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# Epistemic Desiderata

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The central aim of this paper is to suggest that we should abandon the idea that there is a unique something or other properly called 'epistemic justification'. Having done so we will be free to recognize and investigate a number of different ways in which beliefs can be better or worse from an epistemic point of view. Such a change would cast the enterprise of epistemology in a new light.

## i

### Controversies Over Conditions of Justification

I will approach this task by considering some of the most fundamental recent debates over conditions for the epistemic justification of beliefs. It will appear in due time just how this is connected with my central aim. I am concerned here with controversies over whether one or another condition is necessary for justification; questions about what is sufficient will be left to one side. Moreover, I shall be focusing on conditions of a relatively abstract sort, conditions that place constraints on what more concrete conditions will do the job. To fix our thoughts, let's take it that I can be justified in believing that *p* by virtue of some relation of that belief, or its propositional content, to grounds (evidence, reasons)<sup>1</sup> I have for it, in the form of experiences or other things I know or justifiably believe. Thus my reason for believing that my wife is not at home is that her car is not in the driveway. My ground for believing that her car is not in the driveway is the way that area looks to me. Putative necessary conditions of at least the first four sorts I will mention can be thought of as requirements that grounds, or their relation to the belief in question, will have to satisfy in order that the belief thereby be justified. Please note that it is no part of the contentions of this paper that justification *is* a matter of the relation of the belief to adequate grounds. Indeed, I shall be plumping for dropping the question of the justification of belief altogether. The construal of justification in terms of adequate grounds is introduced only

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<sup>1</sup> Though important distinctions can be made between these three terms, for my purposes in this paper I can, and will, use them interchangeably.

to provide a framework for considering a number of putatively necessary conditions of justification. Here are some of the more prominent candidates.

1. *Basing relation*. In order that my belief that *p* be justified it is not enough that I merely *have* a ground of the appropriate sort. It is also necessary that my belief be based on that ground, that this be *my reason (evidence ...)* for believing that *p*. Let's say that I have a good reason for supposing my wife is not at home now; she told me this morning that she would be out most of the day. But that has temporarily slipped my mind, and I believe she is not at home now for the, let us suppose, inadequate reason that it is a beautiful spring day. In that case, on the present suggestion, my belief would not be justified; whereas if justification merely requires *having* an adequate reason, I would be. I start with this controversy because some of the others will have to be stated in terms of some position with respect to this issue. For purposes of this paper I will go with the basing requirement, and I will put the other claims about what is necessary for justification in terms of what it takes for *the reason (evidence...) my belief is based on* to justify it.<sup>2</sup>

2. *Truth-conducivity*. The reason or its content must be so related to the target belief and its content that, given the truth of the former, the latter is thereby likely to be true. The reason must sufficiently "probabilify" the target belief. It is not enough that the reason would commonly be taken to provide adequate support, or that it intuitively seems to do so, or that we would on adequate reflection judge it to do so. The basis of the belief must actually be sufficiently indicative of the truth of the belief. When formulated in terms of probability this claim makes use of some objective conception of probability—frequency or tendency or logical relation—according to which it is an objective fact about the world that beliefs supported in this way can be relied on to be true most of the time.

A special form of this requirement is that the belief has been acquired in a reliable way.<sup>3</sup> Thinking of a belief's being based on grounds, this would amount to the requirement that the belief be based on such grounds that forming beliefs like that on the basis of grounds like that is a generally reliable way of forming beliefs, one that can be relied on provide mostly true beliefs.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> I could have made all the points I make in this paper had I made the other choice, but proceeding in this way makes for smoother formulations.

<sup>3</sup> It is often pointed out that the epistemic status of a belief may change after the initial acquisition. For example, one may come into possession of additional evidence, positive or negative. Though, for the sake of simplicity I shall generally speak of a reliable way of acquiring a belief, this should be understood as equivalent to "acquiring or sustaining".

<sup>4</sup> It is notoriously difficult to give an adequate interpretation of the notion of a reliable way of forming a belief. For example, how do we cash out the term 'like that' which occurs twice in the above formulation? That is not my concern in this paper, and I shall just assume that we understand the notion of reliable belief formation well enough for this discussion.

This latter kind of reliability formulation is equivalent to the requirement that the reason be such as to confer a high probability of truth on the belief that is based on it.

3. *Cognitive accessibility*. The subject must enjoy some special, high grade kind of cognitive access to the justifier if it is to do the job. It is impossible that my belief that *p* should be justified by being based on something of which I can become aware with difficulty, if at all. Those who impose this condition differ as to what sort or degree of access is required, as well as to just what it is to which one must have access of the proper sort. As for the former, the usual idea is that the justifier must be spottable on reflection, just by raising the question. As for the latter, there is the distinction between access to the ground of the belief, and access to the adequacy or efficacy of that ground—access to the fact that it suffices to justify. If the latter is required, we have a particularly strong form of the view, one that holds it to be impossible that I should be justified in believing that *p* if I am unable to ascertain on reflection that this is the case.

4. *Higher level requirements*. The notion of levels here is one that is familiar from talk of meta-languages. Whenever something concerns an item of level *n*, the former is of level *n*+1. Thus believing that one believes that *p* is of a higher level than believing that *p*; and so is knowing, or being justified in believing, that one believes that *p*. Being justified in believing that one is justified in believing that *p* is of higher level than being justified in believing that *p*. Knowing that the ground of one's belief that *p* is an adequate one is of higher level than the ground of one's belief *being* an adequate one. And so on. The putative higher level requirements that I am thinking of here have to do with *S*'s epistemic position vis-à-vis what contributes justification to a belief. Such requirements include:

- A. *S* knows (is justified in believing) that the ground of his belief that *p* is an adequate one. (This would constitute an exercise of the capacity mentioned at the end of 3.)
- B. (Where the belief is arrived at by inference.) *S* knows (is justified in believing) that the inference is a sound one. Or again, *S* knows (is justified in believing) that *S* is justified in believing the premises of the inference.
- C. *S* knows (is justified in believing) that his belief that *p* was arrived at in a reliable manner.

5. *Coherence*. Some epistemologists hold that in order for *S*'s belief that *p* to be justified it must cohere with a total system of beliefs that itself exhibits a high degree of coherence. The notion of coherence is often left rather

obscure, but it has something to do with the extent and strength of inferential, explanatory, and other relations between the constituents of the system.

