful. We can think of our epistemic reasons as being the (epistemic) guarantors of our claims. We have beliefs that we use to make decisions. It seems that what shows these beliefs to be wise (rational) or foolish

(irrational) is what “backs them up.” In short, it seems that epistemic goodness is goodness where we are primarily concerned with truth-connectedness. We want some good—epistemically good—reason to think our beliefs are true. We may take up a banking analogy here. Suppose I write a check. (For the younger readers—a check is a sort of complicated IOU that a person may redeem from someone who can give them real money.) The goodness of the check depends on the standing of my account, which in turn depends in part on the soundness of the financial institution. One of the purposes of Federal guarantees of banks and credit unions is to provide a foundation on which stable transactions may occur. In a similar way, it seems that our beliefs also rely on *epistemic* guarantees. So, when someone makes an epistemic claim (they seem to be claiming knowledge or justified belief), we may ask him to show us that the claim is sound. We ask for an epistemic reason.

While this has perhaps been an unsatisfying discussion of the role of epistemic reasons, space considerations—and not having much else to say—compels us to move on.

### *1.2 WHAT CONSTITUTES AN EPISTEMIC REASON?*

If one is inclined to cynicism, then one may note that originality is more important than truth when it comes to philosophical fame. Defending an original—but implausible—view serves as a better springboard to notoriety than patiently defending correct but uninteresting views. I, of course, am not so vicious as to be cynical, so I shall refrain from speculating on such matters. In any case, I will content myself with adopting a view I find plausible, even if I did not think of it. In other words, I plan on lifting the view of another philosopher, rearranging it a bit, and calling it my account of epistemic reasons. In particular, I rely heavily on Richard Fumerton’s treatment of justification to explain epistemic reasons. This requires a substantial discussion of Fumerton’s



epistemology.<sup>32</sup>

Recall from chapter one that I argue that epistemic reasons are a complex of acquaintances. This makes “acquaintance” a fundamental concept for understanding epistemic reasons, and we thus need to give a fuller treatment than that offered in the first chapter. We should begin by noting that I am not reviving Russell’s idea of knowledge by acquaintance. For Russell, this knowledge was “direct” (and not propositional).<sup>33</sup> Conversely, I am not even sure it is proper to speak of non-propositional knowledge. In any case, as we focus in this essay on propositional knowledge, we will have to think of acquaintance differently than Russell did. What, then, do we mean?

Acquaintance is a direct grasping of some object by the mind.<sup>34</sup> The closest we can get is to say that when S is acquainted with p, p is directly before S’s mind. There is no intervening medium. Of course, this talk of media may make things less clear. We should be careful to avoid misunderstanding. Saying that the mind “directly” grasps p should not suggest some sort of ESP, whereby S acquaints himself with the world without help from his senses or from language. Rather, the point is that, while S of course must use his eyes to see something red, his acquaintance with redness is—somehow—direct. For instance, I may never have considered whether 101 is the smallest prime number greater than 100. I may only consider it because you tell me that it is. Does my belief that 101 is the smallest prime number greater than 100 depend on your testimony? There is some *causal* dependence—I might not have considered the proposition if I hadn’t heard you say it—but if I can “see” for myself that the statement is

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<sup>32</sup> In particular, it will require an extended discussion of his treatment of non-inferential justification. In what follows, I take many of my ideas and the structure of epistemic reasons from the third chapter of his (1995).

<sup>33</sup> For an extended discussion of this position, see Russell (1982), especially chapter five.

<sup>34</sup> Fumerton will say that it is a relation between the mind and some “thing, property, or fact” (1995, 74). I intend the grasping talk as a useful metaphor, compatible with Fumerton’s treatment. I cannot guarantee that he will like it much, however.

true, then surely there is no longer testimonial dependence, where what justifies the belief is the testimony. What does this have to do with acquaintance? Just this: my belief about the smallest prime number greater than 100 originates with you but no longer depends on you for epistemic support. In a similar way, my belief that “x is red” originates with my senses, but does not depend on them for its continued support. It relies on my mental grasp—my acquaintance with—the relevant facts. (Of course, perceptual beliefs are contingent in a way that mathematical beliefs are not. I could get new evidence that x is not red. And this evidence, of course, depends on my senses. But if I, say, were to become blind a few seconds after seeing x, it seems that I might still have the appropriate grasp of—acquaintance with—the relevant facts and propositions. And it seems that I could still maintain that “x *was* red,” even if I can no longer be confident of its current color. )

Similarly, our acquaintance might originate by means of, or depend on, language. So, for instance, when I see something red, it seems that to have the thought “x is red,” I must have the word “red.” But words are not concepts. While I probably have to have the word “red” to *express* what I see, it does not seem that I must have the word “red” to grasp the concept. We are in pretty murky philosophical waters here, but it seems to me that if I could not pick out the property red, I could not have learned the word “red” in the first place. For example, a congenitally blind person may use “red” appropriately in expressions like “roses are red.” But it seems almost trivial to say that such a person lacks (at least part of) the concept. He doesn’t have the “full” concept. (I say “full” concept because it seems that there are lots of things about the concept RED a congenitally blind person can know: at the very least, we can say that he knows that if someone calls something red, certain other expressions are also considered appropriate. If “x is red” is true, then “x is colored,” “x is a warm color,” “x is color highly visible to humans”, etc., are also true. What the blind person lacks is an acquaintance with

redness.) All of this to say that it does not seem that acquaintance depends on language. It may be the media—or a medium—by which we acquaint ourselves with thoughts and facts. But it is misleading to suggest that we are merely acquainted with certain linguistic expressions. In acquaintance, we may be directly acquainted with reality itself, in the form of facts, thoughts, and beliefs. (None of this should suggest that we could not be acquainted with verbal or linguistic expressions like sentences or sentence tokens. But we can be acquainted with much more than these.)

Having cleared away these misconceptions, the reader may still be curious as to what acquaintance is, exactly. A useful way to get at the relevant concept is by ostension (Fumerton, 1995, p. 76). Pain is perhaps the best exemplar of a state with which we may be acquainted. Imagine putting your hand on a hot stove, or dropping a heavy box of books on your foot. The pain is immediately there before consciousness. This is why it sounds odd to ask someone why he thinks he is in pain. (This is also due, in part, to our assumption that people cannot give good reasons for thinking they are in pain. We can tell someone we are in pain, or indicate that we are (limping, grimacing, screaming, etc.), but it would be bizarre to propose these as a method of *proving* that someone is in pain (in a strong sense of proof). However, these linguistic habits are only part of the story.) We don't usually ask someone how he knows that he is in pain because we just think that it is obvious to someone when he is in pain. We should be careful that someone could be in pain and not realize it. This does seem to be possible if, say, you have a dull pain that you fail to attend to when concentrating very hard on something else (DePaul, 2001, p. 14). But it does seem to be pretty safe to say that if someone says he is in pain, he is in a position to know that he is. Whether the speaker is honest is a separate matter.

Taking a hint from Chisholm, we might also try to “get familiar” with acquaintance by considering our own beliefs. He suggests that beliefs about what we

believe are self-justifying.<sup>35</sup> We will ignore the possibility of self-justification for reasons of space, but I think that we can use acquaintance to make sense of Chisholm's example without appeal to self-justification. It seems that what we believe is "there before the mind," at least in the best cases. This is a complicated story, but the way to start is with acquaintance. I directly grasp the belief, and this (partly) explains how it is that I know (or am justified in believing) that I believe that thing. This acquaintance is not sufficient for justification, nor should any of this suggest that I have infallible access to my own beliefs. But there does seem to be here a very clear confrontation between the mind and reality. This is thus a paradigm case of acquaintance.

Assuming that there is such a thing as acquaintance, what are the objects of this acquaintance? And how do we use these things to get justification?

Please note that I offer the following terms provisionally. I follow Fumerton's usage, but I make no claim about the ultimate reality of any of these items. For instance, I contend—following Fumerton—that we may be acquainted with facts. But if the reader dislikes facts (preferring, perhaps, "states of affairs"), he is welcome to substitute his own favored ontological items and see how things go. We should also note that I do not attempt an exhaustive list here. That is, we may be acquainted with an indefinite number of kinds of things. But we are attempting to provide an account of epistemic reasons and justification, not take inventory of the mind's pantry. I thus focus only on those items that we need to construct epistemic reasons.

Facts are non-linguistic states of affairs. It is "the way things are." Facts are also, in some sense, mind-independent. It is tempting to say, in other words, that there were facts from the very beginning of the universe, and that a fact is a fact regardless of

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<sup>35</sup> For an extended discussion of this point, see his *Theory of Knowledge* (1966). BonJour also discusses a similar point in his (2002).

whether anyone notices it or not.<sup>36</sup> Following Fumerton, we may place the species “fact” under the genus “state of affairs.” This is because it sounds natural to talk of non-actual states of affairs, but it sounds odd to speak of non-actual (false (?!)) facts (Fumerton, 1995, pp. 73-74). Facts should be factive.

Facts, then, are some obtaining state of affairs, capable, in theory, of expression via propositions.<sup>37</sup> To describe a fact, we must use words. But the words are not part of the fact itself (except in the trivial cases where the facts are linguistic facts). Like Fumerton, I contend that animals and non-linguistic humans may be acquainted with facts (1995, p. 75). Your dog may be acquainted with the fact that there is water in the dish, even though the dog lacks (presumably) the linguistic abilities to represent that fact in thought. This suggests that having a justified belief depends on more than mere acquaintance with facts.

The next necessary item is a thought. Thoughts are—again, following Fumerton—propositional in structure, and, for Fumerton, thoughts are propositions, although I will not insist on this point (1995, p. 73). Many thoughts have truth-values.<sup>38</sup> Note that thoughts can represent or picture facts. The thought “x is red” represents the fact that x is red. Indeed, this picturing (or failure to picture) makes some propositions true (and others false). This is just a correspondence theory of truth. When the thought

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<sup>36</sup> I am hesitant to endorse this view. If God (of a classical nature) exists, then it seems that facts are mind-dependent after all—there would not be any facts unless God created and sustained them. So to say that facts are mind-independent seems to beg an important question against this version of theism. But I am willing to say this: if God does not exist, facts are mind-independent, and there were facts long before there were any minds to acquaint themselves with them.

<sup>37</sup> I include this hedge (“in theory”) because of the possibility that some facts may be ineffable or otherwise beyond our abilities to express them linguistically. Churchill and I may be acquainted with the same fact; he may be able to express it while I only stammer. But it seems that my failure doesn’t affect the fact. Nor, I think, should we say that I couldn’t be acquainted with the fact. We might end up concluding, however, that I am not—and perhaps could not be—justified in believing the fact obtains. More on this presently.

<sup>38</sup> I say “many” because of questions, commands, and the like. It seems that these have propositional content—they are thoughts—but they don’t have truth-values.

corresponds to a fact it is true. When it fails to correspond it is false (Fumerton, 1995, p. 73). A thought must also be part of our epistemic reasons. Our epistemic reasons, it seems, need propositional content to be about something definite, and thoughts provide the propositional content. When the subject is acquainted with a thought, it may be part of his epistemic reason for certain beliefs.

This talk of acquaintance with a thought may prick up the reader's ears. "Does this mean one can be unacquainted with—unaware of—one's own thoughts?" The locution does sound odd but in reality isn't. Remember that thoughts are propositions. And there is no difficulty in saying that there are propositions with which one is unacquainted. There may be a difficulty about what makes the proposition a thought at all. (Surely not all propositions are *my* thoughts.) And I care about my thoughts when it comes to justifying my beliefs. We will return to this worry when we discuss non-inferential justification.

The final items we need in our toolbox are relations. For something to be an epistemic reason, it seems that it must serve as an *epistemic indicator*: some belief is (epistemically) good (or bad). But note that mere acquaintance with thoughts, facts, and beliefs will not yield an epistemic indicator. Merely grasping, say, a fact and thought does not indicate the epistemic status of anything. Nor does merely grasping two beliefs tell us about the epistemic status of either one. What is missing? We need the beliefs to be related in a certain way, if one is to provide epistemic support for the other—that is, if one is to be an epistemic reason for the other. Or, if we are treating cases where the belief does not rest on another belief—cases of foundational epistemic support, cases where the epistemic reason is not itself a belief—then we need some connection between the proposition (thought) we believe and its support (the fact). It seems we need two relations here: one relating beliefs and one relating propositions to facts. However, as this essay focuses on basic beliefs, I will ignore the case where a belief supports another

belief, and instead focus on non-inferential justification.

With respect to foundational epistemic reasons, the relation we want is one of *correspondence*.<sup>39</sup> That is, we want the relevant bits to “fit” in the appropriate way.<sup>40</sup> In particular, we want the fact and the thought to fit together. What is this notion of fit? It is probably unhelpful to say that it means the thought and the fact correspond. But this is, in fact, just what they do. Recall that we said that thoughts could picture the world (or could represent it). It is facts that determine whether they do, in fact, picture the world. If the thought corresponds to a fact, we say that the proposition (thought) is true. If there is not a corresponding fact, the proposition (thought) is false. And this correspondence is something with which we may acquaint ourselves. When we are so acquainted, we grasp that the fact and the thought “fit” together. We hold them together in the mind’s eye, in the way that we might hold two pieces of film up to the light—one on top of the other—to see if they are the same.

### 1.3 NON-DOXASTIC EPISTEMIC REASONS

We are prepared at last to offer an account of basic epistemic reasons (which are non-doxastic in that a belief does not constitute part of the justification<sup>41</sup>). In what follows, I shall closely follow Richard Fumerton’s account of non-inferential justification. But note that I am not yet offering an account of non-inferential justification. I am merely offering an account of *epistemic reasons*, a subject Fumerton does not discuss (at least, not under that description). Here is the plan: I take part of what Fumerton claims is integral to non-inferential justification, and call this an epistemic reason. We will

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<sup>39</sup> For Fumerton’s discussion of correspondence, see (1995, pp. 74-75).

<sup>40</sup> It is not clear that Bonjour means it in quite this way, but he does have a nice discussion of something like “fit” in his (2002, pp. 211-216).

<sup>41</sup> Note that this does not suggest that these cannot contribute to doxastic justification. They are “non-doxastic” only in the sense that the justification does not consist of a belief.

postpone (to the next section) how justification depends on epistemic reasons. But this first requires an understanding of what epistemic reasons are, which is our immediate task.

In the most general terms, epistemic reasons consist of a set of acquaintances. If the right set of acquaintances exists, then that set of acquaintances just is an epistemic reason. The necessary set of acquaintances is a thought, a fact, and a relation of correspondence. That is, when we are acquainted with the thought that *p*, the fact that *p*, and the relation of correspondence between the fact and the thought, then there is an epistemic reason in favor of *p*. That is, when we are acquainted with a proposition (a thought), the fact that makes it true, and the “fit” between the fact and the proposition, then this just is an epistemic reason for *p*.

## *2. How do epistemic reasons provide justification?*

Once we turn our attention to justification, there are two important distinctions to make. The first is between inferential and non-inferential justification. Recall that, for the foundationalist, we must trace our justified beliefs back to foundational beliefs, and, for the acquaintance foundationalist, back to items with which we are acquainted. These beliefs do not rely on any other beliefs for their justification. The kind of justification they have will be distinct from non-foundational beliefs, which, by definition, rely on other beliefs for their justification. This division we call inferential versus non-inferential justification.

The other distinction that we must keep in mind is that between doxastic and propositional justification. Doxastic justification is that state a subject enjoys when his belief is well supported and he is aware of the support. A subject may fail to have doxastic justification in one of two ways. First, the belief may not be justified—there may be no epistemic support, or insufficient support. Second, the belief may be supported,



but the subject may not realize that it is. He may not have reflected on his source of justification. There is also a question here about whether doxastic justification requires occurrent beliefs. To be doxastically justified in believing that *p* is the case, must I be thinking about *p* “right now”? It seems to me that this is not necessary. However, it does seem to be necessary to have at some point considered the belief and one’s support for it. This restriction seems necessary to account for the following: one may have never considered some proposition, like “My mass is greater than that of a poached (chicken) egg.” On reflection, almost everyone will assent to such a proposition, and be justified in accepting it. But it sounds odd to say that someone is doxastically justified in believing this when he has never even considered the belief. Contrast this case with one where our subject has considered a belief, accepts it, etc., but is simply not thinking about it right now. (To borrow a Fumertonian (1995) example, Goldman is probably not thinking that justification relies on reliability *right now*, but that doesn’t mean that he doesn’t believe it, or couldn’t be doxastically justified in believing it (p. 58).)

What about propositional justification? We can understand it in terms of doxastic justification. If a subject possesses the relevant justifier—epistemic reason—for a belief, but has not made the appropriate inferences, or seen the appropriate connections, then the subject is said to have propositional justification. In other words, if a subject has justification such that if he were to make the appropriate inference, etc., then he would be doxastically justified, then the subject is propositionally justified.

We proceed, with these distinctions in mind, to offer an account of non-inferential justification.

### *2.1 NON-INFERENTIAL JUSTIFICATION*

We proceed in the following way: we begin with a discussion of propositional justification, then turn to doxastic justification. Note that we will leave unanswered

questions about what constitutes having a justified belief, as this involves a much more detailed discussion of defeaters, infallibility, what it is to be a belief, etc.

Non-inferential propositional justification, I propose, consists in there being an epistemic reason for the proposition in question.<sup>42</sup> Recall that (non-doxastic) epistemic reasons consist of a three-fold acquaintance: with the thought that *p*, with the fact that makes *p* true, and with the relation of correspondence between the fact and the thought. Thus, when we have these three acquaintances, we have propositional justification for *p*.<sup>43</sup>

However, this is insufficient for doxastic justification. In particular, we want the belief to be based on this epistemic reason, and not be a mere hunch. We achieve doxastic justification with—perhaps unsurprisingly—more acquaintances. To have non-inferential doxastic justification for a belief that *p*, we must be acquainted with the belief that *p*, acquainted with the epistemic reason in favor of the proposition *p*, and acquainted with the relation that connects these two. What relation is this? It is tempting to say that it is very much like the relation of correspondence between the fact that *p* and the thought that *p*: it seems that beliefs and their reasons may “fit” together in much the same way that facts and thoughts do.

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<sup>42</sup> Note that I am only claiming necessity here, not sufficiency. For if it is possible to have conflicting epistemic reasons for the same basic belief—I am not sure this is possible, but I am thinking of cases like optical illusions—then it seems that there could be an epistemic reason in favor of *p* without *p* being justified.

<sup>43</sup> Fumerton (1995) at times talks as though this is sufficient for having a justified belief (p. 75). That is, when we had the three acquaintances and also had the thought that *p*, we would have a justified belief that *p*. (And, to be clear, Fumerton did not think that it is possible to be acquainted with the thought that *p* without having the thought that *p*. He simply wanted to emphasize, I think, the occurrent nature of the belief (see Fumerton, 1995, p. 76) But he seems to have backed off of this position—see his remarks in DePaul (2001) contending that, as there is a basing requirement on justification, the tri-partite acquaintance only gets us propositional justification (pp. 13-14, p. 20, n. 16). Thus, I think that the position outlined thus far is in accord with Fumerton’s position. Also, I am about to add another requirement for doxastic justification, and I make no claims for there to be anything particularly Fumertonian about this view (other than it being a species of acquaintance foundationalism).

Thus, doxastic justification also consists of a three-fold acquaintance: with a belief, its epistemic reason, and the relation of correspondence—or, if one thinks that this is not the same as the relation of correspondence, we may call it correspondence\*—between them. And the epistemic reason itself consists of acquaintances, so doxastic justification will consist, in part, of acquaintance with acquaintances. (Note that this is possible: for, on acquaintance foundationalism, it is only by acquaintance with acquaintance that we know what acquaintance is to begin with.)

Let's review the merits of this account. First, by being partially copied from Fumerton and the other acquaintance foundationalists, it is not so novel as to induce immediate skepticism. (I am always suspicious when someone proposes an idea that no one has ever thought of before: while it is possible that the person proposing it is smarter—or more perceptive—that everyone else who has ever considered the problem, I am skeptical that this possibility actually obtains.) Second, by appealing to acquaintance, it allows for basic beliefs, a necessity on any foundationalist account. Third, acquaintance also allows us to get input from the world. Fourth, it allows us access to this input, unlike many externalist theories, where it is unclear how the complicated processes under discussion could improve the subject's epistemic position. Fifth, the acquaintances allow us to get propositional information—allowing us to justify a belief—without requiring us to begin with a justified proposition. This will allow us to avoid, I contend, Sellarsian-type dilemmas. (The reader may be skeptical on this last point, or perhaps all of them. While we cannot give an exhaustive defense of all of these, recall that the main purpose of this essay is negative, showing that acquaintance foundationalism does not fall prey to the challenge of various dilemmas. I thus will assume the truth of the account in the rest of the essay and spend the last three chapters showing that it does not fall prey to various dilemmas. This does not prove that the account is true, but it does overcome some very powerful objections.)