6. *Satisfying intellectual obligations.* This requirement is typically imposed in what I take to be an unacceptable way. It is held that one is justified in believing that *p* only if one fails to violate any intellectual obligation *in believing that p*, i.e., only if correct intellectual standards permit one to believe that *p* under the conditions that do obtain. I reject this as a viable suggestion for a condition on justification, since it presupposes that belief is under effective voluntary control (otherwise how can it be obligatory to believe or refrain from believing under certain conditions?), and it seems clear to me that it is not.<sup>5</sup> However I have no doubt but that there are intellectual obligations, e.g., to look for more evidence under certain conditions and to train oneself to be less credulous. And it may well be thought that a necessary condition of justifiably believing that *p* is that this belief did not stem from any violation of such obligations.

An allied idea is that a belief is justified only if it stemmed from the exercise of an intellectual (cognitive, epistemic) virtue.<sup>6</sup> This suggestion is presumably related to the non-violation-of-intellectual-obligations suggestions in something of the same way in which a virtue oriented ethics is related to an obligation oriented ethics, whatever that is.

These are the putative requirements I shall be discussing. I could add more, but these will suffice to make the points I am concerned to make in this paper. The above conditions all seem to me to be necessary for some epistemically valuable condition, whereas some of the alleged conditions I have not mentioned seem to me not to be real possibilities for human cognitive subjects and so not a viable requirement for any epistemically important status. Prominent members of this latter group are the various “epistemic immunities”, infallibility, incorrigibility, and indubitability.<sup>7</sup> In the twentieth century these have more often been taken to be requirements for the *foundations* of knowledge only; but in earlier times they have frequently been taken as requirements for knowledge generally. Though the matter is highly controversial, it is doubtful that human cognitive efforts are ever marked by immunity from mistake, correction, or doubt. In any event, I shall set aside these candidates in favor of more obviously satisfiable conditions.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See my “The Deontological Conception of Epistemic Justification” in Alston 1989.

<sup>6</sup> See Sosa 1991, Pt. IV.

<sup>7</sup> These terms are variously interpreted. For some exploration of this see my “Varieties of Privileged Access”, in Alston 1989.

<sup>8</sup> Some forms of 1.–6. are also unsatisfiable. I have already pointed this out with respect to intellectual obligations that attach directly to believing and refraining from believing. Some higher-level requirements lead to an infinite regress. Again, if an accessibility condition required that one be conscious of everything that goes into one’s justification for believing that *p*, that would seem to be unsatisfiable by human beings.

## The Status of Epistemic Desiderata

Now I want to call attention to a striking feature of these disputes. (This is one of the two main points I will be making about them.) For each condition no one denies that it is desirable to satisfy it, and desirable from an epistemic point of view, desirable vis-à-vis the basic aims of the cognitive enterprise. Let's go through the list and document this.

1. Those who deny that it is necessary for justification that one's belief be *based* on an adequate ground or reason are by no means disposed to deny that it is, epistemically, a good thing for one's belief to be *based* on an adequate ground. Indeed, they typically take a basing condition to be necessary for *knowledge*. They only maintain that this is not required for one's belief to be *justified*.

2. Those who deny that truth-conducivity or reliability is required for justification do not deny that it is epistemically desirable to form beliefs in such a way that they are thereby likely to be true. How could they, given that the basic aim of belief formation is to store correct information, rather than misinformation? They only deny that this is required for *justification*, usually on the grounds that since reliability or truth-conducivity is not epistemically accessible in a direct way it therefore cannot be required for justification.

3. Those who deny that what makes for justification must be directly accessible to the subject do not, of course, deny that such accessibility is a good thing. How could they? If it is good to be able to determine when one is justified in holding a certain belief, as it obviously is, then it is good to enjoy as sure a cognitive access as possible to what is responsible for this.

4. Those who abjure higher level requirements for justification do not by any means deny that it is a good thing to have reflective, higher level knowledge or justified belief concerning the epistemic status of one's beliefs and concerning the adequacy of the grounds of one's beliefs. Again, how could they? Surely it is eminently worthwhile to reflect on the epistemic status of one's beliefs, to determine what grounds one has for those beliefs and how solid those grounds are. This is an essential component of the life of reason, and though all may not be called to full participation therein, it is a noble calling; human life is enriched by a reflective awareness of one's epistemic situation.

5. As for coherence, those who deny that is closely tied to justification will not downplay the value and importance of constructing coherent systems of belief. It is clearly one of our intellectual aims, part of what makes for satisfaction of the intellectual side of our nature, to systematize and integrate our knowledge.

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In the ensuing discussion I shall be thinking of satisfiable forms of the requirements on my list.

6. Finally, if we do have intellectual obligations, it is tautological that we ought to satisfy those obligations, and that it is better to do so than not. To admit that we are obliged, all things considered, to do A, and then to deny that it is good thing for us to do A, would be incoherent at best and inconsistent at worst.

Thus the disputes over these conditions is not as to whether their satisfaction is valuable or important from an epistemic point of view, but simply over whether a given condition is *necessary* for being minimally *justified* in holding a certain belief. Is, e.g., being justified in believing that the grounds for ones belief that p are adequate, part of what is minimally required for being justified in believing that p? The fireworks are over this issue. This is what calls out intuitions about particular cases of justification or non-justification, claims as to what being justified amounts to, and the derivation of putatively unacceptable consequences of the positions of one's opponents.

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#### Is There a Unique Concept of Epistemic Justification?

Well, so what? What if the conditions under dispute do all represent states of affairs that are highly desirable epistemically? And what if the disputes do concern what is minimally required for justified belief? Wasn't it obvious from the beginning that this is what the dispute is about? Perhaps so. And if the issue over what is required for justification were clearly well conceived, if it were sufficiently clear that this is a well-formed question that has a determinate and unique answer (whether we can agree on what that is or not), then the consensus over the desirability of the conditions at issue would have no important implications for the controversies. We could just say, "Of course, many different states of affairs are worthwhile vis-à-vis the aims of cognition, but what we want to determine is which of these constitutes being *justified* in believing that p". But, and this is the second main point I want to make about the controversies, I believe this condition not to be satisfied. The persistence of the disputes leads to the suspicion that there is no unique common item concerning the nature of which people are disagreeing. To be sure, mere persistence is not sufficient to yield this result. There can be, and are, endless disputes where it is obvious that there is a common target concerning which incompatible views are held. Consider, for example, disputes over a genetic basis for this or that individual difference. But here it is not just that the disputes are long lasting. In addition there are features of the disputes that are best explained by supposing that there is no unique item called 'epistemic justification' concerning which the parties are disagreeing. To get at this I will have to talk a bit about the term 'justified' and its cognates.

The term 'justified' has been imported into epistemology from talk about voluntary action. I was justified in doing something, e.g., in charging you for damage to my sidewalk, provided my doing so is in accordance with rele-

vant rules, regulations, norms, or standards. More specifically, my doing so is *permitted* by the relevant norms; it is not necessary that they *require* me to do so. I could be justified in charging you for the repair of my sidewalk even if I wouldn't be violating any obligation in failing to charge you. Justification varies with the background system of norms that is presupposed. These can be legal, moral, institutional, and so on. Thus I might be legally, morally, and/or prudentially justified in charging you for the repair to my sidewalk.

The fact that 'justified' comes into epistemology from this quarter explains the strong tendency to think of the justification of belief in deontological terms, in terms of being permitted to believe that *p* (not being to blame for doing so, being "in the clear" in so believing). Or perhaps a prior tendency to think of belief as subject to voluntary control, and hence as subject to requirements, prohibitions, and permissions, is responsible for the use of terms from the justification-family. Or perhaps the two tendencies have developed together and have reinforced each other. In any event, the most natural understanding of 'justified' in application to belief is tied to the supposition that terms in the 'required'- 'permitted' family are applicable to doxastic attitudes like believing and hence that doxastic attitudes are under effective voluntary control. I have already explained that I take this last assumption to be untenable, and hence that I consider the deontological conception of justification that presupposes it to be correspondingly untenable. But if we abandon that conception, terms in the justification family are left without any natural interpretation, or at least without their most natural interpretation.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps the most honest course would be to abandon the term altogether in epistemology.<sup>10</sup> But it seems to be too firmly rooted, even in non-deontological circles, for this to be feasible. Moreover, there are other roots of the epistemological use of the term, roots that are not entangled with assumptions of voluntary control. And whether or not these roots can nourish the use of 'justified' with linguistic propriety, they unquestionably do influence current epistemological thinking about what is called 'justification'. Perhaps the most obvious of these is the notion of having adequate grounds (reasons, evidence...) for a belief, or, alternatively, the belief's being based on this. It seems not implausible linguistically to parse "He isn't justified in believing that" as "He lacks sufficient grounds (reasons, evidence...) for believing that". A closely analogous root is the notion of a proposition's being true "so far as I can tell", or the proposition's appearing to be true, given what I have to go on, or given the evidence available to me.

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<sup>9</sup> For assertions that 'justified' is properly used only when so construed see my "Concepts of Epistemic Justification" in Alston 1989 and Wolterstorff 1983, fn. 12.

<sup>10</sup> Plantinga 1988 has abandoned the term in favor of 'warrant' and 'positive epistemic status'.

Some epistemologists hold that epistemic justification is tied to “believing *p* in such a way as to be thereby be in a strong position to get the truth”, or “believing that *p* in such a way that *p* is thereby highly likely to be true”. Thus reliabilists think it not implausible to identify justified belief and reliably formed belief,<sup>11</sup> or to take the latter as a conceptually necessary condition for the former.<sup>12</sup> And this root obviously ties in with the “adequate ground” root, provided we construe adequacy, as would seem natural, in terms of being indicative of truth or in terms of probabilifying the belief. I myself find it quite unintuitive, linguistically, to suppose that “*S* is justified in believing that *p*” conceptually or semantically implies “It is objectively very probable that *p*”. Nevertheless the prevalence of this supposition indicates that truth-conducivity is a significant root of the concept(s), or stretch of conceptual territory, that epistemologists currently use ‘justified’ to express.

Now comes the clinching point. If we take the full range of parties to the disputes we have been considering, some of whom have had their thinking about “epistemic justification” nourished primarily by some of the roots just mentioned and others by others, there does not seem to be enough commonality in their pre-theoretical understanding of the nature of epistemic justification to warrant us in supposing that there is some uniquely identifiable item about which they hold different views. It seems, rather, that they are highlighting, emphasizing, “pushing” different concepts, all called ‘justification’. It seems, to switch to the perspective of this paper, that they are selecting different epistemic desiderata, or packages thereof, as deserving of the honorific title ‘justification’. If that is the case, the persistent disputes over what justification really is have been misdirected, and it is time to take a fresh start under a more appropriate aegis. Instead of trying to decide what is the correct account of justified belief, the real problem is one of understanding and interrelating the various epistemic desiderata, determining which of them are feasible goals and what it takes to achieve each of those feasibilia, and identifying the contexts (interests, aims, problems) for which one or another is most important.

That will be the central task of this paper, or rather of the larger project to which this paper is a prolegomenon, but the project hangs on the negative point just made: that it is a mistake to suppose that there is a unique something-or-other called ‘epistemic justification’ concerning which the disputants are disputing. And I can hardly expect you just to take my word for this. To find a more impressive support I need to consider the most promising suggestions as to how epistemic justification might be identified in a theoretically neutral way, and show that none of these work.

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<sup>11</sup> See Swain 1981.

<sup>12</sup> See Goldman 1979, 1986.

Let's lay out the parameters of the problem. First, none of the points at issue can be used to identify that of which the varying accounts of justification are accounts. We cannot zero in on the subject matter, "justified belief", by saying that it is *what it is permitted, epistemically, to believe*, or that it is *being sufficiently supported by the ground on which the belief is based*, or that it is *one's believing in a reliable or a truth conducive way*, or that it is *fitting into a coherent doxastic system*. Each of these is something that some parties to the disputes deny of epistemic justification, and so none of them can be non-question beggingly deployed to specify what it is the disputes are about. What avenues does that leave open?

Well, at least this can be said. If I am justified in believing that *p*, my doxastic state is one that is desirable from an epistemic point of view, where that is defined in terms of the aim at maximizing true belief and minimizing false belief. This may be taken as uncontroversial.<sup>13</sup> But this hardly serves to uniquely pick out epistemic justification. There are many epistemically desirable features of a belief that cannot be identified with being justified, e.g., truth. Nothing can be more desirable from the standpoint of an aim at the truth than truth; and yet, by common consent, justification is distinct from truth. True beliefs can be unjustified, and false beliefs can be justified. Indeed, as pointed out above, all the controversial conditions we have been discussing represent epistemically desirable properties, and yet none of them, just because they are controversial, can be used to identify what it is concerning which the controversialists are disputing.

Some epistemologists try to locate epistemic justification by saying that it is what makes true belief into knowledge. We need only solve for *X* in "True belief + *X* = knowledge" in order to determine what justification is. But there is more than one reason why this will not do. The most widely advertised reason stems from Edmund Gettier's celebrated demonstration that true justified belief is not sufficient for knowledge.<sup>14</sup> That difficulty could be handled by changing the recipe to "It's what substitutes for *X* in 'True belief + *X* + what it takes to deal with Gettier problems = knowledge'". And, provided the concept of a Gettier problem is sufficiently determinate, this would take care of that difficulty. Given that assumption, the question, "What is such that when added to true belief, in the absence of Gettier problems, it gives us knowledge?" is an intelligible and significant question. I am by no means disposed to deny that this formula does identify a common target con-

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<sup>13</sup> At least relatively uncontroversial. But nothing in philosophy is wholly so. Moser 1989, 1.3, denies that 'justified' is (should be taken as) an evaluative term, but he does not deny that believing that *p* justifiably is better than believing it unjustifiably. There are many views as to just exactly how the aim at acquiring the truth and avoiding falsity should be taken, and it is an exceedingly complicated matter, but there would be broad agreement that the aim as stated is somehow fundamental. (For a dissenting voice here see DePaul, unpublished.)