## 2.2 INITIAL OBJECTIONS

It seems that there are two big worries here. The first is “over-intellectualization”—I am describing something that is far too complex to be what really goes on. After all, don’t we, at fairly tender ages, have non-inferentially justified beliefs about bread-box-sized objects? The second worry is related. Suppose that we, in response to over-intellectualization worries, claim that much of this happened inchoately in the believer. “It’s not at though you must rehearse a little story in your head about acquaintances and then you have a non-inferentially justified belief,” etc. The worry is that pursuing this line loses the “internalist” constraint on justification. If we claim that too much is going on with the subject blissfully unaware, it will be unclear how it is that these things are supposed to justify the subject (at least on internalist conceptions of justification).

The internalist finds himself caught between the rock of over-intellectualization and the hard place of externalism. To address this worry, we must distinguish between being justified and explaining what justifies us. Someone can be perfectly well justified in believing there are apples in the basket without being able to say what it is that justifies him. The reader may be skeptical on this point. But it seems no different from saying that someone can recognize a color without explaining what color is, or what makes things colored. Or, someone can recognize a trumpet playing without any clear understanding of the principles affecting an instrument’s *timbre*. But the case of justification, the reader may protest, is different. For justification, the internalist thinks that someone must give an *account* of his belief, and this he cannot do without an understanding of what justifies him (or *that* it justifies him). At first pass, we should distinguish between the ability to grasp something as a justifier and being able to explain what constitutes justification. The ability to grasp something as a justifier requires

grasping how a belief connects to its support; the ability to explain what constitutes justification requires describing, in some detail, what it is for something to support a belief. “But,” the reader may object, “don’t we think that someone who is completely clueless about the support for his belief cannot properly be said to be justified at all?” This is true. “Why do you believe x?” “I dunno”—this is hardly a paradigm of justification. But still, we must distinguish between not being able to say *what* justifies him and giving an account of justification *generally*. A wide gulf separates cases where someone believes at random and the case where someone can only fumble through what justifies his belief. We shall return to this point when we consider Bergmann’s dilemma.

The reader may be skeptical of this account, and may worry that it will fall into regress. We shall delay full consideration of the question of regress until chapters four and five, when we examine the arguments of Lyons and Bergmann. However, we should say a bit more about how this account deals with particular cases. This will also be a useful prelude to considering regress worries. As the focus of this essay is basic perceptual beliefs, let’s consider a case of this type.

On the shelf in front of me is a red book. I believe the proposition “that book is red.” Am I justified in this belief, and in what does this justification consist? According to my account, my doxastic justification consists of my acquaintance with the belief in question, along with my acquaintance with the epistemic reason in favor of the belief, and my acquaintance with the connection between the two. Let’s start with the epistemic reason in favor of the belief. It too consists of acquaintances—the acquaintance with the fact that the book is red, the thought that “that book is red,” and the relation of correspondence between the fact and the thought. And then, I must also be acquainted—or perhaps be able to acquaint myself, on reflection—with the relation between the belief and the epistemic reason. It seems that there is no obvious regress here. Of course, the reader may challenge my contention that acquaintances exist, or that they can do the

relevant epistemic work. My point is merely that we seem to have avoided regress thus far.

Again, I should emphasize that I need not rehearse this little story to have doxastic justification. There is a difference between being justified and describing what makes me justified. Most people probably will not tell a story like what I have told, but this, of course, does nothing to affect justification, any more than my inability to discuss music theory or the physics of sound waves with much sophistication has any bearing on my ability to match a pitch or to hear that the pitches match. Again, the externalist will not be convinced by this account. We need a closer consideration of the cases to determine whether this account falls prey to the regresses that Lyons and Bergman have cooked up. But we will delay such discussion to later chapters.

In the first chapter, I contended that the idea of epistemic reasons was critical to making sense of various epistemic controversies. Having outlined an account of epistemic reasons, I am now ready to elaborate on this claim, which will set up the remainder of the essay.

### *3. How do epistemic reasons divide up contemporary epistemology?*

The earlier parts of this chapter attempted to answer two questions: what role do epistemic reasons play? And what constitutes an epistemic reason? It is interesting to note that some, and perhaps all, disputants in contemporary epistemology accept something like my answer to the first question. (This is probably not, strictly speaking, accurate, as most of them do not consider the term "epistemic reasons" at all. But we may plausibly reinterpret their constructions in terms of epistemic reasons.) Recall that epistemic reasons are what make a belief epistemically good. They play a "supporting" role in our doxastic lives. And this, by itself, is (probably) not controversial. It seems instead that the dispute will be about what *counts* as an epistemic reason, or what may

give us an epistemic reason. Even oddballs like Rorty or Williamson would likely agree with the near platitudes of the first section of this chapter. Rorty, famously, thought that all reasons are relative to a particular perspective on the world<sup>44</sup> (although he seemed awfully convinced that religious fundamentalism is really, really bad, and not merely from his perspective<sup>45</sup>). But it seems that Rorty would allow epistemic reasons to play the kind of role I have outlined. He simply thinks that these reasons must be contextual. Williamson argues that evidence is known propositions.<sup>46</sup> This is an unusual (in the sense of “uncommon”) treatment of evidence, which makes it difficult to know what Williamson would make of my talk of “epistemic reasons.” But it seems we could argue that Williamson concedes my general point about the role of epistemic reasons, but wishes to challenge what counts as an epistemic reason (i.e., only known propositions can play the role of an epistemic reason).

We thus turn our attention to what counts as an epistemic reason. It is here that we may divide epistemologists up. Consider coherentism. Coherentists argue, roughly, that beliefs have no foundation. We justify our beliefs by reference to other beliefs. My belief that it is raining does not depend on some privileged basic beliefs, themselves supported by experience, but instead on how well it “coheres” with my other beliefs. We may give this as a motto: nothing justifies beliefs except beliefs. Translating, we may say that coherentists contend that only a belief may serve as an epistemic reason. Note that this is just another way of saying there can be no basic beliefs, for, on this view, *every* belief is supported by other beliefs, in contrast to the foundationalist, who contends that not every belief is supported by another belief.

What about internalism and externalism? We may see one historically important

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<sup>44</sup> See, e.g., his extended discussion in Rorty (1979).

<sup>45</sup> For a particularly patronizing discussion of religious Americans, see Rorty (2001).

<sup>46</sup> See especially chapter nine of his (2000).

and interesting debate between internalists and externalists—that is, the debate I wish to join—as a family squabble between foundationalists, as almost all externalists are foundationalists (although not explicitly).<sup>47</sup> As we discussed in chapter one, most externalists accept a foundationalist structure of justification (although not always explicitly), but disagree with internalists about what justifies basic beliefs. In other words, the dispute is over whether every belief needs an epistemic reason to be justified. Externalists, in my view, do not claim that every justified belief needs an epistemic reason. This is the purpose of “external” methods of justification. They justify (at least) foundational beliefs, but do not (necessarily) provide epistemic reasons for them. (I say “at least” foundational beliefs, because it is unclear whether all beliefs directly depend on the externalist source of justification, or whether some of them may be inferred from other beliefs, and, if so, whether this is itself an “external” process.) Take reliabilists as our exemplar. The reliabilist contends that a belief’s causal history can justify it. If my belief that “there is a red balloon” has the appropriate causal history—if it is the output of a reliable belief-forming mechanism—then that belief is justified. Recall that I need not have access to the fact of this reliability. We have justified foundation without epistemic reasons.

Thus, we can see the challenge of Lyons and Bergmann (both externalists) this way: the internalist cannot provide epistemic reasons for foundational beliefs according to the internalist’s own standards. This may also put the reader in mind of the Sellarsian dilemma against foundationalism. I thus wish to take up Sellars’s dilemma (and the more recent formulation by BonJour) for several reasons. First, the dilemma is helpful in clarifying Lyons and Bergmann, both of whom note the similarities. Second, it is possible that considering Sellars’s dilemma in detail may point the way to defeat Lyons

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<sup>47</sup> A phenomenon discussed by Jack Lyons at some length; for a useful discussion, see Lyons (2009), especially the first two chapters.



and Bergmann. Finally, in the interest of completeness, it would be nice to show that internalist foundationalism had adequate resources to defeat all the main challenges leveled against it. To Sellars and Bonjour we now turn our attention.

## CHAPTER THREE

### SELLARS AND BONJOUR

#### *1. An epistemic history*

We may trace the development of epistemology in the twentieth century along several contours. The challenge to foundationalism laid down by Wilfrid Sellars—the “Sellarsian dilemma”—is one of these lines. Tracing the growth of this dilemma—including objections to it and developments of it—brings us eyeball to eyeball with problems at the heart of epistemology. Any place we begin our story is somewhat arbitrary; we shall begin our telling of the story with CI Lewis.

Lewis’s treatment of the given—while certainly not Sellars’s only target—we may take as representative. Lewis claimed that the given was indubitable and non-conceptual (2014, sec. 6). He refrained from according this given the title of knowledge because he believed knowledge has an opposite—error—that the given lacks. However, we may form conceptual judgments based on the given. These judgments form our beliefs and expectations about the world, and they may be mistaken (2014, sec. 6). The question is how these judgments relate to the given: if the given is entirely non-conceptual, how does it support conceptual judgments?

Trying to answer this question has driven philosophers to spill a lot of ink. We may think of each successive response to the dilemma as a battle, with each side seeking to push back the other. In First World War, the two sides found themselves pushing back and forth in successive waves, often finding that territory gained in one surge would be quickly undone by the enemy’s counter-attack. We may think of the successive moves and counter-moves with respect to the Sellarsian dilemma similarly. However, unlike the First World War, these successive waves are not wasteful. Instead, each response (at least, of the ones we shall consider) clarifies some issue left murky in the previous work.

However, each wave, while clarifying some issues, reveals other pertinent questions that we must answer if we are to have a satisfactory account of the given. (I do not mean to prejudice the issue here. I leave open the possibility that a satisfactory account of the given may be “there’s no such thing.”)

So we may think of Sellars’s response to Lewis as framing the initial statement of the problem—a problem that Lewis seems not to have fully grasped. Each successive response brings the issue—or some part of the issue—into focus. Sellars’s (1956) treatment of the problem, for instance, is not very clear. He spends much of his essay “Epistemology and the Philosophy of Mind” (hereafter EPM)—allegedly a classic statement of the problem—discussing the sense data theory. The difficulty he raises takes as its target a much broader swath of the philosophical landscape than just this theory, but the sweeping nature of his conclusion is easy to miss on a cursory reading. Also, despite the Sellarsian dilemma’s place as a standard argument against foundationalism (and usually for coherentism), Sellars seems to deny both theories (1956, p. 300). However, it is unclear what separates him from coherentism: he seems to suggest that genuine learning of concepts is possible, but not in the piecemeal fashion foundationalists suggest. The idea is rather that we learn large swaths of concepts in concert. What justifies their application in particular cases is that, over time, we notice that our concepts fit together. Perhaps, then, we learn color words in a bundle. What justifies our use of them is that we subject our use of color words “to the world.” I never baptize a certain phenomenal experience “red” in isolation, for instance, but rather I come to be justified in using lots of color words simultaneously.<sup>48</sup>

Chisholm is the next major figure in this history. He responds to the Sellarsian

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<sup>48</sup> This is, I think, supposed to be the point of Sellars’s myth at the end of EPM (see especially ss. XII and XV). John McDowell makes a similar point in *Mind and World* (1993, see especially Lecture One, ss. 4 and 5). This is not what I take to be the main line of development of the Sellarsian dilemma and so McDowell gets only this brief mention in this telling.

dilemma in ways both thrilling and frustrating ((1966); (2008)). It is thrilling because it seems that he touches the nerve of Sellars's difficulty. It is frustrating because at times he fails to give a clear statement of how we may escape the difficulty. (This failure comes not, I think, from evasion but from the sheer slipperiness of the issues.) Take, for instance, his story about the Frenchman (1966, p. 37). Suppose a Frenchman says, "There are apples in the basket," when there are potatoes in the basket. Chisholm points out that the Frenchman may have the word for "potatoes" wrong, but that this need not affect his belief that there are potatoes in the basket. There is something fundamental about being able to notice that something is a potato, and this does not depend on how we label the item. Noticing what it *is* is (philosophically) prior to applying a concept to it. This point is important, but it seems to raise just as many questions as it answers. Isn't there some kind of conceptualization going on here? And, if there is, doesn't Sellars point remain? What exactly is supposed to be serving as foundations here? Is it the potato experience, or the belief about the experience? Chisholm is not always as clear we might like. He elsewhere suggests that basic beliefs are either not in need of further justification, or are somehow self-justifying (1966, p. 23n; p. 30). But he does not give a satisfactory account of the nature of these basic beliefs. He has pointed to an important feature of our experience—it seems that there is something to be said in favor of the idea that basic beliefs depend on experience itself—but has given an incomplete description of it. This is a pattern that repeats itself in the literature on this problem (and, indeed, lots of philosophical problems). Someone will state a point that seems right, but that is difficult to state with any precision. It remains to be seen if further inspection—perhaps by the next generation of philosophers—can put it right, or if we have been putting our faith in something that seemed right only because its vagueness disguised its flaws. The idea of experience serving as our foundations is one such idea.

The next move in this development is in the early work of Laurence Bonjour. As

the reader may be aware, BonJour spent most of his early philosophical career espousing coherentist heresies before recanting and being received into the foundationalist camp. He has since attempted to make restitution via a thorough defense of acquaintance foundationalism. But, in his coherentist days, he developed the rather murky Sellarsian dilemma into a potent attack on foundationalism.<sup>49</sup> That is, he took the core idea of Sellars—the foundationalist cannot provide an adequate account of basic beliefs—and sharpened it. He does so by giving a close reading of several attempts to justify basic beliefs—by Quinton, Schlick, and Lewis—and undermining them. BonJour thus hopes to show that the very idea of a basic belief is incoherent. There is no possible way to justify a belief that does not itself require justification. This is not brute bluster by BonJour but a reasoned conclusion. He aims to prove this conclusion by examining some efforts to justify basic beliefs and concluding that these failed attempts are representative of any possible solution to the problem he outlines.

Of course, we are still speaking in unhelpfully general terms. To evaluate the merits of BonJour's case against foundationalism, we must give close consideration of his argument. This is especially so as BonJour develops his main point in slightly different forms, raising questions of whether he has given two distinct arguments or merely put one argument in two different ways. As the focus of the second part of this chapter is BonJour and his arguments, we will leave off discussion of them for the present.

Here the history—or the strand of history that I wish to trace—becomes difficult to follow. BonJour, by spelling out a coherentist account—including an account of empirical belief—in many ways redoubled the attack on coherentism. A clear statement

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<sup>49</sup> We should note that BonJour (1985) does not claim to be doing historical reconstruction of the arguments Sellars gives in EPM. Rather, he claims that he is offering something in the spirit of the Sellarsian dilemma. Whether we can identify BonJour's argument with any of those that Sellars outlines is not of primary importance, either for BonJour or for us.

of the view exposed its limitations. Coherentism began to wane in influence. While it is not a dead theory—and, even if it does “die,” it is only a matter of time until some ingenious philosopher resurrects it—it has in large part given way before trenchant criticism.<sup>50</sup> Bonjour himself recanted in the 90’s ((1997; 1998) . This conversion was part of a traditional/acquaintance foundationalist spring, in which many flowers bloomed. In addition to Bonjour, the decade saw important defenses of this view by Fales (1990, 1996), Fumerton (1995), Haack<sup>51</sup> (1993), and McGrew (1995).

Each of these books contends—some<sup>52</sup> albeit indirectly—with Sellarsian dilemmas and Bonjour’s formulations thereof. And each of them picks up disparate foundationalist threads and attempts to unify them. The result is a cluster of similar treatments, differing in points of emphasis and terminology. The different emphases often disguise real differences, however. For instance, Fales and Fumerton focus on (mostly) different aspects of the problems of our epistemic foundations. Fales (1996) is explicit in his treatment of the Sellarsian dilemma—at least Bonjour’s form of it—and contends that experience itself licenses inference, and yet is not in need of justification (pp. 167-169). It thus evades the dilemma. But Fales is often less explicit about the precise nature of this experience, and how it licenses inference. Fumerton takes the opposite tack, giving a thorough treatment of what he takes to be the relevant experience, namely acquaintance<sup>53</sup> (1995, p. 73 ff.). But he doesn’t say much about

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<sup>50</sup> For two insightful sets of criticisms of coherentism, see Haack (1993), chapter three and Fumerton (1995, chapter five). Of course, coherentists likely think that they have good responses to such criticisms, but I find these to be decisive.

<sup>51</sup> A word of explanation is necessary. Haack contends that her position is neither foundationalist nor coherentist in structure, a suggestion I find to be incoherent. I think it is best to understand Haack as advocating a type of weak foundationalism, partially following Bonjour’s (1997) interpretation of Haack.

<sup>52</sup> See, e.g. Fales (1990), where the given is assumed but not robustly defended.

<sup>53</sup> There are important unanswered questions here. Is acquaintance a type of experience, or are we acquainted with parts of our experience? It seems that the latter is intended. There are several problems here, to be further discussed in chapter four.

Sellarsian difficulties.<sup>54</sup> One may be tempted to graft on parts of one account as a supplement to the other (what counts as the branch and what the trunk we will leave as an open question). Fales has even expressed sympathy with Fumertonian acquaintance.<sup>55</sup> But there are also real differences. Fales argues that when some beliefs are obvious to me, it is obvious to me that it is obvious to me. (He has in mind here things like simple mathematical propositions or tautologous statements (1996, pp. 155-165).) He will welcome—I think—a strong awareness<sup>56</sup> requirement on justification, such that you are justified only if you are aware of your justification *as a justification* (1996, 164-165).<sup>57</sup> Fales grants that this requirement commits him to a regress (he must be justified in thinking that he is justified). But Fales claims that the regress is benign (1996, 161-165). For it is not as though we must complete some infinite chain of reasoning before we can be justified. We are justified, which then allows us to complete an infinite chain (or at least a chain indefinitely long) (Fales (1996), pp. 162-163). The belief and its truth-makers are, in Fales's parlance, "transparent to us" (p. 160). For any level of justification, then, we can affirm that we are, indeed, justified, because it is apparent to me—or transparent to me—that I am justified, and that I am justified in believing that I'm justified, etc. Fumerton disagrees. He says very similar things about justification—e.g., when one has the appropriate acquaintances, then one has all one could need or want (1995, p. 75). This sounds similar to Fales's talk of transparency. But Fumerton denies—while Fales affirms—what we might call the J-J principle: if you're justified in believing p, you are justified in believing that you're justified in believing p (Fumerton, 1995, pp. 79-80; Fales, 1996, p. 165)). That is, for Fumerton, it is possible

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<sup>54</sup> They do get a brief discussion in chapter three of (1995, pp. 74-75).

<sup>55</sup> In conversation with the author, although not in print.

<sup>56</sup> We have to be careful here. Fumerton (1995,) speaks of *access* requirements on justification (pp. 62-66), while Bergmann (2006) speaks of *awareness* requirements (p. 13), and the terms are not coextensive. We shall have occasion to discuss these issues in chapter five.

<sup>57</sup> Fales actually endorses K/K in this passage, but J/J seems to follow from this.

that we are justified in believing that we are justified, but it is not an entailment of being justified at the first order. What appears on the surface as compatibility between Fales and Fumerton—the similar nature of transparency and acquaintance—hides a deep tension at another level. We will return to this issue in chapter five.

This instance of disagreement is representative of a common phenomenon. The four horsemen of traditional foundationalism (BonJour, Fales, Fumerton, and McGrew) each hint at apparently similar responses to this cluster of problems. The differences that crop up are perhaps verbal—it is difficult to state one's position on these issues clearly—but they often seem substantial. The situation may well put the reader in mind of the blind men touching an elephant. Much of the common ground—and real differences, too—are hidden by conflicting sets of images. We shall have to sort through some of these issues to make sense of Sellars's dilemma and possible solutions to it, often by favoring one set of metaphors and terms over another, perhaps at the price of clarity or widespread agreement.

Here there is another shift in the story. The fall of coherentism heralded the rise of externalism. This position rejects both classical (including acquaintance) foundationalism and coherentism. Most externalists have adopted a foundationalist structure of justification but endorse very odd notions of what justifies (already discussed in the first chapter). And, while Goldman was content to show that the internalist could provide only very meager sources of justification, a new generation of externalists has attempted to undermine the internalists' ability to provide any justification for their beliefs. Two representatives of this new generation are Michael Bergmann and Jack Lyons. Each man has presented a dilemma very similar in structure to Sellars's, a debt that both men acknowledge (Lyons (2009, p. 36); Bergmann (2006; p. 13). The ultimate purpose of these arguments differs from Sellars's—or from Sellarsians'—in that they seek to bring down *all* internalist theories of justification. They



grant that regress worries decide in favor of foundationalism, but they contend that no possible way exists to construct “epistemic reasons” for these foundational beliefs. Instead, we must turn to a different notion of justification. Both Sellars and McDowell worried about getting experiential input into the system, and concluded that this could—somehow—be learned (Sellars (1956, sec. XII ff.); McDowell (1993, lecture one, ss. 4 and 5)). But the externalist takes a different tack: they conclude that appropriate causal constraints are all we need for epistemic justification. This approach contrasts with the previous debate. Sellars and the traditional foundationalists argued over what could be an epistemic reason (e.g., could only a belief justify another belief? Or anything with conceptual content?). The externalists have decided that there is no need for epistemic reasons, after all. However, the full story is complex, and, as this essay does not attempt to attack externalism but rather to defend a version of internalism, a full discussion thus falls outside of our purview. However, we do need a close discussion of Lyons’s and Bergmann’s respective dilemmas, which we postpone to the last two chapters.

This essay, then, is the next wave in the internalist response. As I see it, the four horsemen of traditional internalism have treed something close to the truth. However, more work must be done to discover how matters stand, given the difficulty of the questions and the pervasiveness of metaphor. If Lyons or Bergmann is right, their arguments vitiate the internalist project and banish further speculation about the justificatory nature of experience to the dustbin of philosophical history next to debates over the precise nature of phlogiston. My hope is that this essay shows the fruitfulness of a continued development of acquaintance foundationalism. While I do defend a version of acquaintance foundationalism, this account is too cursory to answer many of the relevant questions in satisfactory detail. My hope is to show that these questions are worth pursuing.

## *2. Aims of the present chapter*

With our history lesson finished, we may ask about the purpose, scope and method of the present chapter. This chapter serves three distinct, but related, purposes.

First, a close discussion of Sellars and Bonjour allows us to place our more recent dilemmas in their proper context, as, so I shall argue, all four dilemmas share fundamental similarities. Furthermore, exposing the similarity of structure may reveal what is needed to resolve each of these dilemmas. (Perhaps unsurprisingly, I argue that the solutions are also quite similar, and can be found in our concept of direct acquaintance.)

Second, this chapter develops a preliminary response to Sellarsian-type dilemmas. My hope is that this resolution can provide, with some adaptation, a satisfactory response to Lyons and Bergmann. Outlining such a response requires the close reading and reconstruction of the Sellarsian dilemma that this chapter provides.

Third, this chapter addresses “completeness” worries. Suppose I were to give a devastating response to Lyons and Bergmann, but left Bonjour and Sellars unaddressed: the reader may with justice worry that the response is incomplete, and that these earlier challenges still succeed. By addressing Sellars and Bonjour, this chapter helps the essay avoid culpable incompleteness.

## *3. Sellars’s dilemma*

We are, at last, ready for a close consideration of Sellars’s argument.

His account of the trouble for traditional foundationalism is slippery for several reasons. First, his immediate preoccupation is with sense-data theories. Sellars argues that a sense datum cannot do what its proponents need it to do: it cannot provide a foundation for our empirical knowledge. It requires, however, some care to present his

argument in a general form that allows it to address all traditional foundationalist accounts. Second, Sellars states his position in various forms. Any satisfactory account of Sellars must puzzle out exactly what the difference in the form of the argument comes to (if anything).

### 3.1 SELLARS'S STATEMENTS OF THE DIFFICULTY

Let's take up what Sellars says in EPM. I shall list several statements of the difficulty, with some commentary on each, before offering a more general account of his arguments.

The first statement he offers contends that the doctrine of the "given" requires the endorsement of inconsistent theses. These theses are:

- A. *X senses red sense content s entails x non-inferentially knows that s is red.*
- B. The ability to sense sense contents is unacquired.
- C. The ability to know facts of the form *x is  $\phi$*  is acquired. (1956, p. 258)

Accepting any two claims entails the denial of the third. The idea is simple but powerful (if true): mere sensations are not facts.<sup>58</sup> To say that we "know" our sensations does not get us the conclusion that we know facts. And this gap between experience and items with propositional form (like facts) is what the given supposed to bridge. Sellars claims the given cannot bridge this gap.

We should note, however, that his statement of the problem is ambiguous. First, A is ambiguous. When we say that X non-inferentially knows that s is red, are we claiming that s is *phenomenologically* red? Or that s *really is* red? And what does this difference come to (if anything)? C is also ambiguous. What does it mean to say that the ability to know facts of the form *x is  $\phi$*  is an acquired ability? If it means that, for some

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<sup>58</sup> In the sense that they lack a propositional structure that facts enjoy. It is, of course, a fact that you are having the sensation.

English speaker to know that a certain fact—expressed by a token of the sentence type “*x is red*”—makes “*x is red*” true, that person must have acquired some familiarity with English, then this claim is uncontroversial. (Or, perhaps, less controversial: it sounds odd to my ears to speak of facts being true (or false); I would prefer to say that a proposition expressing a fact is true. I do think that facts have a structure that is propositional, of which more later.) But there is another, more controversial, reading of this statement. This reading has to do with the relationship between experience and language. I contend that the ability to notice facts of the form *x is  $\varphi$*  is un-acquired.<sup>59</sup>

Noticing that *this is that*—assigning a predicate to an object—is un-acquired and probably primitive, in the sense that it is probably impossible to analyze the ability further. (This should not suggest that there is no further story to tell about the physical processes that constitute our senses. But this is a causal story. The noticing is primitive in that it is the foundation of our reasons and not something we can offer reasons on behalf of.) If we think of language acquisition as learning to stick the appropriate tags on things, then the only way to do this is by noticing that *x is  $\varphi$*  (although a child who lacks natural language will not have natural language labels to stick on). But if he cannot notice the structure of the world, then it is difficult to tell a story about how he could ever acquire the labels to stick on to the world. So, if Sellars intends to deny this claim under C, then I must protest. But it is unclear exactly which version of the claim Sellars does endorse.

Sellars also puts the point a different way. He muses whether the concept of sense data did not arise from an unwarranted slide between two distinct ideas. (We should

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<sup>59</sup> For certain [*x,  $\varphi$* ] pairs. And I am not alone in this—see Fales (1996, pp. 167-169), Chisholm (1966, p. 37), Fumerton (1995, pp. 78-79).

again note that the metaphysics of sense data is secondary. What is primary is the epistemological role sense data are supposed to play.) The two ideas are, in Sellars's words:

- 1) The idea that there are certain inner episodes—e.g. sensations of red or of C#—which can occur to human beings (and brutes) without any prior process of learning or concept or formation; and without which it would *in some sense* be impossible to *see*, for example, that the facing surface of a physical object is red and triangular, or *hear* that a certain physical sound is C#.
2. The idea that there are certain inner episodes which are the non-inferential knowings that certain items are, for example, red or C#; and that these episodes are the necessary conditions of empirical knowledge as providing the evidence for all other empirical propositions. (1956, p. 259, emphases in original)

There are several points to note. First, we should emphasize the epistemic *role* of sense data more than the sense data themselves. For we could give any number of theories of perception, each of which falls prey to Sellars's worries. It is thus helpful to abstract away from the focus on sense data. This abstraction leaves us with Sellars's contention that there are two different kinds of inner episode that epistemologists have tried to run together. We should, according to Sellars, take care to separate these. Sellars contends that having certain sensations (see 1), above) is not an epistemic fact. The idea is that mere sensation cannot provide us with what I have called epistemic reasons. Sellars seems to say that only by illicitly describing the sense data under two different descriptions can the theory of sense data seem to provide an adequate account of epistemic foundations. We can perhaps extract a more general point: nothing can fall under both descriptions that Sellars outlines—nothing can play both roles—and so nothing can provide adequate epistemic foundations.

Before examining the merits of this argument, let's see what else Sellars has to say on this topic. Sellars develops this "no foundations" position by a careful development of what he coins "the myth of the given." Indeed, we can think of the

arguments just discussed as attempted explications and eviscerations of this myth. He takes it up next under this form:

[T]he idea that there is, indeed *must be*, a structure of particular matters of fact such that (a) each fact can not only be non-inferentially known to be the case, but presupposes no other knowledge either of particular matters of fact, or of general truths; and (b) such that the non-inferential knowledge of facts belonging to this structure constitutes the ultimate court of appeals for all factual claims—particular and general—about the world (1956, p. 293).

Sellars (1956) also describes this “privileged stratum of fact” as “ultimate, yet it has authority” (p. 293). This also supports the idea of epistemologists running together two incompatible roles.

Before we examine this line of thought, we should note several features of Sellars’s account of the myth. First, note that Sellars has as part of the myth the contention that some facts can be non-inferentially known. We must tread with caution here. Recall that our primary concern is with propositional knowledge. While I am not concerned to argue that it is inappropriate to say there is non-propositional knowledge, we must be careful to translate Sellars’s concerns into our account. On the account that I defend, the foundations are propositions that have experience for their support. And these propositions provide the support for all other empirical knowledge. Second, we must be careful about our endorsement of (a), particularly the bit about presupposing no other knowledge. Recall that, on our view, there is a *cluster* of acquaintances that we must have for our belief to have an epistemic reason in its favor. As none of these acquaintances are themselves propositions,<sup>60</sup> our account does not require that we know them before we have knowledge of the proposition they support. However, we do concede that the mere acquaintance with a fact is insufficient for something to be an epistemic reason. Whether this concession grants Sellars his point remains to be seen. Third, we should note that Sellars speaks of knowledge, not justification. The account I

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<sup>60</sup> This perhaps sounds odd. We will discuss this further in chapter four.

defend speaks of justification and ignores knowledge. I think we can sidestep this issue. Note that someone could contend that a belief is justified, while being unknown, and someone could always try to wriggle out of Sellars's problem by claiming only that he was trying to prove that such beliefs are justified, not that they are known. However, if my interpretation of Sellars is good—if, that is, his dilemmas attack the ability to even *form* epistemic reasons—then this wiggle room disappears. Whether this interpretation is correct remains to be seen.

With these preliminaries out of the way, what shall we say about Sellars's description of the Myth? To repeat a bit, it seems that Sellars has set up two epistemic roles—facts must be *immediately known* and, also, the *ultimate court of appeals*—and argues that facts cannot play both roles. Indeed, Sellars will go further and say that nothing can play both roles. We need an entirely new story, not just a new item to put in the place of “facts” about experience. But here matters get sticky. Sellars never, for example, offers any master argument for the conclusion, and, indeed, he never states this conclusion directly at all. He proceeds by a careful consideration of cases, language, and various stories we might tell to make sense of these. Indeed, he seems more concerned to tell a convincing story about concept acquisition—how do we break into the space of reasons (which Sellars often treats as co-extensive with conceptual space)?—than in discussing justification. There is a deep connection here: justification of beliefs and applying concepts are perhaps two sides of the same coin. One is not sure where to begin—must we understand concept formation before we give an account of justification, or should we begin by trying to makes sense of how it is that we justify beliefs? Furthermore, Sellars (1956) has a particular focus on language—he speaks often of utterances, sentence types and tokens, the fine shades of difference between all the things a speaker might say in the presence of a red object, etc. (261 ff.; and also sec. III). Finally, Sellars gives what appears to be diverse reasons for rejecting the given—for

thinking it mythical, if you will. Sellars claims that, as we have already noted, there is a deep tension between the idea of sensing something and knowing that  $x$  is  $\varphi$ , as the former is an un-acquired ability and the latter is acquired. (This is perhaps another way of saying that nothing can fill the two roles Sellars has in mind.) But Sellars also seems to give a different worry: “we have seen that to be the expression of knowledge, a report must not only *have* authority, this authority must *in some sense* be recognized by the person whose report it is” (297, emphases in original). Is this the same worry? Is there some further, Bergmannian worry? That is, is he worried about the givenist’s ability to stop a regress? Or something else?

Here is what I propose. Let’s ignore the worries about learning concepts for the moment, and focus on epistemic worries. We thus need a statement of Sellars’s worries as an epistemic problem. Then, if we are satisfied with the reconstruction of the problem, we can proceed to put the argument in terms of epistemic reasons.

### 3.2 DEVRIES’S RECONSTRUCTION

I follow William DeVries’s reconstruction of the argument (2015, sec. 4)<sup>61</sup>. This requires a brief introduction to the central concepts of the dilemma as DeVries sees it. DeVries, like me, notes the varied epistemic roles that foundations must fill. He puts the matter this way. For something to be an appropriate foundation, it must meet two requirements: epistemic efficacy & epistemic independence. *Efficacy*, as DeVries uses it, means something like epistemic support. A belief with epistemic efficacy can support another belief. To recall our banking analogy from Chapter two, beliefs may “borrow” support from efficacious beliefs because these are epistemically “solvent.” A belief that lacks efficacy cannot provide it to another belief, unless it itself borrows from a further

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<sup>61</sup> All of the referenced material in what follows can be found at this citation. As the material is all from the same section of an online encyclopedia, it is not possible to give more particular citations.



belief. As foundational beliefs—as their defenders assert—support the whole edifice of our knowledge, these foundations require efficacy. Epistemic *independence* is a requirement that a state not derive its efficacy—support—from its “epistemic relations to any other cognitive state.” That is, the state—the belief or what have you—must somehow be self-supporting, lacking dependence on other states.

This way of presenting matters puts the point nicely: our foundations—be they beliefs or otherwise—must be able to support other beliefs (by licensing inferences, etc.) while requiring no further support themselves. The attack on foundationalism—at least, in its more traditional, internalist forms—comes from the contention that no candidate meets—nor could it meet—both requirements. However, such a sweeping conclusion requires an argument. DeVries notes that no exhaustive list of candidates exists that we may cross off one by one. The hope, he contends, is to shift the burden of proof on to foundationalists. The central idea is that mere sensations or sense data do not support beliefs, and so are not efficacious, or “presuppose other knowledge on the part of the knower,” and thus fail to be independent. (Recall that Sellars contends that knowing something of the form “ $x$  is  $\varphi$ ” requires other knowledge—lots of other knowledge—on the part of the knower.) Thus, nothing satisfies both requirements and knowledge cannot have foundations.

DeVries (2015) reconstructs Sellars’s argument for this conclusion thus:

1) A cognitive state is epistemically independent if it possesses its epistemic status independently of its being inferred or inferable from some other cognitive states [df. of epistemic independence]

2) A cognitive state is epistemically efficacious—is capable of epistemically supporting other cognitive states—if the epistemic status of those other states can be validly inferred (formally or materially) from its epistemic status. [df. of epistemic efficacy]

3) The doctrine of the given is that any empirical knowledge *that p* requires [some epistemically independent knowledge that is epistemically efficacious with

respect to p, or the empirical knowledge must itself be epistemically independent] [df. of doctrine of the given] [N.B. I have reworded DeVries here for clarity.]

4) Inferential relations are always between items with propositional form. [By the nature of inference]

5) Therefore, non-propositional items (such as sense data) are epistemically inefficacious and cannot serve as what is given. [from 2 &4]

6) No inferentially acquired, propositionally structured mental state is epistemically independent. [From 1]

7) Examination of multiple candidates for non-inferentially acquired, propositionally structured cognitive states indicates that their epistemic status presupposes the possession by the knowing subject of other empirical knowledge, both of particular and of general empirical truths. [From Sellars's analyses of statements about sense-data and appearances in Parts I-IV of EPM and his analysis of epistemic authority in Part VIII]

8) Presupposition is an epistemic and therefore an inferential relation. [assumed [ . . .]]

9) Non-inferentially acquired empirical knowledge that presupposes the possession by the knowing subject of other empirical knowledge is not epistemically independent. [From 1, 7, and 8]

10) Any empirical, propositional cognition is acquired either inferentially or non-inferentially. [Excluded middle]

11) Therefore, propositionally structured cognitions, whether inferentially or non-inferentially acquired, are never epistemically independent and cannot serve as the given [6, 9, 10 constructive dilemma]

12) Every cognition is either propositionally structured or it is not. [Excluded middle]

13) Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that no item of empirical knowledge can serve the function of the given. [5, 11, 12 constructive dilemma] (Section four)

Let's see how the Sellarsian dilemma bears on epistemic reasons. Recall that, in DeVries's words, we want our foundations to have *epistemic efficacy*, meaning they may

(epistemically) support beliefs. And this idea of epistemic support is just what epistemic reasons are supposed to provide. DeVries also notes that the Sellarsian dilemma does not target merely the indubitability of foundations; instead, it targets the notion of the foundation itself. It is helpful to see this attack as an attempt to undermine the foundationalist's ability to give epistemic reasons. For the traditional foundationalist thinks that his basic beliefs—like all beliefs—require epistemic reasons to be justified. But, if Sellars is correct, there can't be any epistemic reasons for the foundational beliefs. Anything (so the argument goes) that provides justification—is *efficacious*, in DeVries's parlance—itself demands some justification, which requires something else with epistemic efficacy. The only way to stop this chain is to find something that is also independent, i.e. something that can provide an epistemic reason without itself requiring a reason. As DeVries and Sellars claim this is impossible, it is appropriate to interpret this reasoning as asserting that the traditional foundationalist cannot provide epistemic reasons for his basic beliefs, and so—*a fortiori*—he cannot provide any epistemic reasons for his basic empirical beliefs (the focus of the present essay).

Recall that, on the present account of non-inferential justification, our acquaintances are independent while our basic beliefs are efficacious. We simply deny that anything is playing both roles described by Sellars (at least, Sellars interpreted by DeVries). It is by a *combination* of these acquaintances that our basic beliefs are justified. Thus I deny that an acquaintance itself is “efficacious,” but I also deny that this dearth vitiates the account. I would guess that Sellars (and DeVries) would not accept this move. They would—or should—push back; after all, don't I think epistemic reasons play both roles? And doesn't this present us with a problem of explaining how this is possible? It is difficult to evaluate this challenge. But remember that—by my lights—BonJour presents an argument with a similar structure. BonJour's argument also has the merit of being much more clearly stated. It shall perhaps be most useful to focus our

attention there. If I am correct, then the same problems for our account will emerge from BonJour's critique, and we can evaluate more clearly whether our preliminary account avoids the difficulty. We thus turn our attention to BonJour's arguments.

#### 4. *BonJour's dilemma*

BonJour (1985), while acknowledging an intellectual debt to Sellars, also notes the difficulty in stating the Sellarsian problematic (p. 59; p. 237, n2). BonJour thus attempts a fresh account of the cardinal difficulties facing traditional foundationalism. (BonJour also targets externalism, but we shall let this pass with only brief commentary.) He proposes two versions of the same argument, or—depending on your interpretation—offers two separate arguments. We shall attempt only a bit of interpretive wrangling and focus most of our attention on what is—according to both BonJour's lights and mine—the clearer statement of the problem.

Let's begin with BonJour's initial statement. BonJour focuses on the notion of non-inferential justification, which puzzles him. In particular, how do basic beliefs acquire such justification? How could any belief confer epistemic justification without requiring it from another source? Or, what source could give justification to beliefs that does not itself require it? In other words, we must have good reasons for thinking that the belief is true, but it is unclear how any of these reasons can be the "unmoved movers" of epistemology (BonJour, 1985, p. 30). BonJour thinks he has something of a master argument against such a possibility. Here's BonJour (1985) in his own words:

If we let  $\varphi$  represent the feature or characteristic, whatever it may be, which distinguishes basic empirical beliefs from other empirical beliefs, then in an acceptable foundationalist account a particular empirical belief B could qualify as basic only if the premise of the following justificatory argument were adequately justified:

- 1) B has feature  $\varphi$
  - 2) Beliefs having feature  $\varphi$  are highly likely to be true.
- Therefore, B is highly likely to be true. (p. 31)

And, so BonJour contends, it seems impossible to accept such an argument without one of the premises being empirical. 1), for instance, seems very difficult to justify *a priori*. And, furthermore, it is no good for there to merely be some empirical justification for 1)—the subject must also *believe* that there is some such empirical justification for it to do him any good. BonJour thus concludes that the belief isn't basic at all, because it depends for its justification on some further empirical belief. But this undermines the very notion of a basic belief: if every potentially basic belief is like this, there can be no basic beliefs at all.