<sup>14</sup> Gettier 1963.

cerning which different theorists hold different views. But the formula does not provide a theoretically neutral way of identifying epistemic justification. This is because a large proportion of justification theorists recognize other constraints on what can count as epistemic justification, and if it should turn out that what turns true belief into knowledge does not satisfy those constraints they would not recognize it as justification. Suppose, for example, that a very convincing case could be made that forming or holding a belief in a sufficiently reliable way, given a suitable understanding of that phrase, turns true belief into knowledge, *pace* Gettier problems. Suppose that this case is so convincing that it would even convince the likes of Chisholm, Bonjour, Foley, and Feldman. Would they go on to identify justification with reliability? Not unless they change their spots in dramatic fashion. Let's focus on Chisholm. Unless he undergoes a drastic philosophical personality change, he would say that mere reliability is insufficient to render a person justified, since it doesn't guarantee that the person has sufficient grounds, reason, or evidence for the belief. If the person knew that the belief were formed in a reliable way, that would be another story; but mere reliability of belief formation by no means guarantees that. Thus, according to my scenario; what such theorists would say in this highly counterfactual situation in which they become convinced of a reliability theory of knowledge is that they were mistaken in supposing that justification is what turns true belief into knowledge, not that justification amounts to reliability. If I am right about this, it shows that the "true belief +" did not really suffice to identify what it was concerning which they were spinning their theories of justification; for they are not disposed to recognize what satisfies that formula, *whatever it may be otherwise*, as epistemic justification.

Thus far I have been considering what one might do by way of *specifying* in theoretically neutral terms what justification is, and I have suggested that the job can't be done. But even if that is so, it doesn't follow that (all or most of) the disputants do not have some common target in mind. There are other ways of zeroing in on a topic than by giving a definite description that uniquely picks out the target. And a group may share one of those ways instead. For example, there is the use of paradigm cases as a base from which to generalize. Even if we can't provide a general formula for saying what justification is without getting into theoretically controversial matters, at least we can trot out some (relatively) uncontroversial paradigms of justified and unjustified beliefs, and that will enable any sufficiently alert spectator to form (recognize) the concept of justification shared by all the parties to the disputes, even if no one can give the concept an informative pre-theoretical *definition*. In that case this will be like other concepts with respect to which one acquires the concept by picking up the knack of grouping together cases that are sufficiently similar to the paradigms. It is often pointed out that this is the character of commonsense concepts of many natural kinds like *dog*,

*tree*, etc. Laypersons are not, in general, able to spell out necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of such terms. Instead, they learn the term in connection with paradigm cases, thereby learning how to apply the term when and only when the object is appropriately similar to the paradigms. Why shouldn't it be this way with *epistemic justification*?

This is certainly a possible picture. But there are reasons for scepticism, the most important of which is that the oppositions between different accounts of justification deeply infect the picking out of paradigm cases and the patterns of extrapolating from a class of paradigms. Thus Bonjour, in attacking reliability theories of justification, presents imaginary cases (involving clairvoyance) of reliably formed beliefs that, he claims, are not justified. But at least some of these cases will be taken by a reliabilist as clear cases of justified belief. Again philosophers on opposite sides of the "based on" issue will differ sharply on the justificatory status of cases in which the subject has adequate reasons for a belief that *p* but believes that *p* on some other (inadequate) basis instead. Finally, in another controversy over reliabilism, "internalist" critics maintain that if we were in a world controlled by a Cartesian demon who arranged things so that our beliefs were generally false, even though we had all the evidence we have for them in the actual (normal, non-demon) world, the beliefs that are justified in the actual world would be equally so in this other world; while reliabilists will typically deny this. I don't mean to be suggesting that there is not a substantial body of cases on the justificatory status of which (almost) all parties will agree. But, as the above facts show, there are quite different ways of extrapolating from those cases to other cases. And so, on this way of construing concepts, these different patterns of extrapolating from the paradigms would determine different concepts.

Thus, even though it is quite possible to share a common concept without being able to formulate a common definition, we would want some reason for thinking that a single concept is, indeed, shared; and the above discussion suggests that we are without any such reason. The denial of a shared target is also supported by certain controverted examples in the literature, where one feels strong pulls in opposite directions. Consider the demon worlds case. Given a possible world in which the inhabitants have all the same bases for common sense beliefs about the physical and social environment that we have, but where those beliefs are mostly false, should we say that those people are justified in their beliefs or not? On the one hand, it is very plausible to say that they are. After all, they have just the same grounds for their beliefs that we have for ours, which are, by hypothesis, justified. So far as they can tell, they are believing what is true. On the other hand, I find it plausible to say that they are not justified. Truth is the goal of the believing game, and if they are failing miserably to attain that goal, how can their beliefs be justified? This is an indication to me that there are at least two epistemic

desiderata that are being conflated here under the term ‘justification’. Depending on which one is in the front of our minds at a given moment our intuitions will go in one way rather than the other.

In the light of all this the most reasonable judgment would seem to be that the parties to at least some persistent disputes about justification are working with different concepts, different selections of epistemic desiderata, not just different opinions as to what is required for the application of a common concept. That is not to say that no disputes involve a commonality of topic. Thinkers who share a deontological or a reliability or an evidential support conception of justification can and do argue among themselves about many less fundamental issues. But the most radical and persistent disputes, those that involve the sharpest disagreements as to what justified belief requires, are mostly to be diagnosed as involving fundamentally different conceptions of justification. If that is the case, it is misguided to try to determine which of them is right about the nature of justification. Instead we should seek to disentangle the various epistemic desiderata involved in these discussions, aim at a penetrating understanding of each and of their interrelations, and explore the implications of this for epistemology. In the remainder of this paper I will make a start at this task.<sup>15</sup>

i v

**Some Important Epistemic Desiderata**

The first job is to organize a list of desiderata. I won’t attempt to be comprehensive; my aim in this paper is only to illustrate the issues that arise when we think about epistemology in these terms. I will deal with a few desiderata that I take to be particularly central. I will extract these from the controversies over justification we considered at the beginning. The first controversy had to do with the contrast between a belief’s being *based on* adequate evidence and the subject’s merely *having* adequate evidence for the belief, or the proposition that gives the belief its content. Let’s take as the first two desiderata on our list:

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<sup>15</sup> It will be noted that I have not claimed that there is no unique concept of (propositional) knowledge that it is important to use and get clear about in epistemology. Indeed, I have not been talking about knowledge at all in this paper. I won’t be able to tackle knowledge in the remainder of this paper either, but I will say this. I think there is a much stronger case for a more or less determinate pre-theoretical conception of knowledge that we can use to locate our subject matter, than is the case with justification, or rationality. And in any event, I certainly do not wish to deny that epistemology is properly concerned with knowledge! Hence my recommendation of my “epistemic desiderata” approach must be construed as having to do with those parts of epistemology that are usually handled under the aegis of “justification”.