What shall the traditional foundationalist say? One immediate rejoinder is that BonJour has misconceived what the foundationalist is doing. The foundationalist does not think there is some special feature of a belief— $\phi$ —such that we should hunt beliefs with this feature down to find the foundations of knowledge. What justifies these beliefs is their epistemic support, or their particular epistemic reasons. It is not as though there is some special feature of basic beliefs we find and then conclude that these beliefs are justified. Indeed, it is only by justifying these beliefs—by seeing that they do not require other beliefs in their favor—that we see that they *are* basic. Putting them together in a category (“basic beliefs”) is secondary; what is primary is noticing that what justifies these beliefs is not another belief. It seems that BonJour's argument puts the cart before the horse. A primary motivation for accepting traditional foundationalism is that some beliefs *require no argument for their support*. What a basic belief has is better than argument.

Given the difficulties of this form of the argument, let's turn our attention to BonJour's (1985) other argument (or the more precise form of his first argument). It proceeds thus:

- 1) Suppose that there are *basic empirical beliefs*, that is, empirical beliefs (a) which are epistemically justified, and (b) whose justification does not depend on that of any further empirical beliefs.

2) For a belief to be epistemically justified requires that there be a reason why it is likely to be true.

3) For a belief to be epistemically justified for a particular person requires that this person be himself in cognitive possession of such a reason.

4) The only way to be in cognitive possession of such a reason is to believe *with justification* the premises from which it follows that the belief is likely to be true.

5) The premises of such a justifying argument for an empirical belief cannot be entirely *a priori*; at least one such premise must be empirical.

Therefore, the justification of a supposed basic empirical belief must depend on the justification of at least one other empirical belief, contradicting (1); it follows that there can be no basic empirical beliefs. (p. 32)

Note the predicament in which this leaves the foundationalist. Whatever beliefs the foundationalist takes to be basic, the beliefs cannot justify while not requiring justification themselves. This is similar to the Sellarsian point we mentioned earlier: the burden is on the foundationalist to explain how one item (a belief?) can play the dual role the foundationalist envisions.

BonJour contends that the only two places it makes sense to attack this argument are premises three and four. Denying premise three yields externalism; denying premise four yields more traditional foundationalism. For simplicity's sake, I shall accept BonJour's evaluation. And, as this essay defends a species of traditional foundationalism, it should come as no surprise that I intend to take issue with premise four.

Before we pursue this strategy, it may be helpful to do two preliminary tasks. First, we should translate BonJour's argument into epistemic reasons talk to emphasize the structural similarity that I contend exists between BonJour and Sellars. Second, we should examine BonJour's treatment of some attempts to provide an account of basic beliefs. This will help draw out the criteria for a good account.

Let's see if we can translate BonJour's argument into epistemic reasons talk.

Premise one remains unchanged. Premise two—“For a belief to be epistemically justified requires that there be a reason why it is likely to be true”—seems to point to what we are calling “epistemic reasons.” It seems that BonJour and I agree here. In short, epistemic justification requires *epistemic* goodness, justification demands a special kind of support: epistemic support. I contend that the following premise may be substituted, *salva veritate*, for premise two:

2': for a belief to be epistemically justified requires that there be an epistemic reason in its favor.

Premise three stipulates that there merely being a reason is insufficient to procure justification. In my parlance, the subject must *possess* the epistemic reason. Premise three thus becomes:

3' For a belief to be epistemically justified for a particular person requires that this person *possess* an epistemic reason in its favor.

Translating the fourth premise proves more difficult. I shall offer what I take to be a fair translation of the premise, and attempt to justify such a translation, with the caveat that my translation may have gone wrong. I take this to be a fair translation:

4': The only way to possess an epistemic reason [in favor of some belief B] is to believe *with justification* the premises of a [sound and persuasive] argument of which B is the conclusion.<sup>62</sup>

I think this gloss captures BonJour's central idea that justification is a matter of following our justified premises to a justified conclusion. And I think it clarifies some theses about which BonJour is not explicit. In particular, it brings out his propositionalism, the idea that only propositions may serve as epistemic reasons

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<sup>62</sup> I have included some amplifications in brackets. While I think these help explicate BonJour's meaning, I am uncomfortable suggesting that these are a straightforward translation of the premise.

(BonJour, 1985, 64-65).<sup>63</sup> This reading also throws into sharper relief the issue of regress. BonJour (1985) seems to flirt with a strong access condition<sup>64</sup> and thus raises worries of a regress (pp. 67-69). (Again, we must delay consideration of this regress for now.) This translation does add a bit that BonJour does not say. But I think these additions are almost certainly implied by BonJour. For instance, the addition about a “sound and persuasive” argument is just to clarify the kind of thing we think we are after: an argument with justified premises where the conclusion follows and is not circular. This serves to highlight the challenge to the foundationalist.

Of course, BonJour—or some past time slice of BonJour, as he no longer espouses the coherentist heresy—may object to this formulation. However, as I do not wish to make a serious attempt at a history of epistemology, I propose the following: my reconstruction is what coherentist BonJour *should* say. That is, this reconstruction is a good way of making a certain kind of coherentist argument clear and compelling.

We thus turn to the rest of the argument. Premise five (“The premises of such an argument [as that mentioned in premise four] for an empirical belief cannot be entirely *a priori*; at least one such premise must be empirical”) does not stand in need of modification, nor does the conclusion. That is, the central point remains: the only way to justify—or to supply an epistemic reason for—an empirical belief is via appeal to another empirical belief, but this makes the very notion of a basic empirical belief incoherent.

Before attempting to undermine this argument, it would be helpful to see just what makes it so compelling. And, as we shall attempt to show that premise four is false, we should begin by examining the reasons BonJour gives in favor of this premise.

BonJour’s strategy seems to be the following: examine several candidates for the states

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<sup>63</sup> BonJour was often a bit cagey about this commitment. For a further discussion of propositionalism about evidence, see Dougherty (2011).

<sup>64</sup> We discussed access conditions in chapter one.



that are supposed to justify beliefs. In each case, conclude that the state is *cognitive*—meaning it can justify beliefs but needs justification for itself—or it is not cognitive—meaning that it needs no justification, but neither can it provide any (BonJour, 1985, p. 69).

But what do we mean by calling a state “cognitive”? The crux is propositional content. In other words, a state is cognitive if its content is *assertable* and not otherwise (BonJour, 1985, p. 75). An example may clarify. Consider an experience of phenomenal red. BonJour contends that I must take care to separate two items. One is the experience itself. The other is the belief we have, or the judgment I may make, that I am having a red experience (or experiencing red, or am redly appeared to, etc.). The experience itself contains no propositional content in that I cannot “assert” an experience (that is a category mistake). I *can* assert my *belief* (judgment) that I am redly appeared to. We must not confuse these two things. As we have already mentioned, BonJour seems to adopt a “propositionalist” line about justification. Only items with propositional content—assertable items—are capable of providing justification. But these items need justification themselves. Conversely, a mere experience of red needs no justification. But neither can it provide any.

BonJour takes care to survey the history of 20<sup>th</sup>-century epistemology, laying waste to all the accounts of the given he can find. He even proposes some novel ways defenders of the given might develop their accounts, and demolishes them as well. How does he manage such widespread destruction? He proposes a dilemma for any attempt to justify basic beliefs by appeal to a more basic cognitive state. His dilemma takes the form of a question: is the state cognitive or not? If it is, it can justify but needs justification; if not, it needs no justification but cannot itself justify. BonJour then proceeds to examine several candidates for foundations. In particular, he looks at Schlick’s “basic statements,” Quinton’s “ostensive definitions,” and Lewis’s “qualia,” or

“recognizable qualities of the given.”<sup>65</sup> Each man gives a plausible sounding account of justifying basic beliefs by appeal to experience. Schlick (1934/5) speaks of verifying a statement in his travel guide by looking at a particular cathedral: the fact justifies the belief (p. 66). Quinton (1973b) suggests that empirical “inductions” justify “ostensive statements,” where we point to something and slap on the appropriate mental label (p. 134).<sup>66</sup> Lewis (1946) speaks of apprehending qualia—a direct confrontation with reality by the mind—which provides certain foundations for all of our empirical beliefs (p. 179). But Bonjour (1985) contends that these accounts sound convincing because they are vague (pp. 59-60, 65, 66, 72). Each account leaves unanswered crucial questions, which, when pressed, reveal its bankruptcy.

For the sake of simplicity, we will focus on his discussion of Lewis. Lewis’s qualia account is incomplete (says Bonjour). We need an answer to the following question to complete it: what is it that justifies our basic empirical beliefs? Is it the qualia themselves, or an *apprehension* of the qualia (pp. 74-75)? While it is tempting to slide between these alternatives, we must be careful to separate them. And, when we do, we shall see that the account cannot give us what we want. The qualia themselves cannot justify, because these lack propositional content. And apprehensions of the qualia can justify, but they stand in need of justification themselves (p. 75). Thus, they cannot function as epistemic “unmoved movers.” A bit of reflection helps drive the point home: an apprehension requires justification due to its propositional content. Due to its assertive nature, we need some reason in its favor, or—alternatively—we must explain why this particular assertion needs no reason in its favor. (And note that this latter

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<sup>65</sup> See Schlick (1934/5), Quinton (1973a) and (1973b), and Lewis (1929) and (1946). See Bonjour (1985, chapter four) for an extended critical discussion.

<sup>66</sup> Also, see his slightly different account in (1973a, pp. 551-552), and Bonjour’s (1985) critical discussion of it (p. 66 ff.). Note that, on Bonjour’s interpretation, Quinton defends something quite similar to the tri-partite structure of justification that this essay defends. We will not explore the ramifications of this possibility here.

option seems impossible; for what kind of reasoning could we give? We must explain why some category of assertion is exempt from the need for reasons. And then we must show that this assertion—or category of assertions—is in the favored set. But to give this reasoning is essentially to say that a so-called “basic belief” has other beliefs in its favor, and so grant that the belief is not basic after all. This point is what I think BonJour suggests with his initial  $\phi$  version of the argument.) The former task—giving a reason in favor of the “apprehension”—does seem possible, but note that it would require an appeal to another belief, which vitiates the foundationalist’s claim that such a belief is basic.

Another possibility is to claim that there is some state, more basic than apprehension, that yields support to apprehension. But it is difficult to see what such a state *could* be. It doesn’t look as though the qualia themselves will be any help, as already mentioned. And, for any state the foundationalist proposes, BonJour has the same question waiting; to wit, is the state cognitive or not? By now, the reader may fill in the rest. What the foundationalist wants, BonJour contends, is just the thing he cannot have: a state that both justifies beliefs but stands in no need of justification itself. BonJour admits that it is possible for there to be such a foundational state. It is fair, however, to admit that the onus is on the foundationalist to provide the missing link and explain its role. Even if we give a modest interpretation of BonJour, we should grant that he has laid the burden of proof on foundationalism. Whether it can bear up under the strain remains to be seen. The reader may recall that the last chapter outlined an account of justification based on the notion of acquaintance. And the reader may further guess that it is just this account that I propose in answer to BonJour’s challenge. In particular, I shall claim that acquaintance provides what the foundationalist needs. Acquaintance, that is, can justify beliefs without itself requiring justification. Let’s recap

how that account is supposed to go. Then we can discuss how BonJour might respond.

## 5. *Acquaintance to the rescue*

Recall that acquaintance is a *sui generis* relation between a mind and some property, fact, proposition, or relation (Fumerton, 1995, p. 74). By itself, an acquaintance does not—and probably cannot—justify. But when we have a complex of acquaintances—when we are acquainted with the thought that *p*, the fact that makes it true, and the relation of correspondence between the fact and the thought—then we have an epistemic reason in favor of that belief. And, when we also have an acquaintance with the belief, the epistemic reason, and the relation between the belief and the epistemic reason, then we have *prima facie* non-inferential justification for the belief.

However, we may suspect that BonJour—or, at least, coherentist BonJour—will not be pleased with this attempt to ground our basic beliefs. We can imagine how his challenge might go. He will ask, for any particular acquaintance, whether it is cognitive (propositional, conceptual) or not. If it is cognitive, it stands in need of justification. If it is not cognitive, then it stands in need of no justification, but neither can it provide any. I myself would prefer to reserve talk of justification to beliefs, but, even granting this terminological point, BonJour's challenge remains. Surely, the thought goes, I must be able to say something about what “backs up” the acquaintance. What reason do I have for thinking that it gets at truth? And if I don't have any reason for thinking that my acquaintance is truth conducive, then surely acquaintances cannot ground our basic beliefs.

The first question to consider is whether acquaintances are “cognitive.” It seems that acquaintances with “thoughts”—propositions—must surely be cognitive. If the acquaintance does not take in propositional content, it is unclear what exactly the acquaintance is with. And containing propositional content was the mark of something

being cognitive. The same may also be said of our acquaintance with the correspondence between the fact and the thought. If there is no propositional content, then it is unclear what the fact is supposed to correspond to, and thus unclear what relation we are acquainted with. Finally, with respect to facts, we may be tempted to say that here there is no propositional content. However, I am tempted to say that, with respect to facts, there is, at minimum, something like a propositional structure (say,  $x$  is  $F$ ).<sup>67</sup> It is this propositional structure that makes the thing with which we are acquainted a fact. If our acquaintances were literally nothing but a mishmash of impressions, then it seems that, properly speaking, we would not be acquainted with facts. It is something like the propositional structure of facts that allows us to notice the fact at all (Fumerton, 1995, pp. 78-79). So, I am inclined to say that, in the case of facts, our acquaintances should be regarded as “cognitive.”

Having settled this question—our acquaintances are cognitive—we must next ask how it is that the acquaintance foundationalist may avoid BonJour’s dilemma. Here I wish to make two points. First, acquaintances do not bear the justificatory burden alone. It is only in conjunction that the acquaintances can provide justification for a belief. However, this probably does not set BonJour’s mind at ease. After all, the worry about taking the “cognitive” horn of the dilemma is how we “justify” the individual acquaintances. Here we should make the second point: each acquaintance is “primitive” enough that may say that it is self-justifying. (Again, we should note that it is somewhat infelicitous to speak of acquaintances as being justified, as it is clearer to reserve this term for beliefs.) What justifies my acquaintance with my own pain, or with my own beliefs? Here I must confess that I am baffled: it is just the acquaintance itself. Or, to put the point alternatively, acquaintance does not seem to be the sort of state for which

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<sup>67</sup> Here I follow, in part, Fales (1996, pp. 167-169)

we can provide additional reasons. Note that this does not mean that any time I take myself to be acquainted with a state, I am indeed acquainted with it: I might think that I am acquainted with a shade of blue that is really a shade of green, or take myself to be acquainted with an oboe when I am really hearing an English horn. But this does not mean that I can provide additional support for thinking that my acquaintances are what they are, nor does it mean that they stand in need of such additional support.

The perhaps obvious rejoinder here is to press the acquaintance foundationalist about how these acquaintances are to do justifying work if they themselves have no additional reasons in their favor. At the risk of being repetitious, I say again that any particular acquaintance, by itself, does not justify. That is, my mere acquaintance with the fact of a red book being on the desk before me does not justify my belief that there is a red book on the desk before me. It is by being acquainted with the proposition that describes the state of affairs, and also with the correspondence between the fact and the thought, that I obtain the epistemic reason in support of the belief. And it is only when I am also acquainted with the belief, the epistemic reason, and the relation of support—that the epistemic reason supports the belief—that I can be said to be doxastically justified for the belief.

To recap, then: our acquaintances are cognitive, in BonJour's sense. However, they are so epistemically primitive that they need no further support (or, alternatively, they may be said to be self-supporting). While they are too primitive to justify a belief individually, collectively they have the epistemic sophistication to do so. If BonJour complains that the acquaintances need more support, I will simply point out that everyone does seem to be acquainted with states where it seems that no support is necessary (pain and our own beliefs being the two prime examples). If he objects instead that acquaintances need some support to justify beliefs, I will ask why: if we really are acquainted with the fact of the red book, etc., then what else would we need to improve

our epistemic position? (It may be possible to improve our epistemic position by getting a clearer view of an object, or by better lighting, or what have you. But this seems to be a matter of getting a better acquaintance, and not adding something besides acquaintance to the equation.)

And now we can also see why the simpler statement of the argument (the  $\varphi$  formulation) is no good. Recall that an informal way of putting Bonjour's point was that for a basic belief to be justified, we must have some argument in favor of the belief: this belief is basic, and basic beliefs are probably true, so . . . And, as it turns out, such a belief is not basic after all, for it will have at least one empirical belief supporting it (one of the premises of the argument in its favor). But the acquaintance foundationalist will not grant the point here. There is no need to have any such argument in favor of our basic beliefs. Bonjour gets the order of explanation wrong. The foundationalist does not attempt to justify basic beliefs by appeal to the fact that they're basic. It is not as though the foundationalist, upon having a belief challenged, folds his arms and smugly replies, "It's basic," as though that settled anything. (At least, no acquaintance foundationalist will do so. That strategy does seem to be popular among reformed epistemologists, although we should not impugn their characters by suggesting smugness on their part.) Foundationalists do appeal to basicness as a way of explaining the end of a regress. Basic beliefs are, at least in part, our foundations. But it is not as though *it is the basic nature of the belief* that we appeal to to explain its epistemic merits.

Instead, the foundationalist explanation proceeds in the opposite direction. We note that some beliefs are justified via appeal to experience—or by appeal to something other than beliefs—(and here we must provide some satisfactory account of that justification)—and then conclude that some of them are basic. This is the end of the explanation, and not the beginning. This responds, in part, to Bonjour's worries about justifying basic beliefs. (However, the reader may worry that this dismissal has been too

quick, and that there is more to Bonjour's argument than this. The reader is correct. In particular, it seems that there is still a worry here that justification requires an argument in favor of the belief. These waters are deep and muddy. I propose to delay consideration of such issues until the final chapter, where we address Michael Bergmann's similar problem for internalism.)

Let's next re-examine Bonjour's more detailed statement of the argument. Recall that, on my gloss, the targeted premise—premise four—read thus:

4': The only way to possess an epistemic reason [in favor of some belief B] is to believe with justification the premises of the [sound and persuasive] argument of which B is the conclusion.

Bonjour considers 4' justified because he has carefully shown that all attempts to provide justification—observation statements and the rest—ran up against his “cognitive” dilemma. However, I have attempted to show that acquaintances provide a way out of this dilemma. They are cognitive states, but because they are so basic, they do not require justification. However, they can—when put together in the appropriate ways—constitute epistemic reasons in favor of beliefs. Thus, acquaintances can give justification without requiring it, providing a way out of Bonjour's dilemma and showing premise four to be false.

However, this response is perhaps too simple. We have several clusters of problems, perhaps best stated as a series of questions:

1) Don't acquaintances need some kind of justification? Perhaps they don't need “full-blooded” justification, if we wish to reserve that term for beliefs. But is it possible for acquaintances to be “bad,” and how do we separate the sheep from the goats?

2) On a related point, why think that acquaintance is really enough? Shouldn't I believe that I am acquainted? If animals and young children can be acquainted with their environs, shouldn't I need more? And don't I need a justified belief about my



acquaintance?

These problems merit close inspection. And, the reader may have noted that these questions bear a striking resemblance to the dilemmas proposed by our externalist interlocutors. In particular, the first problem set is similar to the worries Jack Lyons proposes for our favored brand of internalist foundationalism. And the second set seems to be the motivating worries for Bergmann's dilemma against internalism.

Thus, to give a (more) complete defense of acquaintance foundationalism we must address these two dilemmas. We thus turn our attention directly to Lyons and Bergmann. Bergmann is the focus of our closing chapter (chapter five). We take up Lyons in chapter four.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### LYONS'S DILEMMA

#### 1. *Lyons's roar*

At the end of the last chapter, we noted two problem clusters for the acquaintance theory of justification. The first—the subject of this chapter—is the as-yet-slippery justificatory status of acquaintances. In particular, we wondered whether acquaintances could do any work in justifying our beliefs. I contend that alone, each acquaintance can do nothing, but together, they may provide an epistemic reason for a belief. This allows us to sidestep BonJour's "cognitive" dilemma: if acquaintances are not cognitive, they cannot justify; if they are cognitive, they themselves require justification (or something like it). But the precise way we avoid this dilemma may still seem unsatisfactory. Can acquaintances lacking cognitive content *really* provide us with a building block for justification? Conversely, doesn't an acquaintance with cognitive content require some reason in its favor? Recall that we began to address such questions in chapter two. However, chapter three has perhaps underscored the unsatisfactory nature of our previous claims about the justificatory capabilities of acquaintances. In this chapter, then, we shall see whether—and to what extent—these claims are defensible. In particular, we shall examine them in light of the challenge that Jack Lyons proposes.

Lyons (2009), a reliabilist, contends, like BonJour, that the internalist foundationalist cannot provide any justification for his basic beliefs (p. 36). (And, as these beliefs are the ultimate source of epistemic justification, he cannot justify any beliefs.) Lyons's arguments proceed along several lines. We shall focus just on those most relevant to our concerns. In particular, we shall focus on Lyons's comments regarding what he calls "experientialist" theories of justification. These theories rely on sense experience to justify basic beliefs (and note that this is the kind of theory that this

essay defends). Lyons contends that such theories are hopeless.

It is worth noting that, despite some similarities between his arguments and BonJour's, Lyons denies that he presents an actual dilemma (2009, 46).<sup>68</sup> He also thinks that the Sellarsian dilemma, of which he considers BonJour's treatment to be the standard statement, is not terribly vexing for the experientialist. Lyons (2009) notes that it does not seem implausible for the experientialist to take either horn of the dilemma (p. 46). It is unclear why non-cognitive (or non-propositional) states should be unable to justify, nor why cognitive states should themselves need justification. As it is a secondary thesis of this essay that Lyons proposes a dilemma, and that it is nearly identical in structure to the older Sellarsian dilemma, we will need to do some interpretive sparring with Lyons.

## *2. Outline of the chapter*

We thus have three tasks before us. First, we must get clear on what Lyons takes himself to be doing. We shall attempt this by a close consideration of the arguments he gives in the third chapter of his book *Perception and Basic Beliefs*. As much of his discussion in that chapter depends on terms he defines and theses he defends elsewhere, we shall dip into other chapters as needed. The second task is to reconstruct Lyons's argument in terms of epistemic reasons. I shall argue that Lyons, despite his resistance to such characterization, does indeed present a dilemma and that this dilemma, properly understood, aims to deny the internalist foundationalist the ability to provide any epistemic reasons for his basic, perceptual beliefs. Indeed, it is helpful to see Lyons as offering an improved account of the insight that BonJour gives in his statement of Sellarsian dilemma. For Lyons will give us good reasons—although, as I will argue, not

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<sup>68</sup> Although also see (2009, p. 36, p. 84), where he seems to admit to offering a dilemma of some kind.

ultimately persuasive ones—to think that experience cannot play the role that many internalist foundationalists require it to play. But all of this requires argument, which I shall provide in the second part of the chapter. The third task of this chapter is to demonstrate the ineffectiveness of Lyons’s dilemma. It ultimately fails to deny the internalist foundationalist his epistemic reasons for basic perceptual beliefs. I argue for this conclusion by showing that for at least one account—that is, the acquaintance foundationalism outlined in chapter two—Lyons’s dilemma is rendered harmless. Perhaps other accounts fare as well, but I do not consider them. Showing one successful account is enough to undermine the dilemma.

### *3. Lyons’s anti-experientialism*

#### *3.1 PRELIMINARIES*

Let’s begin by a close consideration of Lyons’s account. Lyons targets *experientialism*, his name for any foundationalist view that relies on experience to justify the foundational (or basic) beliefs.<sup>69</sup> Lyons introduces several principles to divide up the epistemic landscape. We shall follow his use of the principles to introduce the view under discussion. The principles are as follows.

Grounds Principle [hereafter GP]: all justified beliefs have grounds, that is, evidential justifiers.

Belief Principle [hereafter BP]: only beliefs can evidentially justify beliefs. (2009, p. 29)

Lyons contends that we can divide views into useful categories based on their

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<sup>69</sup> Lyons suggests that it may be possible to construct a coherentist version of what he calls experientialism, but this possibility is not his primary target. And, as we are examining the merits of a certain kind of foundationalism, we shall ignore this complication in what follows.

acceptance—or rejection—of these principles. For instance, internalist coherentism—what Lyons calls “doxasticism”—accepts both of the above principles (2009, p. 29). All justified beliefs have evidential justifiers in their favor, and this evidence is always in the form of other beliefs. Lyons himself will reject GP but accept BP (note that this makes him a type of externalist foundationalist) (2009, p. 84). This means that while he accepts that we can only infer beliefs from other beliefs, we can still have supported foundational beliefs because these are supported in a reliabilist way (2009, chapters four and six). So, while we may have no evidence for them, we do not need any such evidence, as he rejects GP. Traditional, internalist foundationalism accepts the grounds principle but rejects the belief principle (2009, p. 29). Experientialism (experientialist non-doxasticism, to make the more formal introduction) is a version of this view that appeals to experience to justify basic beliefs (pp. 37-38). That is, experience can serve as an *evidential justifier* (a bit of Lyonsian technical parlance). Lyons’s arguments consist of attempts to show that experience is unsuitable for such a role.

Before we consider this argument we should say a word about Lyons’s use of the terms “evidential justifier” and “evidentially justify” in his statement of the principles. Lyons (2009) defines evidential justifiers as “any state that serves as part or all of the agent’s justifying grounds, that is, evidence, that is, reasons, for that belief” (p. 23). He adds that evidential justifiers are “the sort of thing that the believer can take into account” (2009, p. 23). Conversely, a non-evidential justifier is “any positively relevant J-factor that is not an evidential justifier . . . [they are] relevant to the justification of a belief, [but] they are not themselves evidence, and their relevance to justification is constitutive rather than evidential” (2009, p. 24). An example may help illustrate the point. Lyons considers his belief that someone exists, which he infers from his own existence. His belief that he exists serves as evidence—i.e., an evidential justifier—for his belief that someone exists. The inference relation between the two beliefs is also part of

the justification of the belief, but it does not serve as evidence (2009, p. 24). (To say that it does would be to commit something like the fallacy that induces Carroll's (1895) regress.) To give another example, reliability (as reliabilists use it) is a non-evidential justifier. It doesn't serve as part of the believer's evidence or reasons for a belief (2009, p. 25). (Indeed, this seems to be why internalists tend to accuse reliabilism in particular—and externalism in general—of changing the subject with respect to justification. Internalist theories of justification tend to focus on a subject's evidence for particular beliefs, and claims that such evidence is necessary to have a well justified belief. Externalists deny this: they think that non-evidential justifiers are enough for justification, full-stop (2009, p. 25).)

We can now re-examine the principles Lyons uses to divide epistemology into competing camps. Recall that the grounds principle claims that all justified beliefs must be evidentially justified; they must have reasons or grounds in their favor. (In my parlance, all justified beliefs must have *epistemic reasons* in their favor.) In other words, what Lyons calls non-evidential justifiers—in whatever numbers or of whatever qualities—are never sufficient to justify beliefs. The belief principle claims that only beliefs may serve as evidential justifiers (or evidence). Other mental states, that is, cannot serve as an agent's reasons for—or evidence for—a belief. (These other states may still function as non-evidential justifiers.)

Recall that the experientialist is a type of internalist foundationalist. This means that he will reject the belief principle but accept the grounds principle. Every justified belief (including a basic belief) must have an evidential justifier in its favor. But things other than beliefs may serve as evidential justifiers. In particular, the experientialist contends that experience can serve to justify beliefs. This view, relatively popular<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> In addition to our four horsemen, the view seems to be defended by Chisholm (1966), Feldman and Conee (1985), Haack (1993), Huemer (2001), and Steup (2000), among others.

among internalist foundationalists, seems to be the appropriate label for the acquaintance foundationalism that this essay has outlined and defended. Thus, Lyons challenge to experientialism constitutes a challenge to the view that we have proposed as a way to evade some difficult epistemic problems. To this challenge we now turn our attention.

Lyons contends that, despite the intuitive plausibility of experientialism, it cannot withstand a sustained scrutiny of the role that experience is alleged to play (that of providing grounds—in my terms, epistemic reasons—for our beliefs). Lyons (2009) begins by noting that experience is too broad a term to be of much use. Many parts compose our “experience,” even if we restrict ourselves to a single sense modality (p. 42). For example, my “visual experience” contains many different components. When I look up at the room, for instance, there are many different colors to be seen—black, pale yellow, white, gold, brown, red, royal blue, a greenish blue, etc. Some surfaces appear brighter than others—some of them “shine.” But it is not as though I merely have different color patches in front of me. I believe—or am disposed to believe—many things about what I see. I take most of the objects I see to be three dimensional—some “look” that way, others (like sheets of paper pinned to the wall) I am merely trained to believe have a third dimension. I divide what I see into objects: microwave, coffee-maker, stapler, electric hole-punch, and refrigerator. I think that the “shine” of some objects is due to their reflecting more light from their surfaces, and I believe that the door of the microwave looks odd because it is reflecting an image of the bookshelf behind me. Can I be said to see the bookshelf, or book, or the phone on the shelf? Indeed, can I be said to see the objects at all, or is this some sort of inference from appearance? These and many other questions need answers if we are to provide a complete account of our visual experience and beliefs. I do not pretend to provide any such account in an essay so limited as this one. But, as I do wish to defend experientialism—or at least a version of

it—we must provide satisfying answers to some questions like those we have already mentioned. In particular, we would do well to address a question Lyons (2009) raises regarding our experience: “Which of these [aforementioned] components of experience are held to be responsible for evidentially justifying beliefs, and what features of these states equip them to do so?” (p. 42).

To focus his discussion, Lyons divides the broader term “experience” into the narrower categories of “sensation” and “perception.” Before we discuss the way Lyons uses these terms, it is helpful to put ourselves in mind of Lyons’s general strategy. Recall that he argues that experientialism is a failure because experience cannot play the role that the view demands of it. His general strategy for proving this point is to divide our experience into two exclusive categories (sensation and perception) and argue that neither can bear the weight that experientialism requires. Thus, Lyons (2009) is not as concerned with providing the most accurate division of experience possible—he admits that the simple division into sensations and percepts is crude and outdated—but rather to provide broad categories into which we can separate the various aspects of experience (p. 42).

“[S]ensation,” Lyons tells us, “is the raw, direct experiential consequence of the stimulation of the sense organs” (2009, p. 42). Sensation does not involve processing of information (while perception does—more on this shortly.) Sensation is James’s (1981) blooming, buzzing confusion. Consider, following Lyons, the Necker cube (2009, p. 43). What is the sensation here? Lyons contends that it is the pattern of lines of the page. This sensation we ought not identify with either of the cubes that may appear to normal observers. The sensation is unchanging, in that there is only one pattern of radiation when one looks at a Necker cube from one perspective.

A percept, conversely, is the “look” of a thing where this look requires some processing of information. To take up the Necker cube again, it “looks” like both a cube



pointing down and to the left, or a cube pointing up and to the right (but not like both at the same time) (Lyons, 2009, p. 43). Both of these looks are percepts. To contrast, then:

In the sense of ‘looks’ that describes the sensation, the drawing looks like exactly what it is: a series of lines joining each other at certain angles. There is no *cube* here, only squares and lines. Only some of the angles in the sensation are right angles . . . Even this description, however, may be a bit misleading. The sensation does not represent the lines and angles *as being* lines and angles, and certainly not as being . . . angles [of certain degrees]. That is the kind of interpretation or categorization that occurs higher up; the sensation is raw, qualitative, uninterpreted (Lyons, 2009, p. 43).

This talk of “higher-up categorization” hints at another way Lyons divides us the difference between sensations and percepts. That is, there are many different levels of visual processing; these levels contain different amounts of cognitive or propositional information. Lyons elsewhere suggests that we should think of the lower-level states as sensation, and the higher level states as percepts (2009, p. 84). The distinction here hinges on propositional and qualitative content. Lower-level representations—sensations—contain lots of *qualitative* information, in that there is a definite and robust “something it’s like” to have the sensation (2009, p. 69-70). But there is very little cognitive or propositional content. Conversely, a higher-level representation—a percept—doesn’t contain much in the way of qualia, but is rich in *cognitive* content—so rich that there is some debate about what the difference between a percept and a belief comes to (2009, pp. 71-72).

### 3.2 LYONS’S DILEMMA

While there may be room to quibble with the way Lyons draws these distinctions, nothing in my response to Lyons will depend too heavily on the particulars of his account. To his arguments we thus turn our attention. Lyons, as we have just noted, divides experience into sensations and percepts. He then argues that neither type of experience can ground our perceptual beliefs. Thus, experience cannot provide a

foundation for our beliefs.

We can render the argument in its clearest form thus:

- 1) All visual experience is either a sensation or a percept.
- 2) A sensation cannot serve as an *evidential justifier* (or *evidence*) for a belief.
- 3) A percept cannot serve as an *evidential justifier* (or *evidence*) for a belief.  
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- 4) Thus, no visual experience can serve as an *evidential justifier* (or *evidence*) for a belief.<sup>71</sup>

And such an argument, if sound, vitiates experientialism, because the heart of the view is that experience may evidentially justify beliefs. And, as the experientialist accepts the grounds principle (that all justified beliefs have epistemic justifiers in their favor), this leaves him with a large swath of beliefs that are totally unjustified (from an evidential point of view). The experientialist is pushed to accept an extreme form of skepticism. Of course, by itself, this might not be a decisive objection. (It is unclear when—and under what forms —skepticism defeats a position.) But we should delay such defeatist tactics until we have examined the soundness of Lyons’s arguments.

Let’s begin by translating the argument into our preferred language of “epistemic reasons.” Recall that, in chapter one, I concluded that “epistemic reason” was a rough synonym of “evidence” and Lyons’s “evidential justifier.” The impetus for using “epistemic reasons” talk was to call attention to the stipulative nature of the term. And it seems that our discussion of epistemic reasons and evidential justifiers shows that there is no substantial difference between the terms. They both contribute to a belief’s justification, and they both seem to contain an “internalist” component, in that they improve a subject’s epistemic position *from the perspective of the subject*. Thus, I am content at present to substitute “epistemic reason” and “evidential justifier” freely, though I cannot vouch for Lyons being thrilled with the arrangement. The argument, in

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<sup>71</sup> This is my reconstruction; Lyons does not give the argument in premise-conclusion form. The argument is essentially a chapter-long piece of discourse (Lyons, 2009, chapter three).

its new form, is as follows:

- 1) A visual experience is either a sensation or a percept.
- 2) No sensation can be an epistemic reason for a belief.
- 3) No percept can be an epistemic reason for a belief.
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- 4) No visual experience can be an epistemic reason for a belief.

We must now defend the premises of the argument. 1) we have already had occasion to discuss in our treatment of sensation and perception. Lyons admits the rough nature of the distinction, and, as already mentioned, elsewhere seems more comfortable with talk of higher and lower level visual representations. While difficulties may arise on this point, I am not concerned to chase them down. Instead, I shall grant Lyons the truth of this premise. We thus turn our attention to premise two.

Lyons gives a handful of arguments attempting to demonstrate that sensations are neither necessary nor sufficient to provide epistemic reasons. As our form of the argument is written in terms of sufficiency, we shall focus on Lyons's efforts to show that no sensation is sufficient for an epistemic reason, and leave arguments about necessity to one side.

The primary difficulty with sensation is what Lyons will call the "sensation-perception" gap. One loose way of dividing up sensations and percepts is by appeal to the difference between "seeing" versus "seeing as" (see Dretske, 1969) I might have, say, a visual experience of a red, roughly elliptical (ovaltine?)<sup>72</sup> figure. We may say that this is what I "see." But, of course, I need not see it *as* being red or elliptical. Indeed, to see it *as* these things is to involve a much higher-level representation of the object.

However, it now becomes difficult to grasp what reasons—what evidence—a sensation could provide for a belief. This point is not merely an assertion of, say, propositionalism about evidence (where "propositionalism" is the thesis that only

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<sup>72</sup> An argument for this diction from analogy: if a velvet object is velveteen, then an elliptical object should be...

propositions may serve as evidence). It is noticing a real gap between our lower and higher level states. Our sensations—low-level states or simple seeing—seem to lack cognitive or propositional content. For it seems that, if an experience includes such content, it thereby becomes a percept. But a wide gulf separates our sensations from the beliefs they are supposed to justify. How should—or could—we move from a simple seeing to a belief? We might appeal to the percept as a mediator between the two—and we shall consider the justificatory capacities of percepts below—but this still leaves us with the problem of connecting sensations and percepts, or what Lyons (2009) will call the sensation-perception gap ( p. 54ff.).

It seems that the connection between sensations and percepts must either be evidential or causal (or, I suppose, both). But we may very well ask what good a causal connection is (or what good a merely causal connection is). A causal connection between a sensation and a percept—and there likely are such connections—will be of no avail in providing *evidential* reasons for percepts (or for beliefs) unless these connections are available to us. And it seems that such causal connections are not available to the agent. Also, note that even if such connections were available, their use would be as a kind of evidence (or epistemic reason): “I am in state S, which (reliably?) causes state t, so . . .” Thus, it seems that the connection between sensations and percepts must be evidential. But just what evidential connection could there be between a sensation and a percept?

Lyons (2009) proposes some options that the experientialist might take in the form of evidential principles: “If S is appeared to [phi]-ly, then S is prima facie justified in believing that there is something [phi] nearby” (p. 68). But, as Lyons notes, this will not do. Sensations lack conceptual content, so it is unclear what content phi has, or how it is to connect to a percept or belief regarding phi (p. 68). Lyons thinks that the best we can do is something like this: “If S is appeared to [phi]-ly, then S is prima facie justified in believing that there is something [gamma] nearby” (p. 68). But neither will this do, as

Lyons explains: “[C]learly we are now in need of some principled account of which values of  $\phi$  get ‘matched up’ with which values of  $\gamma$ , and it is doubtful that the sensation experientialist can provide this” (p. 68).

Perhaps, we may conclude, we shall have better luck with the percept. Not so, says Lyons, and an explanation of his reasons for so thinking constitutes our defense of premise three, to which we now turn our attention. Recall that premise three contends that no percept can be an epistemic reason for a belief. Remember that Lyons was concerned that sensations could not serve as evidence—could not stand in the appropriate epistemic relations to either percepts or beliefs—because they lack the appropriate content. Without conceptual or propositional content, sensations seem capable of serving as evidence only if there was some *further* connection between it and the item it was to serve as evidence for. And if the state does have conceptual (or propositional) content, it is a “high-level representation”—a percept—by definition. However, this content would be quite useful in allowing the percept to serve as an epistemic reason. Why does Lyons think it cannot?

In favor of this contention Lyons offers us another “gap.” Just as there was a gap between sensations and percepts, Lyons (2009) contends there is another gap between percepts and beliefs (pp. 70, 84). Take, for instance, the belief that “here’s a tomato.” What justifies it? Here we encounter substantial difficulties.

Part of the difficulty is in identifying percepts. Lyons notes that there are many levels of representation in our visual system. For instance, some levels represent surfaces or boundaries and higher-levels might recognize objects. But there are two problems here. First, many of these representations seem unavailable from the subject’s perspective. (I have never—or perhaps only rarely—been aware of just a boundary or a surface. Even on reflection, I normally can only see *objects*, and not merely surfaces or boundaries.) A second problem is that it is difficult to know which of these

representations are percepts (and which sensations). Lyons (2009) suggests that sensations are “raw,” lacking conceptual content (p. 62). But it is a feature of our visual experience that much of our experience comes to us *as* something—as having a certain feature or property, or being a certain way. It might be tempting to say that the only states of which we are aware are percepts, because it is difficult to imagine experiencing something in a way that involves no concepts or judgments whatsoever. (By analogy, we might note that once someone learns to read, it is nearly impossible for him to see a word (in a language he knows) and *merely* see it (i.e., and not read it).) Should we thus identify all of experience with percepts?