- A. The belief is based on adequate grounds (reasons, evidence).<sup>16</sup>
- B. *S* has adequate grounds (reason, evidence) for the belief.

Each of these is obviously a good thing, whether or not it is sufficient, or necessary, for “justification”.

But now let’s look more carefully at the ‘adequate’ modifier. Our second controversy concerned whether the fact that a belief is justified entails that the belief is likely to be true. If we think of justification as requiring adequate evidence, this controversy over whether justification is essentially truth-conducive translates into whether the evidence’s being adequate requires that the evidence render the belief probable in some objective sense of probability. Truth-conducive versions of A. and B. can be spelled out as follows:<sup>17</sup>

- A.1. *S*’s belief that *p* is based on grounds (reasons, evidence) that render it objectively probable.
- B.1. *S* has (at least potential) grounds (reasons, evidence) for believing that *p* that render *p* objectively probable.<sup>18</sup>

A negative position on the truth-conducivity controversy can give rise to various versions of A. and B. Those like Chisholm who believe (or seem to believe) that justification is a matter of a belief’s possessing a suitable non-natural, unanalyzable, directly intuitable property would spell out adequacy of evidence in those terms. (The possession of this property by a belief is not deemed to have any logical entailments for the truth status of that belief or probability thereof.) Being sceptical about such non-natural epistemic properties I will not pursue that line here. Another tack would be a subjective one, in which adequacy is a function of facts about the subject’s beliefs or belief tendencies concerning his epistemic situation, rather than a function of his epistemic situation itself (where the latter is what it is whatever the subject believes or tends to believe about it). A maximally subjective version would be that *S* believes that such-and-such evidence (the evidence on which the belief is based) renders the belief objectively probable. But this would seem to lack value from the epistemic point of view, however comforting and reassuring it may be for *S*. A less blatantly subjective version is the one put forward

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<sup>16</sup> From now on I will often omit the explicit disjunction of ground-evidence-reasons and speak in terms of one or another disjunct. No significance is to be attached to those variations. The disjunction is to be understood in each case.

<sup>17</sup> There will, of course, be as many understandings of these versions as there are objective concepts of probability.

<sup>18</sup> Note that since having adequate evidence for a belief that *p* is compatible with not believing *p*, in B. it is best to take the proposition that *p* as what is probabilified.

by Richard Foley as an account of what he calls “epistemic rationality”.<sup>19</sup> This can be formulated as follows.

- A.2. The grounds on which S’s belief that p is based are such that on adequate reflection S would believe that they render the belief objectively probable.
- B.2. S has evidence e such that on adequate reflection S would believe that e renders it objectively probable that p.<sup>20</sup>

There is a question as to whether A.2. and B.2. are desirable from an epistemic point of view.<sup>21</sup> They are clearly less desirable vis-à-vis the aim at acquiring the truth than is the possession or use of evidence that objectively probabilifies the proposition in question. Nevertheless, they are not wholly without value. I think it is fair to say that when thinkers spell out conditions for justification that do not guarantee an objective probability of truth they do so because they despair, for one reason or another, of our being able to “get at” objective probability. That is, they proffer their suggestions as the best available approximations to a state of affairs that is ideal from the standpoint of the basic aim at truth. The usual line of argument here is “internalist”. It is felt that our basic epistemic access (access that does not presuppose that we know various things) is only to our own introspectable psychological states. Therefore if positive epistemic status is going to be something we can ascertain without presupposing that we know various things, it will have to be restricted to those limits. And, it may be supposed, something like Foley’s suggestion is the best we can do along that line. If we are so restricted, then it is no doubt better to form beliefs on evidence that we would reflectively approve than on evidence we would not so approve.<sup>22</sup>

As we saw in discussing the truth-conducivity issue, there is another way of developing the notion that a belief is held in a truth conducive manner, viz., that the belief was formed in a reliable way. This is intimately related to the development in terms of objective probability.<sup>23</sup> As pointed out earlier, it seems plausible to say that when S’s belief that p is formed on the basis of evidence or grounds, e, the belief was formed in a reliable way if and only if p is objectively probable (above some minimum level) on e. The connection is short of equivalence only because of the possibility that a belief might be

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<sup>19</sup> Foley 1987

<sup>20</sup> These are not Foley’s formulations. They rather constitute a modification of Foley’s approach to fit in with the our talk about the evidence one has and the evidence a belief is based on.

<sup>21</sup> See Alston 1989A. This will partly depend on what the standards are for “adequate reflection”, but I won’t try to go into that here.

<sup>22</sup> See below for a brief indication of some reservations about this line of argument.

<sup>23</sup> Swain 1981 develops reliability theory in terms of probability.

formed in a reliable way without being based on any evidence. Keeping that possibility in mind, let's list reliability of belief formation as a separate desideratum.

C. S's belief that p was formed in a reliable way.

I can more briefly extract items for our list from the next two controversies we considered. First, cognitive accessibility. As we noted earlier, accessibility internalists differ as to the precise kind of high grade accessibility they require of justifiers or of justification. For present purposes let's think of knowability just on reflection, just on raising the question, and let's distinguish access to justifiers (thought of as evidence or grounds) and access to the adequacy of the evidence as well as to its existence.

D. A subject can determine, just on reflection, what grounds she has for her belief that p [and whether these grounds are adequate].

It is clearly desirable to be able to spot grounds and to determine whether a ground is adequate, all this just on reflection without engaging in lengthy investigations, whether or not this is a necessary condition for the belief's *being* justified.