That seems like too hasty a conclusion. We might perhaps say that any given instance of experience contains both sensations and percepts. However, it becomes difficult to separate our experience into these component parts. For example, when examining the book on the table in front of me, do I have percept of a book *plus* a sensation (or a raw feel)? Do I have two percepts—one as of a book and one as of a soft-cover book—or do I just have one? And so on our questions go.

This cluster of problems makes it difficult to evaluate the justificatory capacities of percepts. However, we shall do our best to put Lyons’s argument in the brightest light. The central idea is this: percepts—at whatever level—are unsuitable for service as epistemic reasons. Here’s why: a lower-level percept leaves a “gap” between the percept and the belief, much like the gap between sensation and perception. A higher-level percept is too “belief-like” for the view to be comfortably “experientialist.” We shall consider these problems separately.

Let’s take up the percept-belief “gap” problem first. The problem is very similar to that of the “sensation-perception” gap: as we need some principled way to move from sensations to percepts, we need a principled way to move from percepts to beliefs (if the beliefs are to be justified on the basis of those percepts) and Lyons doubts whether the

experientialist can provide this principled way. If the percept is lower-level—containing less conceptual information—then it seems we need to make some *inference*—if p, then b—but it is unclear how to formulate an inference rule of this kind (see Lyons, 2009, pp. 68, 70). Even if we had such a rule, it seems that we must also *believe* there is such a connection. So, it seems that the belief in question is not basic after all, as it depends for its justification on at least one other belief. (There is also a regress problem here—if this beliefs about the connection between the percept and perceptual belief must be *justified*, then it seems that a regress looms. We shall ignore this problem for now.)

Conversely, we might suppose that the percept is higher-level—perhaps much higher-level—and so there is not much of a gap between the content of the percept and the belief. There are two problems with this gambit. First we might be suspicious of the “hunch-like” nature of these states (Lyons, 2009, 69). That is, if these states are information rich, then it seems they will be qualia-poor. Take a simple case: I am looking at the desk in front of me, and I see a yellow pen. I believe that “there’s a yellow pen.” What is the percept? Well, it is difficult to say. Indeed, it might even be impossible to speak of *the* percept, as if there was only one.<sup>73</sup> It is more accurate to say that there is a cluster of sensations and percepts. Lyons (2009) contends that a percept that is high-level enough to contain the information we require—perhaps “yellow-pen-there-now”—will be distinct from the sensations that we call yellow, or that suggest a pen-like shape (pp. 69-70). If the percept *just is* the high-level conceptual content, it will be quite “hunch-like,” in that it will be a case of a percept without a sensation, and this seems to lack a sufficient dependence on experience to satisfy the experientialist (Lyons, 2009, 69). Of course, we might retort that in such a case, there is a sensation, too. But this is not—*ex hypothesi*—what does the justificatory work. We have already tried that move

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<sup>73</sup> For Lyons’s (2009) discussion of this point, see pp. 68ff.

(above), and it led us nowhere. And, without the corresponding sensation, it seems that there is just a hunch-like state. And it isn't clear, Lyons (2009) tells us, how to use such hunches to justify, or whether it is plausible to say that it is experience that has done the justifying (p. 69).

A second reason to doubt that percepts justify basic beliefs is that percepts may actually *be* beliefs.<sup>74</sup> Percept and beliefs may have content as similar as you like, and perhaps, in some cases, identical contents (or, at least, identical propositional and conceptual content). Indeed, this is probably what the experientialist needs (or at least wants): what could do a better job of justifying a belief than an experience with identical content? However, the difficulty then becomes how to distinguish between a percept and a belief, especially if—as Lyons contends—high-level percepts lack qualia. Lyons argues at some length that percepts and beliefs may be the same states. A full treatment of Lyons's discussion would take us too far afield. But, as I do not plan on resisting Lyons's argument at this point, we shall satisfy ourselves with a cursory discussion.

The central point is that what distinguishes a percept from a belief is its functional role in the cognitive system. When I have the percept as of “this is a yellow pen,” what separates it from the belief that “there's a yellow pen” is where the representation occurs in the cognitive system. When the representation is the output of a perceptual module, then it is a percept, and when the same (type-identical) representation is in the (highly contentious) “belief box,” then it is a belief (Lyons, 2009, pp. 71-72). And, if I came to think that the visual experience was some kind of illusion, the representation may get deleted from the belief box while remaining an output of my perceptual module. So, I would still have the percept but no belief (Lyons, 2009, 71-72). (The lines of the Müller-Lyer illusion still look uneven, even when I no longer believe

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<sup>74</sup> For Lyons (2009) discussion of the issues in this paragraph, see pp. 70-72.



that they are.)

All of this is contentious. Lyons's point is about the intrinsic inseparability of beliefs and percepts: their content may be identical, and what distinguishes them is where the representation is within the cognitive system. In some sense, then, a belief and a percept may be the "same state." But it is unclear how to use the percept to justify the belief, that is, how the percept can be an *epistemic reason* for a belief. If the two states are indeed identical, it sounds odd to say that one can justify the other in a non-question-begging fashion. For it seems that whatever concerns we have about the one state attach also to the other; conversely, if the belief was (epistemically) okay to begin with, then it is unclear what role the percept is to play. Of course, we could always make some appeal to the systems involved, but this seems to push us in an externalist direction. To keep the view internalist, it seems that the subject must be aware of the various systems and representations in play, and—probably—must believe that the relevant systems are reliable and connected in the appropriate ways. Such a move, even if it were possible to make, very likely vitiates the attempt to ground *basic* beliefs. For now we are relying on other beliefs to justify the belief that was supposed to be basic.

Thus, it seems that neither lower-level nor higher-level percepts will do. Lower-level percepts leave open a gap between the content of the percept and the belief. Higher-level percepts are, on the other hand, too "hunch-like," lacking the qualitative richness that was supposed to the view an experientialist one. These high-level percepts, by lacking qualitative content, lose the intrinsic plausibility of the experientialist position, that of justifying perceptual beliefs by appeal to experience itself. Furthermore, as just discussed, there is a lurking worry that very high-level percepts just are beliefs, and so cannot be used to justify beliefs.

### 3.3 LYONS'S DEFENSE OF THE BELIEF PRINCIPLE

Thus, we have defended each of the premises of (our reconstruction of) Lyons’s argument. If the argument is sound, it is difficult to see a way forward for experientialism. Perhaps the reader is suspicious of something slippery in the argument as given. Perhaps we were too imprecise in defining sensations and percepts, or perhaps we were too quick to agree to an unbridgeable gap between sensations and percepts. But Lyons is not yet done. He proposes another argument, with the intention of proving that nothing besides a belief can serve as an epistemic reason—or, in Lyons parlance, an “epistemic justifier.” The reader may recall that this conclusion is just Lyons’s “belief principle” (BP). As it is a central contention of Lyons view that BP is true, this argument drives a stake through the heart of experientialism, and supports a central pillar of Lyons’s brand of externalism. Thus, while it is not the goal of this essay to undermine Lyons’s positive view, it would be nice to make trouble for externalism *en passant*. And, of course, we must fight for the survival of experientialism if this essay is to be successful. We thus turn to Lyons’s argument for the belief principle, which we shall call the BP argument. Lyons does not give the argument in premise-conclusion form, so what follows is my reconstruction of the argument.<sup>75</sup>

- 5) For something to evidentially justify a belief, that thing must itself be evidentially justified.
- 6) Only a belief may be evidentially justified.
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- 7) Thus, only a belief can evidentially justify a belief.

We may, following our assertion of the functional equivalence of “evidential justifier” and “epistemic reason,” translate this argument into “epistemic reasons” talk rather easily:

- 5’) For something to be an epistemic reason for a belief, that thing must itself have an epistemic reason in its favor.
- 6’) Only beliefs may have epistemic reasons in their favor.
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<sup>75</sup> This reconstruction is based on Lyons’s (2009) discussion of BP given in chapter three, pp. 74-76.

7') Thus, only a belief can be an epistemic reason for a belief.

This argument, if sound, is devastating to the experientialist position, for it rules out the possibility of foundational belief that is, in Lyons's parlance, evidentially justified. We must, then, examine the case that can be made for each of its premises.

Let's begin with premise 5'. To show the plausibility of the premise, Lyons considers a case of justified belief. What, Lyons asks, justifies any belief? He contends that it is the justification of the premises we offer in support of the belief (Lyons, 2009, p. 75). For example, we may ask what justifies my belief that Mr. Obama is in Orlando. It is surely whatever justifies my "premise"—so, if one of my reasons for thinking that Mr. Obama is in Orlando is that the morning paper listed his schedule, then surely this justification depends in part on how well justified I am in thinking the claims of that newspaper are reliable, which in turn depends in part on how well justified I am in thinking that the newspaper checks its facts, and so on. In my parlance, each of these justifying beliefs serves as an epistemic reason for the belief it justifies. But it seems they can only serve in this role as an epistemic reason if they have some epistemic reason in their favor. Contrast the case above—where I can give a series of inconclusive but otherwise strong reasons—with the case where I can offer no good reasons at all for thinking that Mr. Obama is in Orlando. I perhaps offer some reason—say, Mr. Obama likes sunny weather, so he's in Orlando—but it seems that this belief about Mr. Obama's preferred climate has no epistemic reason in its favor, and thus is totally unjustified. If a belief has only unsupported—unjustified—"reasons" in its favor, it sounds odd to say that these are reasons at all.

This line of thought leads Lyons to make his more general point that only things with epistemic reasons (or, as he puts it, evidential justifiers) in their favor can serve as epistemic reasons (or evidential justifiers). That is why an unjustified belief cannot

justify. But this also suggests why other kinds of mental states cannot serve as reasons: they are themselves unjustified. My desire that a certain state of affairs obtains cannot serve as an epistemic reason because it is not the sort of thing that can have an epistemic reason in its favor. This may lead us to wonder what kind of state *can* serve as epistemic reasons. Lyons will contend that only beliefs may do so, for only beliefs may have epistemic reasons in their favor. But this is just premise six, to which we now turn our attention.

Why think that only beliefs may have epistemic reasons in their favor? Any other item, it seems, cannot be justified in this way. Consider some candidates—desires, hopes, fears, etc—it seems that these cannot have epistemic reasons in their favor. It would just be a category mistake to claim that they can (or so goes the Lyonsian line of thought) (2009, p. 75). We may be suspicious that there is something slippery going on here: no internalist foundationalist claims that conceiving, perceiving, etc., are justified in the same sense in which beliefs are justified. But this seems to be partly a matter of stipulation: justification is, by definition, a concept that applies to beliefs. But note that granting the stipulative nature of the definition does nothing to undermine premise six. For it is simply a matter of definition, and therefore beyond dispute.

If this is so, the weight of the argument falls on premise five (or five') and the question of whether something can *be* an epistemic reasons without having an epistemic reason in its favor. We grant, *arguendo*, the truth of 6 and 6'. We will thus focus our attention on the much more contentious issues of what an item needs to be of justificatory value.

Let's re-examine Lyons's defense of 5) (and 5')). Lyons offers us a grocery list of items that fail to justify—beliefs with no support, hunches, desires, fears, etc.—and argues that what they hold in common is their lack of justification. This dearth is what renders all of them incapable of justifying any beliefs. We may be suspicious that Lyons

has simply defined his way to his conclusion, by defining evidential justifiers (or epistemic reasons) in such a way that only a belief could satisfy what he wants. This would be perhaps be a fair criticism if Lyons had defined evidential justifiers in an unusual way, but it seems that he is in accord with at least some internalists on this issue (e.g., the author of the present essay). Furthermore, I think Lyons takes his earlier argument—that no experience could serve as an epistemic reason—to constitute a partial defense of premise five. For, if we have proven that no experience may justify a belief, then we are well on the road to showing that no non-doxastic state is capable of serving as an epistemic reason. Thus, it seems that the surest way of showing that premise five is false is to find some non-belief state that can serve as an epistemic reason without itself requiring an epistemic reason in its favor. That is, if we can find something besides a belief that can serve as an epistemic reason, then we have disproven the conclusion. And, as this essay wishes to defend experientialism, such an account must also manage to get around Lyons's argument that no experience can serve as an epistemic reason. As the reader may have guessed, I do think that we have at least one account available that can meet all these demands. As the reader may also have guessed, it is by appeal to acquaintance that we can defeat these two arguments and defend experientialism. I have already offered a sketch of an account of justification based on acquaintance in outline (Chapter Two) and in a bit more detail (Chapter Three), but we must now see how to answer the questions that Lyons has set the experientialist. To answering these questions we now turn.

#### *4. Defending experientialism*

I begin by pointing out that Lyons has only considered sensations and percepts in isolation, not what their justificatory abilities may be as part of a justifying complex. But before we explore the merits of this suggestion, we must first determine in what

relationship acquaintances stand with respect to our experience. How does acquaintance “fit in” to the picture that Lyons has outlined, of low-level sensations and high-level perception? It seems only two answers are possible: acquaintances are themselves a kind of sensation or percept—and this includes the possibility that some acquaintances are sensations and some are percepts—or acquaintances are something else. There also remains the question of whether we can be *acquainted with* sensations and percepts, and, if so, how this acquaintance contributes to justification.

#### 4.1 SOME AWKWARD QUESTIONS ABOUT ACQUAINTANCE

The standard story, according to Lyons, is that sensations and percepts are representations, or representational mental states (2009, 69). Acquaintances, on the other hand, are relations between the mind and the world, or “between a self and a thing, property, or fact” (Fumerton 1995, 74). This offers a quick argument for thinking acquaintances are not another mental state to be placed alongside percepts and sensations. Lyons (2009) does suggest that percepts could perhaps be a certain kind of relation to a representation, i.e., standing in a certain relation to a representation is just what it is to be a percept (pp. 108-109). This move would perhaps make room for acquaintance: when I stand in the percept relation to a representation—which would really be an acquaintance relation—then that representation is a percept.<sup>76</sup> Note that this move would also give the mind “access” to the relevant percepts, as we would be acquainted with the representation, making it available for use in justification. This suggestion is difficult to assess, in part because it does such violence to the notion of percept under which we have labored. If a percept is just a representation, then it makes

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<sup>76</sup> A difficulty here is that it seems that this would make percepts both a particular (a representation) and a relation (a universal). This tells against the current reading; as I will not endorse this reading, I leave this issue unaddressed. I am grateful to Professor E. Fales for bringing this point to my attention.

sense to say that there are percepts of which we are unaware. But it is difficult to accept the idea of “unconscious percepts” if we say that there is a percept relation that just is the acquaintance relation. On such a view, it is difficult to make sense of a part of experience with which we are not acquainted. Seeing an object *as* a pen seems to be something with which I must be acquainted on this view. But part of what made the acquaintance view attractive to begin with was that it allowed us to make sense of an experience being “in the mind” but with which you are not acquainted. (One example was the pain to which we were not attending.) A second objection is that this view makes it quite unclear what unifies the various types of acquaintance under one “kind.” That is, standing in a certain relation to a certain representation counts as being acquainted with, or having, a percept. But it now becomes less clear what other kinds of acquaintances—with things, facts, thoughts, etc., are, and what a relationship is between the difference kinds of acquaintance. For these reasons, I think it is most natural to proceed as though acquaintance is distinct from sensations and percepts. (Of course, the industrious reader with nothing better to do could develop an account of acquaintance along the lines suggested above and attempt to show that these objections may be maneuvered around.)

However, another question arises: may we be acquainted with sensations, and how does this fit into the categories of acquaintance already outlined (thing, property, fact)? It seems that we must be able to be acquainted with sensations; otherwise, it is difficult to make sense of our often detailed reports of our experiences.<sup>77</sup> What

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<sup>77</sup> Lyons (2009), in his externalist fervor, has endorsed the idea that perceptual zombies would give just as detailed reports as we would (pp. 52, 72-74). (They are psychologically identical to us with the exception of perceptual states, which presumably includes giving identical responses to questions about the quality of experience.) Lyons (2009) also contends that such zombies are physically possible, which he thinks is a further argument against experientialist views (p. 84). Zombies would also be identical in that their beliefs share the same epistemic status. As they have no perceptual experience, however, they could not be using experience to justify their beliefs. This possibility—even if it is a real possibility—should not detract from the main point that, in ordinary cases, we do seem to be aware of (some of) our sensations.

contributes to the difficulty is that the representation with which we are acquainted seems like it may be any of the above: shall we say, because we are acquainted with a representation—which is surely a *thing*—that we are acquainted with a thing? Or, as the representation under discussion is a sensation, shall we say that we are acquainted with a *property*? Or, as the representation is of an object having some property, shall we say that we are acquainted with a fact (something like the fact that “x is F”)? Furthermore, we must ask about the scope of acquaintance. Could I be acquainted with more than one of these things at once (both a property and a fact)? It seems that the answer is yes. Can we widen the scope further? Is it possible to be acquainted with a representation under several descriptions at once? Can I simultaneously be acquainted with an object as, say, my favorite pen, a gift from my wife, a yellow object, a shiny object, an instance of a certain property—say, symmetry—etc.? And, how many of these can be folded into a single act of acquaintance? That is, can my acquaintance with the symmetry be the very same act of acquaintance with the fact that “there’s a pen”? And, most importantly, what importance do these questions have for developing a successful experientialist account?

It is difficult to make headway on these questions, in part because the notion of a sensation is still unclear. If we mean by sensation a low-level representation that is the output of a sensory module, then it seems that many sensations are not the sort of thing with which we may be acquainted. The scientific folks say that we have many representations that get passed through different levels of processing. And, while we can become aware of the incomplete nature of our visual experience—we can find our blind spots, or note our inability to distinguish colors in our peripheral vision, etc.—we do not notice most of the processing; we end up with *a* visual experience, without noticing the many representations or levels that constitute it. Thus, if we treat sensations as lacking propositional content, then we can carve up our visual experience into a large number of sensations, but it is unclear whether any of these should be regarded as a low-level



representation. Presumably, by the time I am aware of them, they are fairly “high-level” representations, as they have gone through several levels of processing (or I wouldn’t notice them at all). Similarly, if we say that *seeing as* is experiencing a percept, then I do experience lots of percept in my normal visual field. But it is difficult to make sense of these being high-level representations, which are allegedly qualia-poor. In my experience, I think I am seeing an object *as* a pen. It seems that percepts might also be outside of my acquaintance, if we insist on Lyons’s description of them as information-rich but qualia-poor. To put the point differently, we have two different ways of dividing sensations and percepts—a conceptual divide versus a low-level/high-level divide—and it is difficult to square these with one another. It is also difficult to square these with our visual experience. Thus, we are left with a provocative challenge to experientialism in the form of a dilemma—either sensations or percepts must justify us, but neither will do—but it is unclear how to make sense of the terms Lyons uses. Further, our favored response—an acquaintance theory—also faces difficulties in coming to grips with Lyons’s dichotomy. This will leave our response—once given—open to the charge that it merely misunderstands or misrepresents Lyons’s position.

How, then, shall we proceed? I shall attempt a sketch of some answers to the above set of questions, in the hope that the sketch will be sufficient to provide a convincing response to Lyons’s challenge while avoiding a dogmatic adherence to positions that are “up in the air.”

#### *4.2 ANSWERING AWKWARD ACQUAINTANCE QUESTIONS*

Let’s begin picking our way through the briar patch. First, perceptual objects of acquaintance must be within a subject’s perceptual grasp or within his memory. While there probably are many different levels of representation, it seems that only things of which the subject is phenomenally aware of may count as acquaintance via perception.

(This is not to say there is a phenomenon associated with every acquaintance. Perhaps there is something it “feels like” to be acquainted with the correspondence relation, or with abstracta, but perhaps not.) The point to grasp here is that various representations that evade our attention are unsuitable candidates for objects of acquaintance. It seems that all I can be acquainted with is what I can see (hear, etc.). If it is difficult to separate our sensory experiences into component parts, it is a difficulty that will likely always be with us. But these difficulties should not make us deny the phenomenon of acquaintance.

This prompts the further issues of what kinds of representations we are acquainted with in our ordinary visual experience: am I acquainted with sensations, percepts, or both? If we rely on the conceptual division, then we are certainly acquainted with percepts, for it seems that we see objects under certain descriptions—seeing as a table, hearing as a flute, etc. If we instead use the low-level/high-level distinction, it seems that we are acquainted with sensations, as Lyons contends that percepts are generally qualia poor, and our experience generally is not. And I suppose this is why Lyons thinks experientialism sounds plausible: we run together different parts of our experience to get both qualia and information.

However, we must resist Lyons’s characterization of experience. Lyons treats the deliverances of the various cognitive sciences as his starting point, but it seems that this is getting it exactly backwards. Rather, we should begin with our sensory experience. Indeed, on the view we are defending, this is the only place to begin. We should be more concerned with taking our experience as it comes than with trying to fit our experience into the dichotomies that Lyons proposes. What this means, practically, is that we should ignore worries about representations being low or high level. Instead, we should focus on the other way of dividing them, by whether they contain conceptual/propositional content. What this means with respect to the objects of

acquaintance we shall have occasion to discuss. However, it is futile to continue our discussion in such vague terms. It would be best to turn, at this point, to describing our response to Lyons's argument, including use of some examples. This will allow us to address most of the remaining worries regarding acquaintance and experience.

#### 4.3 ACQUAINTANCE TO THE RESCUE (AGAIN!)

The short answer to the challenge posed by Lyons is to say that no experience—or act of acquaintance—can justify a belief by itself. Rather, it is by having a *complex of acquaintances* that we gain justification. In short, I propose that, when we have these acquaintances, we indeed have something that is an epistemic reason without having some further epistemic reason in its favor. It is because of the nature of acquaintances that we can improve our epistemic position without further epistemic reasons. This contention, if true, shows the falsity of premise five of our BP argument, and renders it unsound. With respect to the earlier argument—the “no experience” argument—I am prepared to grant its soundness, so far as it goes. But notice that this argument does not undermine acquaintance foundationalism. For, on this view, it is not a single experience alone that justifies. We should note that Lyons (2009) discusses briefly the possibility of more than one representation serving to justify us (p. 70).<sup>78</sup> He concedes that it is in principle possible for various parts of experience to do together what no experience may do alone. However, he notes that experiences themselves do not seem to be the right sort of thing that could justify, no matter how many we had. He has a point—merely piling up experiences does us no good. But, of course, we are *not* just piling up experiences; we are acquainting ourselves with some of them. It is our acquaintance with the objects of experience—when put together properly—that justifies.

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<sup>78</sup> He also mentions—but does not discuss—Fumertonian acquaintance at (2009, p. 79, and also p. 79, n. 48).

Recall that, on our account of non-inferential propositional justification, we require an acquaintance with the fact that *p*, the thought that *p*, and the relation of correspondence between the fact and the thought. Are these objects of our experience? The fact that *p* does seem to be often a part of our experience. For instance, when I am looking at the desk in front of me, I see a yellow pen. What is the fact with which I am acquainted? Can it be *yellow-pen-there-now*? Is it just “yellow”? Or . . .? (This is related to our earlier question of the “grasp” of acquaintance—could I grasp together what might be grasped separately (e.g., color and shape)? Fales (1996) has given the rather plausible answer that what may be given to us in a single experience depends on our history (p. 104ff.). Someone with no experience of modern appliances could not have the fact of “refrigerator-ness” given to him in experience. But we, who do have common contact with such machines, could have, it seems a refrigerator-like experience. And thus it seems that we could be acquainted with the fact of refrigerator-ness. However, I am not convinced of this point and do not offer it as a dogma. A full account of acquaintance foundationalism must address it, but that is not our task here.)

Let's proceed as though we know of what we speak: I am acquainted with the fact of there being something yellow. We might also be curious as to whether I am acquainted with the sensation of yellow or the percept of yellow: am I acquainted with the thing *as a yellow thing*? For now, let us say that we are so acquainted: we are acquainted with a yellow percept. However, Lyons is right to point out that this does not suffice to justify us. More is needed. However, suppose we are also acquainted with the thought—“that thing is yellow.” This by itself also could not justify us. We must also be acquainted with the correspondence between the fact and the thought. It is these three *together* that can provide us with an epistemic reason for our belief. Indeed, the appropriate acquaintances constitute an epistemic reason for that belief.

We mentioned earlier that we may be acquainted with the sensation of yellow.

Does this change the story we must tell about justifying the belief? In details, perhaps, but not in essence. The worry, I think, is that there would be no content to justify the proposition or thought if it was a mere sensation. But it is *not* a mere sensation that does the justifying: it is a sensation with which we are acquainted. And, after all, the proposition “that thing is yellow” may have as part of its content some yellow sensation. It is this content that allows us to determine the truth of a proposition. Again, the mere sensation does nothing, but the acquaintance with the sensation allows us to grasp the necessary content. Perhaps the reader thinks this makes acquaintance magical, but our ability to connect to the world seems no less magical.

This approach probably still sounds too quick for anyone who is not already an acquaintance foundationalist, and probably too quick even for those who are. Lyons (2009), for instance, although he considers Fumerton’s position, contends that the metaphor of having a justifier “immediately before consciousness” is too obscure to be of any obvious help (p. 79). He suggests that perhaps Fumerton means that such beliefs are basic. But this, he contends, doesn’t address the problems he’s already raised for experientialism—how could a belief be evidentially justified on the basis of experience? (Or, perhaps, Lyons suggests, by contending that acquaintance is not itself an epistemic relation, Fumerton means to suggest—or would be charitably interpreted as suggesting—that acquaintance serves as a non-evidential justifier: it contributes to justification, but not by providing evidence (in the same way that the proper workings of our cognitive system contribute to justification without being evidence). But this does not affect Lyons’s central point that only beliefs can serve as epistemic reasons.)

The way around such a difficulty—I pray the reader excuses the tedium of this repetition—is to grant Lyons’s point that experience—*by itself*—does not serve as an epistemic reason, nor does any acquaintance do so. In Lyons’s words, these are non-evidential justifiers. But this does not vitiate acquaintance foundationalism. Recall that

the central contention of the acquaintance foundationalism I defend is that an epistemic reason consists of three acquaintances. Each of them, separately, does not count as evidence, but together they serve as an epistemic reason. The reader may wonder how such a feat is possible, and the acquaintance foundationalist will simply say what we have already said, in terms of propositions and the facts that make them true. Lyons—and others—may contend that such acquaintances could not serve as epistemic reasons because only a belief can do so. But we are explaining how something can serve as an epistemic reason without being a belief. That is, Lyons has given us an argument for thinking that only a belief may serve as an epistemic reason, which rests on the crucial premise that we must have an epistemic reason in favor of whatever serves as an epistemic reason. However, we have just tried to demonstrate that this is not so. Our acquaintances can constitute an epistemic reason without needing epistemic reasons in their favor.

#### *4.4 AN EXTERNALIST BEAR TRAP*

Furthermore, we might suspect that Lyons gets hoisted on his own petard here. That is, he was attempting to offer an argument that the internalist could offer no epistemic reasons in favor of basic beliefs. However, the opposite is actually true: according to Lyons's lights, we can demonstrate that the externalist can actually have no evidence in favor of any beliefs whatsoever. I propose to defend this claim now. (Note that such a defense is not, strictly speaking, necessary. All that is necessary to defeat Lyons's dilemma is to give an account of justification that gives a serious role to experience, and this we have already tried to do. But causing trouble for the externalist is always a nice bonus. Furthermore, the reader may find my account of acquaintance a bit unsatisfying. If he finds himself tempted by Lyons's arguments, my hope is that drawing out some of the more severe consequences can help the reader to resist this

temptation.)

Lyons seems to argue that the reason non-doxastic states—be they experiences, fears, desires, or what have you—can do no justifying work is because they cannot have evidential justifiers in their favor. To put it in terms of epistemic reasons, only something with an epistemic reason in its favor can serve as an epistemic reason. As we have just seen, we have reason to doubt this doctrine. However, let us suppose that it is true. We thus grant the truth of premise five. However, once we grant the truth of this premise, we can construct a further argument to highlight the severity of Lyons's position. Consider the following:

8) Only an evidentially justified belief may evidentially justify another belief. (5, 7)

Or, in terms of epistemic reasons:

8') Only a belief supported by epistemic reasons may serve as an epistemic reason for another belief. (5', 7')

9) No foundational belief may be supported by an epistemic reason. (8', df. of foundational belief)

10) Ultimately, all beliefs supported by epistemic reasons depend entirely on foundational beliefs to supply those epistemic reasons. (df. of epistemic reason, df. of foundational belief)

11) No belief that depends on a foundational belief being among its epistemic reasons may count that belief among the epistemic reasons in its favor. (8', 9)

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12) No belief may be supported by epistemic reasons. (10, 11)

This result is not one that Lyons recognizes, nor does it accord with his position. It seems that Lyons (2009) suggests that it is possible for some of our beliefs to be evidentially justified (p. 167ff.); however, the above argument shows that this is not the case. Of course, I may have misrepresented Lyons's position, or perhaps the argument is unsound. I leave it for the externalist to consider.

Lyons—or any other externalist—may always claim that a belief does not need *grounds*—epistemic reasons—to be justified. Instead, this justification comes from the

means by which the belief is produced (the reliability of the module, for Lyons). These modules allow for our basic beliefs to be justified—though “ungrounded”—and so provide a foundation for the rest of our beliefs. This essay is not concerned to quarrel with externalism proper, so evaluating this argument is out of the proper purview of the essay. All the same, I do wish to emphasize the extreme lengths to which Lyons’s position is now pushed. He began with the more modest claim that experiences could not evidentially justify, then defended the stronger claim that only a belief could evidentially justify another belief. However, if our reflections are correct, then Lyons is now committed to the view that no belief can be evidence for another belief *in Lyons’s sense of evidence and by Lyons’s own lights*. Lyons (2009) at times suggests above the level of foundations, we may have evidence—epistemic reasons—for our belief (p. 167ff.). My point is merely that this suggestion cannot be serious. The only way to speak of evidence for beliefs—if our argument is correct—is in terms of non-evidential justifiers, which would be an equivocation. Of course, the easiest way to resist this conclusion is to give up premise five of the argument, but this is just what we have been trying to convince the reader of.

To sum up our line of argument, accepting Lyons’s argument for the belief principle shows the poverty of externalism, which perhaps provides some (additional) motivation to reject that argument. But only premise five is open for rejection, as six was stipulated. We focused our attention on premise five—the requirement that something have an epistemic reason to support it before it can serve as an epistemic reason itself—and tried to show its falsity. This task we accomplished by giving an account of non-inferential justification based on acquaintance, which demonstrates how items that are not themselves supported by epistemic reasons may form an epistemic reason. This, in turn, allows us to make an “end run” around Lyons’s dilemma, as we rely neither on sensations nor percepts alone to provide justification.



The reader may recall that we began this chapter with a question about our response to the Sellarsian dilemma. This question focused on whether acquaintances could really do any justifying work without themselves being justified. We have tried to demonstrate that they can do such work. That has been the focus of this chapter: to find a role for experience in the face of Lyons's challenge. Acquaintance foundationalism meets this challenge, meeting the need for our beliefs to be based on experience and explaining how our experience can justify. However, there are still some lingering questions from chapter three: mustn't I be aware that I am justified—and be justified in so thinking—to be a good internalist? And doesn't this lead to regress? In other words, what shall we say about Michael Bergmann's dilemma? It is to this challenge that we turn our attention in the final chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### BERGMANN'S DILEMMA

#### *1. Introduction and outline*

Michael Bergmann defends the last version of the Sellarsian dilemma that we consider. He contends that internalism is self-defeating, in that internalism cannot provide any epistemic reasons—for any beliefs—whatsoever. Note that this severe skepticism would undermine our very ability to give reasons for internalism (Bergmann, 2006, p. 23). The internalist then becomes like Samson pushing over the pillars in the temple of the Philistines: it all comes down.<sup>79</sup> While Bergmann thinks of his arguments as being wide in scope—they affect both coherentism and foundationalism (see his 2006, p. 13), and they affect all classes of justification (inferred, *a priori*, empirical)—we shall focus only on basic perceptual beliefs. We do so, as in the rest of the essay, to keep a firm target of attention. Also, as Bergmann himself considers several examples of perceptual beliefs, this allows us to make an “apples to apples” comparison.

Such a sweeping conclusion requires a powerful argument, which Bergmann provides. It is the goal of this chapter to examine this argument closely and show that at least one premise in it is false (we shall grant, *arguendo*, its validity). We shall attempt to do so, unsurprisingly, from the perspective of acquaintance foundationalism; in particular, the version of it that this essay has heretofore defended. The structure of the chapter is this: we begin with a close consideration of the background of Bergmann's dilemma, including a description of the core concepts he uses in his argument. We then state the argument and provide some motivation for it, including some defense of the premises. This defense will include some of Bergmann's rejoinders to the acquaintance foundationalists that he thinks have provided unsatisfactory replies to the dilemma. We

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<sup>79</sup> For the Philistines among my readers, you may find this story in Judges 16.23ff.

then move to our response to the dilemma. This we do by reviewing the account we outlined in chapter two and defended in chapters three and four. We then pull together some threads from Fumerton, Fales, and Bonjour to show how the acquaintance foundationalist avoids Bergmann's dilemma. We close with some reflections on skepticism.

## *2. Bergmann's dilemma*

### *2.1 THE PRELIMINARIES*

Bergmann begins with some reflections on the motivation for internalism. The main motivation is that it provides what we may call an "internal constraint" on our beliefs. That is, it is not good enough for a believer to merely believe something: there must be some reason why the believer does believe it (2006, pp 11-12). And it is not enough for there to merely be some reason, but this must be something that believer is aware of. Otherwise, there is nothing to separate this belief from a "stray hunch or arbitrary conviction" (2006, p. 12). This is why we do not think people are justified in their beliefs simply based on conviction ("I just *know* I'm going to pick the right Powerball ticket"). There must not only be a good reason to believe, but the believer must, it seems, have this reason. Bergmann (2006) calls this the "subject's perspective objection" (hereafter SPO), in that the internalist will use this maneuver to object to any position that does not constrain beliefs in this way (p. 12). Thus, the internalist will protest, with respect to any externalist theory of justification, that beliefs so justified are arbitrary or unsupported *from the subject's perspective*. Any self-respecting internalist, then, must keep this constraint on our beliefs, or lose the motivation for being an internalist in the first place.<sup>80</sup> Bergmann will argue that one of the horns of his dilemma

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<sup>80</sup> Bergmann (2006) considers the possibility of alternative motivations for internalism in his fourth chapter and perhaps elsewhere (see p. 12, n. 19).

will lead to abandoning an appropriate internal constraint on beliefs, leading any view that accepts this horn vulnerable to the SPO (more on this presently).

Bergmann (2006) thus thinks about internalism in terms of *awareness*: the internalist thinks the believer must be aware of what makes his beliefs good (pp. 9-11). Bergmann distinguishes between different kinds of awareness. *Weak awareness* is awareness of a justifier that does not involve conceiving of that justifier as being relevant to the “justification or truth” of the relevant belief (Bergmann, 2006, p. 13). *Strong awareness*, conversely, is awareness of a justifier that does involve such conceiving: that is, my awareness is *strong awareness* only if I conceive of that justifier as being relevant to the “justification or truth” of the belief in question (Bergmann, 2006, p. 13). In other words, strong awareness seems to demand awareness of the justifier *as a justifier*, while weak awareness does not make this demand.

## 2.2 THE DILEMMA PROPER

This consideration of awareness suggests to Bergmann that internalism contains a deep tension between its fundamental commitments. In short, internalism must impose an awareness requirement on justification, but neither strong awareness nor weak awareness will do. Weak awareness is of no use in satisfying the internalist’s demand for an internal constraint on belief. That is, if we only require weak awareness, it seems that a believer may meet this requirement in the case of a particular belief, yet still fall prey to the SPO. For any justifier I might possess—if I have no clue as to its status as a justifier—seems helpless to improve my epistemic position. It seems that the belief is more of a hunch, without a reason to support it. Conversely, the internalist may require strong awareness—for a believer to believe with justification, he must not only be aware of what justifies, he must conceive of that justifier as being relevant to the justification of the belief. We schematize the problem as follows, where B is a belief, S is

a subject, and J is a justifier: for S to be justified in believing B, he must be aware of J and conceive of it as relevant to the “justification or truth” of B. But this conceiving may either be correct or incorrect, and only a correct conceiving could justify. (Surely, my belief that penguins can’t fly does not support my belief that I will win the lottery, even if I “conceive of” the former as being relevant to the latter.) I must then justify this conception (or belief) that the justifier is in fact positively relevant to the belief in question. But this starts us on a regress: I must now believe that my conception that J supports B is justified (a fairly complex proposition). And I must have some reason for thinking that this belief is justified, as well: some further thing, X, supports my belief that my conception that J supports B is justified. And so on the regress will go. There is a regress of beliefs of ever-increasing complexity: this means that the internalist will not be able to justify any beliefs to any degree whatsoever, including, presumably, his belief in internalism. Internalism thus flirts with self-refutation.<sup>81</sup>

In short, Bergmann contends that if we require strong awareness, we induce a vicious regress; if we require only weak awareness, internalism loses its primary motivation (by falling prey to the SPO). Bergmann (2006) puts the argument formally thus:

I. An essential feature of internalism is that it makes a subject’s actual or potential awareness of some justification-contributor a necessary condition for the justification of any belief held by that subject.

II. The awareness required by internalism is either strong awareness or weak awareness.

III. If the awareness required by internalism is strong awareness, then internalism has vicious regress problems leading to radical skepticism.

IV. If the awareness required by internalism is weak awareness, then internalism is vulnerable to the SPO, in which case internalism loses its main motivation for

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<sup>81</sup> As Bergmann (2006) seems to note (p. 23).

imposing the awareness requirement.

V. If internalism either leads to radical skepticism or loses its main motivation for imposing the awareness requirement (i.e. avoiding the SPO), then we should not endorse internalism.

VI. Therefore, we should not endorse internalism (pp. 13-14).

It seems relatively easy to translate such an argument into talk of epistemic reasons. The primary question is how to treat justification-contributors and awareness; it seems that these two are related to epistemic reasons, although it may be a bit opaque how. It seems that a justification-contributor is either what we are calling an epistemic reason, or one of its component parts (as these may reasonably be said to contribute to justification). I suggest the following translation: strong awareness is awareness that requires the subject to conceive of an epistemic reason—or one of its constituents—as being relevant to the justification or truth of a belief. Weak awareness does not require such conceiving.

This means that there is not much work to do in translating Bergmann's argument. The primary difference is in I (the only place where "justification-contributor" appears). The rest of the argument may remain the same, so long as we understand strong and weak awareness as outlined above. I now reads: "An essential feature of internalism is that it makes a subject's actual or potential awareness of some epistemic reason—or one of its constituents—a necessary condition for the justification of any belief held by that subject." But notice that it now seems impossible for me to be justified to any degree in believing anything. Thus, Bergmann is probably best interpreted as denying the internalist the ability to form epistemic reasons, or at least to use these epistemic reasons to justify beliefs.

Let us take a moment to examine the soundness of the argument. For the sake of space, I will grant Bergmann the validity of the argument, as well as the truth of premises

I, II, and V. I will focus on the truth of premises III and IV. Both premises enjoy some intuitive appeal, as we have already mentioned in our informal statement of the problem. An example may be useful in examining the merits of the argument. Suppose that I am looking at a red book on the table in front of me, and I form the belief “there’s a red book.” What justifies that belief, on an internalist view of justification? It must be, Bergmann says, something of which I am aware—otherwise, it ceases to be an internalist view. But what kind of awareness do we need? And of what? Suppose I think that my awareness of the redness of the book justifies me in thinking that the book is red. Bergmann will not examine the particulars of this account, but rather ask, is it strong or weak awareness of the redness that justifies you? If it is weak, this seems to be of no help. For recall that weak awareness means that I have not conceived of the justifier—the redness—as being in any way relevant to the belief. So, I might be aware of a red sensation, and I might be aware of the belief I have, but if I don’t conceive of the redness as being relevant to the belief, it is hard to see how it could justify this belief. Of course, I probably do think of the redness as being relevant to the belief, but it seems at least possible that I do not. And, in such a case, the beliefs seems true only accidentally. Strong awareness fares no better. For it requires me to conceive of the redness as being relevant to the belief. And surely this conceiving (or, perhaps, this belief) that they are related in the appropriate way needs justification (or something like justification, if we wish to restrict “justification” to describing beliefs alone). But to what could I appeal to provide this justification? And, whatever I appeal to seems to start us on a regress, for I must also have some reason for thinking this does justify me in believing that I am conceiving of the redness in a way that justifies my belief that the book is red. And so on the regress goes.