Of the higher level requirements we distinguished, let's focus on:

E. S knows that the ground of her belief that p is an adequate one.

This is, of course, just the result of actualizing the capacity specified in D., and so it is correspondingly desirable. Indeed, the desirability of D. stems from the fact that it makes possible the attainment of E.<sup>24</sup>

## V

### A Prospectus for Desiderata-Based Epistemology

It will, I hope, have become clear by now that the thesis of this paper is an iconoclastic and revolutionary one, a bold departure from the well trodden pathways of the discipline. It implies that a large proportion of contemporary epistemologists, including myself, have been misguided in their researches, fighting under a false banner, engaged in a quixotic tilting at windmills. But though I enjoy icon bashing as well as the next fellow, I can't continue in

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<sup>24</sup> Since I am restricting myself to desirable features of individual beliefs, I will not deal here with derivatives of our other two issues over justification. Coherence, on any of several explications of that notion, is obviously a good making feature of systems of belief, but for many reasons, including those briefly adumbrated earlier, I do not take it to be crucial for the epistemic assessment of particular beliefs. As for satisfying intellectual obligations, it is a trivial truth that this is a good thing. However, for reasons explored elsewhere, I do not take the presence or absence of this to have crucial bearings on the epistemic status of this or that belief.

this vein, lest I am guilty of false advertising myself. To overstate the point just a bit, it is only the aegis, the rubric of the enterprise that, according to this paper, must be modified. The substance of the debates over justification, the points made in those debates, the insights adumbrated, can survive in the new environment and can flourish as vigorously as ever in the new guise of an investigation of epistemic desiderata. I shall now try to give a sketchy idea of how I construe this new look in the “justification theory” part of epistemology. (The part dealing with knowledge is not dealt with in this paper at all.) If we quit trying to decide what is required for “justification”, what is there left to do? This can be organized under four headings: the *elucidation* of desiderata; their *viability*; their *importance*; their *interrelations*. I will have nothing to say here about the last.

*Elucidation.* Even if we are no longer seeking to determine the necessary and sufficient conditions of the *justification* of belief, we are still faced with the task of understanding the nature of each of the epistemic desiderata that have figured in that discussion. What is it for the grounds of my belief to be more or less *adequate*? What is it for a ground to give more or less *support* to the belief? What dimensions of difference are relevant here, and what importance is there in the grounds of a belief’s being *adequate* in one or other of these ways? What is it for a belief to be *based on* certain grounds—other beliefs, experiences, or whatever? What is it for a belief to be acquired in a *reliable* way, by a reliable process, mechanism, or whatever? What conception(s) of objective probability are applicable to the relation between a belief and the grounds, reasons, or evidence on which it is based, or which one has for it? All these old friends, and many more, will still be with us in the new dispensation. If anything, they will appear more clearly, and we will be able to concentrate on them more clear-headedly, after they have been disengaged from the futile quest for the correct theory of justification.

*Viability.* I have already touched briefly on one issue of this sort, concerning the idea that beliefs can be evaluated in terms of whether doxastic standards or norms *permit* their adoption. I have expressed the view that this is not a viable desideratum, for it presupposes an effective voluntary control over our propositional attitudes that we lack. For another example, turn to the strong-cognitive-access desideratum. Here the idea is that it would be highly desirable, as indeed it would, if we could determine, just on reflection without the need for going outside our armchairs, everything that is relevant to the epistemic evaluation of our beliefs (in the old terminology, everything relevant to their “justification”). But to what extent is this possible? How much of what is epistemically relevant is spottable in that way? Suppose we grant that we can determine, just by attentively considering the matter, what experiences we are currently having and what we are currently thinking. Reliabilists and other truth-conducivity theorists of justification are fond of pointing out that one can not, in general, determine just by reflection whether the

grounds of one's belief renders it (objectively) likely to be true. Extreme internalists respond by denying the relevance of this to "justification". But for now, stick to the identification of reasons for a belief and think of one's current system of beliefs, within which such reasons are to be found. Can that be adequately surveyed just by reflection, so that anything there that supports the target belief one will be sure to spot? That seems unlikely, but I am not concerned here to argue for an answer to the question, only to point out some of the questions that arise. This sort of question is critical for a number of putative objects of one or another high grade of cognitive access. For depending on the answer we may or may not reasonably aspire to a certain kind of access to a certain kind of factor that bears on the epistemic status of beliefs.

Another area in which viability is an important issue is what we have called "higher-level conditions". To what extent are we capable of attaining knowledge or well grounded belief concerning the epistemic status of beliefs, including those of which we are most confident? Is the normal adult human being, or anyone else, capable of acquiring knowledge that his ordinary perceptual or introspective or inductively inferred beliefs are adequately supported? To what extent do people actually have such higher level knowledge? The answers to questions like this will have an important bearing on the extent to which higher level epistemic achievements are something to which human cognitive subjects in general can reasonably aspire.

*Importance.* The closest we can come in the new approach to the old question as to what constitutes justification is the question as to the relative importance or centrality of one or another desideratum. We must be careful here not to relapse into a quest for justification under another name. More specifically, we must be on our guard against falling into thinking that we must choose between, e.g., truth-conducivity, having adequate evidence, and satisfaction of intellectual obligations as *the* central, basic, or key epistemic desideratum for belief. To be sure, we need not fall into an opposite extreme of latitudinarianism, in which we give equal weight to every condition that has been espoused as valuable from the epistemic point of view. As we have seen, some may be eliminated as unattainable (or not sufficiently attainable), while others may be plainly more important than others. My point here is only that we are not involved in a competition, like the NCAA basketball tournament, in which there can be only one survivor.

What I will be discussing here under the rubric of "Importance" is the conditions, assumptions, or contexts relative to which one or another desideratum is more or less important. I will focus on a contrast between externalism and an extreme form of internalism.

v i  
**Internalism and Externalism**

I shall be asking what assumptions we are making when we take internalist or externalist desiderata to be centrally important. I will be thinking of two packages of desiderata, although this discussion will be confined to their variation along two dimensions: truth-conducivity and reflective accessibility. Putting it in terms of “justification” my externalist (a) takes justification to entail an objective likelihood of truth for the belief, and (b) denies that what makes for justification, and hence justification itself, must be knowable by the subject just on reflection in order to deserve the title. My internalist denies what her counterpart asserts—truth-conducivity—and asserts what her counterpart denies—reflective accessibility. Sticking with our resolution to abjure justification-talk, we can say that in the epistemic assessment of belief the externalist focuses on whether the belief is formed or held in such a way that it is thereby likely to be true, whether or not the details of this are open to the subject’s reflective scrutiny. Whereas the internalist focuses on evidence, reasons, or grounds that the subject can spot by reflection, as well as on positive epistemic statuses conferred on a belief by those grounds, whether or not they suffice to be make it objectively likely that the belief in question is true. Thus the externalist is prepared to sacrifice reflective access to truth-conducivity, while the internalist opts for the opposite priority.<sup>25</sup>

Now I want to consider the conditions under which one or the other of these packages is of central importance. As we shall see, the internalist package will require considerable supplementation before we have anything that could be of crucial epistemological importance. Since the value of the externalist package can be more simply and less controversially set out, let’s begin with it. Under what conditions is it of central importance to consider whether a belief is based on objectively adequate grounds, when we seek to epistemically evaluate that belief? The question answers itself. Since the basic aim of cognition is to acquire true beliefs and avoid false beliefs, this dimension of evaluation is obviously of central epistemic importance. It is precisely what we seek to determine when we reflect critically on the epistemic status of our beliefs. We seek to determine what basis we have for a belief and the extent to which that basis indicates that the belief is true. Indeed, this is our usual recourse when we want to determine whether a belief is true. Usually we cannot simply “look and see” whether the facts are as believed.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> There are many varieties of internalism, some of which are explored in my “Internalism and Externalism in Epistemology”. For example, a less extreme version would focus on the grounds, evidence, or reasons that the subject has for a belief, without the additional requirement that these be spottable just on reflection. My illustrative purposes here are best served by concentrating on the more extreme form.