### 2.3 FAILED DISSOLUTIONS

Bergmann also does some work showing that there is “no escape” from this dilemma. He does so by considering several proposals from acquaintance foundationalists, and showing them all to be failures: they all get gored on one horn or the other. We will consider his comments on Fumerton, Fales, and BonJour, as these are instructive: they help us see what an account would require to evade this dilemma. We shall take up each these accounts, and Bergmann’s criticisms, in turn.

Recall that, for Fumerton, non-inferential propositional justification consists of our acquaintances with the thought that *p*, the fact that makes it true, and the relation of correspondence between the fact and the thought<sup>82</sup>. Bergmann interprets Fumerton as endorsing non-conceptual weak awareness (that is, acquaintance is a state such that we do not conceive of the thing with which we are acquainted in any particular way, including as being relevant to the justification of any belief). Bergmann thinks these acquaintances are not enough for justification. At the risk of tedium, let’s review why: if an act of acquaintance is not conceptual—in particular, if I do not conceive of, say, a fact as being relevant to the justification or truth of some belief—then it is unclear how it can play any role in justifying my belief. Such a state may accompany my belief but would be, apparently, epiphenomenal, or perhaps serve as what Lyons would call a non-evidential justifier. Note that it seems that Fumerton comes close to granting Bergmann’s point. In particular, he has claimed elsewhere that these acquaintances would only be sufficient for propositional justification (DePaul, 2001, pp. 13-14, p. 20 n. 16). He concedes that there need be some kind of basing requirement for the believer to have doxastic justification; otherwise, the believer could base his belief on a hunch, or what his psychic told him. But this comes awfully close to just granting Bergmann’s

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<sup>82</sup> Fumerton is explicit about this being sufficient only for propositional justification in DePaul (2001, p. 20, n. 16).



point that weak awareness is insufficient. Returning to our example of the red book on the table before me, we might ask how my belief is justified. Fumerton contends that the three-fold acquaintance—with the thought that “the book is red”, with the fact that makes it true (the redness of the book), and with the relation of correspondence between them—is sufficient for non-inferential propositional justification. And we can see his point: if I did have these acquaintances, then I’ve got something that seems like it could justify me. In my parlance, I’d say that there is an epistemic reason in favor of the belief, and perhaps the believer can be said to “possess” such a reason. But we have no assurance that the belief will be based on this reason. And, although Bergmann (2006) thinks this is highly unlikely, it is possible, he contends, for someone to miss the connection between the belief and their experience (pp. 28-32). In other words, we must be thinking about—conceiving of—the justifier (or epistemic reason) in the right way: that is, we must conceive of it as being relevant to the justification of the belief. But this is something Fumerton’s account does not allow for. He doesn’t tell us how to move from a mere propositional justification to something better.

We might try taking the strong awareness horn instead. Evan Fales (1996) does so, and goes so far as to grant that this does induce a regress; however, he contends that the regress is harmless (pp. 161-165). This is so because some propositions may be *transparent* to me (where transparency is a technical notion). The idea is that when I can hold a proposition before my mind, such that it is obvious to me what its content is—I can specify the truth-makers—and it is obvious to me that this content is satisfied—the truth-makers exist—then we may say that the proposition is transparent to me (Fales, 1996, pp.155-165). Fales contends that these “given” propositions provide a foundation to support our doxastic structures. Consider the Falesian example of “ $1+1=2$ ”: what justifies us in accepting this proposition? For Fales, it is that the proposition is transparent to us. For we understand clearly what makes the proposition true (that one

and one are two), and we can also grasp that the truth-makers do, in fact exist (one and one *are* two). If Bergmann, or anyone else, challenges Fales on the justification of this premise—mustn't you conceive of the truth-makers as being relevant to the truth of the proposition?—Fales (1996) will heartily agree (pp. 164-165). If a proposition is truly transparent to me, then it is transparently so: it is transparent to me that it is transparent. Thus, when I reflect on what justifies me, it is obvious to me what makes the belief true. I must conceive of the justifier as being relevant to the belief, but, if the proposition is transparent to me, this is not a problem.

Does this notion of transparency start a regress? Yes, Fales grants, but he insists that it is harmless. And note that the regress does bear some similarity to the regress that Bergmann warns the internalist against accepting. For, it seems, Fales is committed to the idea that his justification for *p* entails that he can entertain a series of propositions of ever-increasing complexity. Bergmann contends that this is not possible. We can't really satisfy a strong awareness requirement. But Fales contends that this is thinking of the regress in the wrong way. Bergmann's "dilemma" suggests that we must complete this chain of reasoning *before* we can have justification. But this is all wrong. Consider the "regress" of the truth of *p*<sup>83</sup>. If I accept "*p*" as true, you could easily induce me to accept "*p* is true" as true, with no further evidence. If I do think that *p* is true, then it seems essentially trivial to accept the truth of "*p* is true." But the same also goes for "It is true that *p* is true." And also for "It is true that it is true that *p* is true." And so on. Why does this not involve the speaker in a vicious regress? Well, it seems that all we need to know is the content of *p* and its truth-makers. We will also need to understand the essential triviality of "is true" and "It is true that . . ." (that is, "*p*" implies that "*p* is true"). But, once we see all these things—I suppose Fales would say that they are transparent to

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<sup>83</sup> Following Fales (1996, p. 165). For Bergmann's discussion, see his (2006, pp. 41-42).

us—it is unclear why the “regress” is troubling. For, if someone continues to push iterations of the above “is true” operator, we can simply shrug and say, “Of course!” For it is not as though we must accept and defend the truth of an infinitely long chain of propositions before we can accept the truth of p. It is just the truth of p that makes the claim acceptable. And so it is, Fales contends, with transparency. That is, it is not that I must—somehow—complete an infinitely long chain of justification and then get to be justified. It is, rather, that, when I have the content of the proposition and the fact that makes it true open to the mind—I see exactly what the proposition means and I see that such is the case—then that proposition is transparent to me and I am justified in believing it. And, then, when someone challenges me: “Yes, but do you know that you know?” the response is, again, “Of course!” Such a question does not introduce a new, more stringent requirement, for transparent propositions lie totally open to us (Fales, 1996, 165).

Bergmann won't stand for any of this. Bergmann stumbles over the doctrine of transparency—an understandable mistake, as transparency is presumably quite difficult to see. His claim is that, while he can grasp the essential triviality of iterating “is true,” he denies that transparently is equally—shall we say—transparent (Bergmann, 2006, pp. 41-43). He contends that the nested claims of transparency are not obviously trivial in the way that “is true” is. But why not? Of course, even Fales does not—or should not—think that the notion of transparency is intuitive to all and sundry *under that description*. If we simply stop someone on the street and ask him whether it is transparent to him that one and one are two, he will likely not know what to say. (Or, he will try and answer based on a charitable interpretation of what you might mean.) But he will not know what transparency is without us telling him, and this is no obstacle to accepting Fales's position. What, then, does Bergmann have in mind?

The idea seems to be that, even once the notion of transparency is explained, it is

not obvious that what is transparent is transparent (Bergmann, 2006, pp. 40-41). Again, we must avoid missing the point. It is not the case that merely explaining transparency ruins the legitimacy of the claim of transparency. It is thus unlike jazz (if you have to ask, you'll never know<sup>84</sup>). Explaining transparency does not *per se* undermine the claim that anything that is transparent to one is transparently so. Rather, Fales's claim is that, once we understand the content of the claim of transparency, and understand what would make a claim of transparency true, then we will understand—we will “just see”—that any claim that is transparent must be transparently so. And I must confess that I am a bit puzzled as to what Bergmann's difficulty is. He does contend that Fales merely asserts some important claims, rather than defending them (Bergmann, 2006, p. 40). Among these is the idea that transparencies can “stack” with no loss of clarity—that is, that a transparent claim will be, on reflection at least, one that is transparently transparent, and so on. But I must confess that I am at a loss as to what Bergmann is looking for. Does he not understand what it is for a claim to be transparent? What does he think of Fales's toy example of  $1+1=2$ ? Doesn't Bergmann find himself clearly understanding what that claim entails? And doesn't he grasp the truth-makers for the proposition? Then it seems that this claim, at least, is transparent to him. Would Bergmann be at all troubled by someone who tried to “go up a level” and challenge whether he could grasp the fact that he could grasp both the content and the truth-makers? If not, then it seems that he should be perfectly comfortable claiming that it is transparent to him that it is transparent that  $1+1=2$ . And, so, it seems that at least one claim is transparently transparent. Couldn't Bergmann generalize from this case?

If we may put the point another way, it is unclear what else Fales *could* say in defense of such an idea. That is, if some things really are transparent to us in the way

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<sup>84</sup> A quote the substance of which was allegedly uttered by Miles Davis.

that Fales contends, it is unclear whether we should really be able to argue that such things are transparent. Such a task would seem to be on a par with trying to argue for *modus ponens*.<sup>85</sup> If your opponent refuses to accept it, it's unclear what you can say in its defense. I am tempted to reverse the challenge, and ask Bergmann to describe what he thinks is going on in such a case. That is, surely Bergmann believes that one and one are two, and he presumably thinks such a belief is justified, and he surely thinks he can provide some reasons for thinking that this belief is true. And it is unclear what he would point to besides the content of the proposition and its truth-makers.

It is difficult to know how to adjudicate such an impasse. Furthermore, there are two other pressing questions about Fales account, neither of which Bergmann addresses. First is Fales's (1996) acceptance of the J/J principle: must we accept this principle (p. 165)? Can we reject the principle but still accept a strong awareness requirement on justification? Is the principle entailed by the notion of "transparency," such that we must accept both or neither? Second, Bergmann focuses on Fales's account of *a priori* justification, and says nothing, essentially, about his detailed treatment of justifying basic perceptual beliefs (the focus of this essay). So it becomes difficult to know what to make of Bergmann's criticisms of Fales. And, while I find Fales's idea of transparency helpful, I am less sure of my commitments to a J/J principle. Furthermore, to give a proper treatment of Fales's views would require at least its own chapter, and would take us away from our central worry here, which is dealing with Bergmann's challenge. Finally, it seems that Fales and I take different targets: Fales discusses more "nuts and bolts" issues of the given (e.g., do facts have a propositional structure? does this structure license inferences to propositions? is this an inference to the best explanation, or something else?<sup>86</sup>), while I am more concerned with the general structure of

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<sup>85</sup> This seems to be the appropriate moral to take from Carroll's (1895) regress.

<sup>86</sup> For Fales's (1996) discussion of these issues, see *A Defense of the Given*, chapters five and six.

justification, leaving many legitimate questions unanswered. I thus propose to sidestep the Bergmann/Fales debate, leaving as open questions whether we can have a satisfactory account of justification while rejecting J/J, whether some propositions are transparent to us, and whether justification depends on such transparency. In short, I think that Fales's account and my account have some significant harmonies, but, for reasons of space, I do not wish to exhaustively compare and contrast them here.

We should also consider Bergmann's criticisms of Laurence BonJour.<sup>87</sup> BonJour (2002) also takes the strong awareness horn of the dilemma, but, unlike Fales (and Bergmann), he denies that taking this horn leads to a regress (pp. 211-212). To prove this point, BonJour considers some cases of perception. He contends that a visual experience can justify believing some propositions because there is a "descriptive fit" between the experience and the proposition (BonJour, 2002, pp. 214-215). In other words, certain propositions can be taken to describe the experience. And, when the proposition and experience "fit," the experience can be taken as justification for the proposition (BonJour, 2002, p. 215). To call back to our "red book" example, what justifies us in believing there is a red book on the table is that I have a visual experience (as of a red book) that "fits" a proposition ("there's a red book").

The reader can already guess how Bergmann will respond to this line. He will ask about our *awareness* of the fit. Surely, he will push BonJour, you must be aware of the fit (Bergmann, 2006, p. 36)? For, if some "fit" existed but someone didn't realize it, surely it couldn't justify his belief. Of course, BonJour will respond. And what kind of awareness do we need? Don't we need strong awareness (that is, awareness where the subject *conceives of the fit* as being relevant to his justification) (Bergmann, 2006, p. 36)? And doesn't this awareness itself require justification? And, so Bergmann argues,

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<sup>87</sup> For a nice (albeit non-technical) summary of his position on these issues, see BonJour (2002, pp. 211ff.)

regress ensues. BonJour is not happy with this conclusion. He contends that grasping the fit between the experience and the proposition does not require a separate act of a judgment that requires further justification (BonJour, 2002, p. 212). Instead, it seems that somehow “seeing the fit” arises from clearly seeing the experience and the proposition (BonJour, 2002, p. 215). (Note that this seems to be flirting with a Falesian “transparency,” although I doubt BonJour would be happy putting it that way.)

Bergmann isn't buying it. He thinks that BonJour has failed to say enough about what it is that does the justifying. Even if, as BonJour says, it is the content of the experience and the proposition that does the justifying, mustn't we believe—Bergmann contends—that these are relevant to the justification? And doesn't that belief—or conceptualization—itself require justification (Bergmann, 2006, p. 37)? Paraphrasing Bergmann, it seems that what BonJour needs is a belief that the content of a particular experience and a particular proposition support my judgment that there is a descriptive fit between the experience and the proposition. And this belief must itself be justified. So the regress still looms. BonJour might claim that this judgment is somehow self-justifying, pushing him more in a Falesian direction, but it is unclear how he can make good on this suggestion. Or, he could perhaps end up saying that weak awareness is sufficient after all, which would push him in a Fumertonian direction (after all, he already has a tri-partite structure of justification). But, as we have already considered (and rejected) the weak horn, we should not pursue this possibility.

I contend that the theory of justification already outlined in this essay can withstand these challenges, by pulling together the merits of the accounts just considered. However, explaining and defending this response will require some substantive discussion. To this task we now turn.

### *3. Escaping the dilemma*

Let's recap our account as it currently stands, using our trusty "red book" example. When I am acquainted with the thought "there's a red book," and acquainted with the fact that makes it true (the red book), and with the relation of correspondence between them, I have an epistemic reason in favor of the belief "there's a red book." This suffices for propositional justification, barring defeaters (a matter which we lack adequate space to consider). To achieve doxastic justification, I need to be acquainted with the epistemic reason (which is itself a set of acquaintances), and with the belief, and with the relation of correspondence (or relevance) between them. When I have these three acquaintances, then I have doxastic justification for the belief. (I stop short, recall, of calling this a justified belief because it is unclear what counts as having a belief.) The reader may call foul on this account, because he doubts whether I may be acquainted with the fact of there being a red book before me. Surely that is begging a question: isn't it better to say I am acquainted with the appearance, or with some property? I am willing to grant the point, but I do not think anything much rides on it. We can alter the above example without doing violence to the account. Instead, I will be acquainted with the appearance of redness, and the proposition it makes true ("I am redly appeared to"), and the relation of correspondence between these. This will, of course, make it more difficult to know things about the external world (I might have to infer more, which seems to open us up to more skeptical challenges), but I do not see that it affects the basic structure of the justification.

It is a curious fact that in studying the revolution in dynamics and astronomy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there is a tendency to make the principal players out to be more insightful than they were. Many of Galileo's proofs are really nothing of the sort; Descartes buries his idea of inertia amid a claptrap of false notions and unhelpful concepts; Kepler needs something close to a miracle to make his



calculations of the orbit of Mercury come out right. It took Newton—whose publications are mostly on subjects now considered flatly unscientific—to pull out just the right pieces and assemble them into a working whole.<sup>88</sup> With all respect to the epistemologists just discussed, I propose to do something like what Newton did.<sup>89</sup> That is, I think there is much that is insightful in each of these accounts. However, I think the right bits must be carefully assembled to make things come out right. I have just recapitulated the outlines of this account; however, we may be curious how this account stands up to Bergmann's challenge.

We should begin by noting that this account takes the strong horn of the dilemma, for reasons already discussed (meaning that we reject premise III of Bergmann's argument). And that is just the purpose of requiring that the believer must be acquainted with his epistemic reasons *as* epistemic reasons: this prevents him from having an epistemic reason, but not believing on this basis. He must grasp the epistemic reason and its connection to the belief for his belief to be justified. Thus, this position, despite its obvious reliance on Richard Fumerton, takes the account in a direction with which he is probably unsatisfied. I will not attempt too much sparring with Fumerton here: if he thinks the strong awareness horn of the dilemma is doomed, he is welcome to propose what we need for doxastic justification (or propose a different way of taking the strong awareness horn). Between BonJour and Fales, I am inclined to say that no regress ensues (not that a harmless regress ensues). For what justifies us is our

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<sup>88</sup> Kepler, for instance, makes two errors in the calculations that cancel each other out; furthermore, had he attempted to calculate the orbit of any other planet in our solar system, the foci would have been too close together for Kepler to determine that the orbit was, in fact, an ellipse. He also attempted to construct a model of our solar system on a system of Platonic solids (and got this close to making it work). For a discussion of all of these figures, see Koestler's (1959) excellent book *The Sleepwalkers*, especially parts four and five.

<sup>89</sup> I realize the seeming arrogance of such a claim. I contend that the comparison extends only to both Newton and me trying to build a better account out of bits of other people's accounts. I make no claim to Newton's brilliance, originality, or profundity. If the reader prefers, he can compare the author of the present essay to Victor Frankenstein—arrogant, the father of a monster, and doomed.

acquaintance with the epistemic reason, and also our acquaintance with the connection between this reason and the belief. No regress ensues because acquaintance is a regress-stopper. When Bergmann asks why we think something is an epistemic reason, or think that it supports our belief, it seems the only thing we can say is that we are acquainted with it. And it is difficult to see what else Bergmann might be looking for. Is he claiming that our acquaintances are not enough? What else could he want? Is he asking for assurance that something is an epistemic reason? That simply derives from our “first-level” acquaintance with the facts, etc. Is he doubting our ability to be acquainted with facts? Well, I suggest that this is being willfully obtuse, but in any case this isn’t really an objection. I *am* acquainted with facts, and acquainted with my acquaintance with them, and I am willing to bet Bergmann is, too.

We might guess how Bergmann might object to our account. Don’t I have to be *strongly aware* of these epistemic reasons—that is, aware of their ability to justify a belief—and doesn’t this awareness need justification, or something like it? On my account, I will say that what makes it reasonable to believe that the epistemic reason really does support the belief in question is just that we are also acquainted with the connection between the epistemic reason and the belief. But Bergmann will likely not be satisfied with this, either. We can perhaps restate the problem this way: it is possible that we think we have an acquaintance with the truth connection when there isn’t one. What criteria can we offer for separating the sheep from the goats? And, even if we can offer some good criteria, doesn’t this vitiate the claim that these things are supposed to be basic?

This is a good challenge, but I think it is misguided. Are we at all swayed by the similar challenge in the case of pain? Look, it’s possible that you think you are in pain when you aren’t really, so how do you separate the good cases from the bad ones? It isn’t clear there really are any criteria to offer here; only practical advice seems possible:

think really carefully and try not to get distracted. And it seems the same is true for spotting truth connections. Of course this is a skill that may be developed, perhaps akin to being able to tell when two pitches match, but that gives us no reason to think that there is anything deficient in someone who can't give some further reason for thinking that there is such a truth connection, any more than we would challenge someone who thinks that two pitches really match to give us some reason to think that they do.

If Bergmann is not satisfied on this point, I find myself out of things to say. I have rolled down the car window. We just have to hope that the fly finds his way out, eventually.

#### *4. Skepticism reconsidered*

The reader may recall that we began this essay with the motto "Skepticism first!" It is perhaps appropriate to close this essay with some further speculations on skepticism. If we begin by doubting whether we ever know anything, it may be impossible to ever close the gap between doubt and certainty. This, however, should not worry us *qua* philosophers (or, at least, *qua* epistemologists). We are concerned with the fundamental structure of reality, and not with making sure our ordinary assertions of knowledge come out true. Whether the account I have defended has sufficient resources to defeat the skeptic likely depends on what can be brought within the scope of acquaintance. If we may be acquainted with physical objects, then we have a much better shot than if we can only be acquainted with our own mental states. This is an open question and worth further consideration. In the end, though, our inability to come up with reasonable beliefs based on our strictest standards should not worry us. Perhaps the moral of the story is that, if knowledge (or justification) end up being unattainable, these concepts are still useful as idealizations. That is no barrier to developing some weaker concept that describes the epistemic status that our beliefs commonly have. It is

certainly no objection to traditional epistemology, nor to acquaintance foundationalism in particular. There is still much work to do to make acquaintance foundationalism as explicit as we might like. My hope is that this essay has shown that this work is worth doing.

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