<sup>26</sup> It is philosophical dogma nowadays that the more direct procedure is never possible. See, e.g., Rorty 1979. Be that as it may, my point is that even if this is sometimes

We have to evaluate the strength of our grounds for believing that *p* in order to assess the likelihood that *p* is true.

Thus our central externalist desideratum is obviously of crucial importance vis-à-vis the basic aims of cognition, and it is something that is of focal concern in real life situations in which we subject beliefs to epistemic criticism. Its epistemic centrality could be doubted only if there were serious questions about our ability to determine where it is present. And there are such questions, the most serious of which has to do with epistemic circularity.<sup>27</sup> It can be argued, successfully I believe, that all of our major sources of belief—perception, introspection, rational intuition, inductive argument, etc.—are such that there can be no otherwise effective argument for the reliability of that source that does not make use of premises taken from that source. This means that in any otherwise effective argument for the reliability of the source we are, at least in practice, assuming the source to be reliable. To be sure, we can support the claim that the grounds of a *particular* belief are objectively adequate without assuming, even in practice, the adequacy of *those* grounds. Thus I can provide reason for thinking that my present visual experience in the circumstances in which I have it constitutes an adequate ground for the belief that there are people in front of me, without assuming the adequacy of *those* perceptual grounds for *that* belief. But in doing so I will be relying on the adequacy of my grounds for the premises of that argument, including perceptual premises, and to show them in turn to be adequate I will be assuming the adequacy of still others. Thus to avoid both circularity and an infinite regress, we must at some point have recourse to the assumption of the reliability of sense experience in general as a basis for certain sorts of beliefs, and that is where we confront the problem of epistemic circularity.

Considerations like this have led many epistemologists to deny the appropriateness of an attempt to determine the objective adequacy of grounds, or the reliability of belief forming processes, when we are engaged in the most fundamental epistemological criticism. If the attempt to determine the adequacy of the grounds for a perceptual belief, for example, inevitably lands us in epistemic circularity, we are unable to determine whether those grounds are adequate in any way that answers to fundamental epistemological concerns. When we are engaged in the most fundamental kind of epistemological criticism, we are not concerned only to determine whether the grounds for our beliefs satisfy standards generally taken for granted. We want to know whether their adequacy can be successfully defended in a “no holds barred” investigation in which each claim is subjected to criticism without anything being

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possible, it often is not, and, when concerned about truth value, we often have to take the more roundabout approach through a consideration of the adequacy of grounds.

<sup>27</sup> See my “Epistemic Circularity” in Alston 1989. An argument suffers from epistemic circularity when we have to assume the conclusion in order to be *justified* in accepting the premises.

taken for granted. And by those standards, the inescapability of epistemic circularity wrecks the attempt. This reaction is reinforced if we take seriously the idea that the job description of epistemology includes a response to a thoroughgoing scepticism. For a sceptic about, e.g., sense perception would not be impressed by an epistemically circular argument for the reliability of sense perception, one that relies on perception itself for some of its key premises.

Thus we can say that although objective adequacy of grounds is obviously and unproblematically an epistemologically crucial desideratum, its claim to occupy a central place in epistemology depends on our ability to deal successfully with the problem of epistemic circularity.

Now let's turn to our internalist package, which, as previously noted, is still under construction. The governing constraint here is reflective accessibility; to be acceptable, a desideratum will have to be spottable on reflection. That is only a necessary, not a sufficient condition. Much that can be ascertained on reflection is of no epistemic value vis-à-vis a given belief. I can determine on reflection that I am thinking about the Palestinian situation, but that contributes nothing to the epistemic status of my belief that copper expands when heated. We must rely on other considerations to determine what among the reflectively accessible is of epistemic significance. Let's continue to take it, as internalists typically do, that a positive epistemic status for a belief, other than truth, depends on its relation to reasons, evidence, or grounds. Since it is dubious that what a belief is actually based on can always be determined just by reflection, let's take our internalist desideratum to be non-source-relevant, consisting in the *possession* of evidence (to focus on that term) of the right sort. Clearly the last qualification, "of the right sort" is essential. In order that my belief that *copper expands when heated* have positive epistemic status it is not enough that I have reflectively accessible items that could serve as evidence or grounds for something or other. The items must be appropriately related to that belief. They must constitute sufficient, adequate support for the belief. We have already seen that this cannot amount to an objective probabilification of the belief, for that would seem not to be reflectively accessible. Remember that we are working here with a thoroughgoing internalism which requires that everything that goes into the positive epistemic status under consideration be reflectively accessible, not just the other psychological items (the evidence) involved. Hence the internalist will have to construe the "adequacy" or "sufficiency" of evidence in such a way that the subject can spot this too just on reflection. And what construal satisfies that requirement?

In my view that this constitutes one of the Achilles' heels of internalism. (It has one on each foot.) The other one will be unveiled in due course. However, in this paper I come neither to praise nor to bury internalism, but rather

to understand it, which may indeed involve exposing it. Therefore I will just list some answers that have been given to this question.

1. Sufficiency of support is an objective unanalyzable relation we can intuitively grasp on reflection. Just by clearheadedly considering the matter, we can see that the inductive evidence for “Copper expands when heated” confers on that proposition (or a belief with that propositional content when held by someone with that evidence), a positive epistemic status.<sup>28</sup>

2. There are logical relations of conditional probability, the probability of one proposition on another, that hold necessarily and can be grasped a priori, being similar in these respects to relations of deductive logic like entailment and contradiction.

3. Conditions of justification of the belief that *x* is *P* are determined by the concept of *P*.

4. The Foley view, embodied (in a non-source-relevance version) in B. 2.

B.2. *S* has evidence *e* such that on adequate reflection *S* would believe that *e* sufficiently objectively probabilifies *p*.

1., 2., and 3. will be important desiderata only if there are such unanalyzable intuitively graspable relations or such a priori ascertainable logical relations or such features of concept. I am dubious about this, but I have no time to argue the matter. Foley’s alternative, though not wholly unproblematic because of nagging questions about the notion of “adequate reflection” involved, would seem to be less dubious than 1. and 2, and I will take it that Foley has identified a genuine property of beliefs, one that can be spotted on sufficient reflection. The question of how important it is from the epistemic point of view for a belief to possess this property is going to hang on (a) whether something more epistemically valuable is possible within internalist restrictions, and (b) whether it is necessary to do epistemology from within those restrictions. As for (a), I will just assume that although something more objective than B.2. would obviously be more desirable, B.2. is the best we can do while observing those restrictions. As for (b), that is another crucial issue facing internalism. It is the second of the two Achilles’ heels with which it is afflicted. As such it deserves the remaining space in this paper.

Why should we restrict ourselves, when epistemically evaluating beliefs, to what we can discover from an armchair? No doubt, that is the traditional way to do epistemology. But what is the rationale for the procedure? Can

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<sup>28</sup> This would seem to be Chisholm’s view in 1977. This kind of view comes in two forms, depending on whether we take intuitions of particular epistemic facts (about the statuses of particular beliefs and their evidence) as basic, or whether we take intuitions of general principles governing the sufficiency of grounds as basic. Chisholm opts for the former.

anything more impressive be said for it than that it was good enough for my father and grandfather? I will restrict myself to the supporting arguments that seem to me to be strongest. They are simply the obverse of the difficulties with externalism mentioned earlier, viz., epistemic circularity and the problem of answering scepticism. The strength of externalism is that it seems that we should be able to make use of anything relevant that we know in epistemically evaluating our beliefs. And since much that we know other than by reflection is relevant, we should be able to use it. But if we do so we fall into epistemic circularity and beg the question against the sceptic, and hence, according to the internalist, it is epistemically out of order to proceed in this way. And that forces us back on reflection alone in epistemic assessment.

This is a powerful and historically influential line of argument, one that has nourished many generations of armchair epistemologists. But the trouble with it is that it can be turned on itself. By relying on reflection, and abjuring reliance on perception, in determining the conditions of justification for perceptual beliefs, we avoid making assumptions about the epistemic status of perceptual belief. But what happens when we come to the epistemology of reflection? Doesn't reliance on reflection to do the job land us in the same kind of circularity? A similar point can be made about the "answer to scepticism" argument. When we get our epistemological conclusions from reflection and avoid any reliance on perception or induction, we avoid begging the question against the sceptic about perception and induction. But what about a more thoroughgoing sceptic who includes reflection in the scope of his scepticism? Won't the reflective approach to epistemology involve begging the question against him? Thus the internalist orientation escapes these difficulties locally, so to say, but not globally. The supposition that we are home free with internalism comes from a parochial view as to what the problems are.<sup>29</sup>

The internalist may well respond, as many have done, that reflection is unproblematic in a way that, e.g., perception and inductive inference are not. The latter are obviously fallible because their deliverances not infrequently contradict each other, but this is not true with reflection. Even if it is not infallible, it is, relatively speaking, trouble free. And so there is a real point in taking its epistemic status for granted, while refusing to do so with respect to the other sources mentioned. In response to that I would point out analogous problems about reflection. If it includes judgments of self-evidence, these have notoriously varied through the ages. To some it has seemed self-evident that it is impossible for an effect to precede its cause, to others that it is possible. To some it has seemed self-evident that every event is causally determined, to others that we have free will in a contra-deterministic sense. And

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. Reid on Hume. See *Inquiry*, V, 7; VI, 20.

even with respect to the matter under consideration—epistemic judgments—these don't always come out the same in the thought of different epistemologists. Some are convinced on reflection that in a demon world our perceptual beliefs would be justified; others are convinced on reflection that they would not.

However, my aim here, I must keep reminding myself as well as you, is not to knock down internalism but to explore the conditions under which one or another epistemic desideratum occupies a central place in epistemic inquiry. And I think that our discussion of the internalism-externalism contrast has netted the following results on that point. If we are free to use whatever it is we know (are justified in believing) in tackling epistemological problems, then internalist restrictions to reflection are unwarranted, unless it can be shown (persuasively argued) that we know nothing relevant to epistemic assessment except what we know by reflection, a highly unlikely outcome. If, on the other hand, there are reasons indigenous to the epistemic enterprise to limit our resources in ways favored by the internalist, desiderata favored by internalists occupy a special place. We have examined reasons for internalist restrictions and found them less than impressive, but, obviously, the matter calls for much more extended treatment. What we have done is to indicate some of the assumptions on which the acceptability of internalist restrictions depend. If and only if the internalist can provide sufficient grounds for those assumptions will distinctively internalist desiderata like B.2., rightfully occupy a central place in epistemological inquiry.

## vii

### Conclusion

In conclusion let me sum up what I take to be the advantages in the “epistemic desiderata” approach to epistemology, as contrasted with an approach that features an attempt to determine the conditions under which beliefs are “justified”. The most basic and most obvious advantage is that, if I am right about the lack of any unique subject-matter or target called “justification”, my approach is superior in recognizing this fact and avoiding the futile effort to determine just what epistemic justification is and what is required for one or another type of belief to attain this status. It is obviously much better to abstain, where possible, from fruitless endeavors. The flip side of this is that the new paradigm frees us to extend full appreciation to a plethora of values in the cognitive enterprise. Free from preoccupation with determining which of them is required for something called “justification”, we can accord to each the attention, respect, and exploration it deserves.

Moreover, the new look can be expected to make itself felt at particular points in epistemological inquiry. I will conclude by mentioning just one point, a particularly important one, I believe. I have pointed out above that the internalist will have to present solid reasons for restricting our resources

for epistemology to what we can ascertain just on reflection. This is the position he is forced into once he abandons the supposition that *the* meaning, force, or content of the concept of epistemic justification requires this restriction. So long as the search for principles of *justification* are in the foreground, it is not difficult for the internalist to feel good about following (a very considerable strand of the) tradition in taking it that only what is internally discoverable can bear on justification. Proceeding under that aegis it is easy to lull oneself into thinking that it is partly constitutive of justification that those restrictions are in force. But once the internalist is forced out into open country, in which there is a variety of epistemic desiderata, each of which presents strong claims to attention, he is forced to look for more substantial reasons for ruling out of bounds any of those contenders that do not disclose themselves to reflective scrutiny. He will have to come up with something more solid than the mere existence of the tradition and the conceptual apparatus embodied therein if he wants us to take seriously his attempt to give priority to reflective accessibility.<sup>30</sup> And we have already seen that when he tries to do so, he will run into formidable difficulties.

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<sup>30</sup> This is my answer to one who says, "Your discussion of internalism is something that could just as well have gone on under the old 'search for justification' dispensation".

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