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BOSTON UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Dissertation

**EPISTEMIC CIRCULARITY
AND NON-INFERENTIAL JUSTIFICATION**

by

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B.A., University of Toronto, 2008
M.A., University of Toronto, 2010

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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“It seems plausible that philosophy should seek to uncover the deepest truths, to find explanatory or...justificatory principles so deep that nothing else yields them, yet deep enough to subsume themselves.”

- Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations*

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my partner Jana and to Thales, the four-legged kibble monster who during my undergraduate degree dutifully slept on my books beside me as I chipped away at my computer.

**EPISTEMIC CIRCULARITY
AND NON-INFERENTIAL JUSTIFICATION**

RYAN SOSNA

Boston University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, 2021

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation motivates and defends what I call non-inferential epistemic circularity. Traditionally epistemic circularity is understood to be a property of arguments, where justification to believe these arguments' premises depends upon the truth of their conclusions. I argue that epistemically circular arguments face a dilemma. If the conditions for non-inferential justification to believe their premises are too weak, these arguments are either indiscriminate or permit one to bootstrap trivially to higher-order justification. If to avoid these problems the conditions for non-inferential justification are strengthened on the basis of evidence, then epistemically circular arguments beg the question because they collapse into logical circularity. To address these problems I argue that an account of non-inferential justification should be developed that limits the role of evidential grounds and finds room instead for non-evidential sources of justification. I conclude that epistemic circularity is constitutive of non-inferential justification because it is a property of the intentional acts in virtue of which this justification is earned.

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Chapter 1: Framing the Debate about Epistemic Circularity

1.0 Introduction

Imagine you doubt the reliability of your perceptual system, whether it outputs a favourable ratio of true to false beliefs. So you decide to test it. Looking at your desk you take yourself to see a coffee mug, and you conclude that your perceptual system is functioning properly. Looking next at the wall you take yourself to see a clock and conclude again that your perceptual system is functioning properly. After repeating this procedure enough times to infer that your perceptual system outputs a favourable ratio of true to false beliefs, you conclude that it is reliable.

You just engaged in epistemically circular reasoning. Roughly, epistemically circular reasoning involves using a belief source to determine whether that same belief source is reliable, and you used your perceptual faculty to determine whether perception is reliable. But this reasoning might seem wrong. For one, anyone who doubts the reliability of the belief source in question would find it unpersuasive. Consider other examples: determining whether an old thermometer is reliable by reading it; whether a suspected liar is truthful by asking him; or whether your doubtful memory is reliable by taking yourself to remember its reliability. In each case you are relying on a belief source whose reliability you doubt to determine whether that same belief source is reliable. But if you already doubt that source's reliability, there is a strong sense you cannot rely on it to resolve that doubt. Doing otherwise appears to assume just what you want to prove.

Perhaps however this concern arises not from epistemically circular reasoning itself, but from your doubt. If you did not doubt your perceptual system's reliability, would epistemically circular reasoning still be unpersuasive? One reason to believe it would be is that

epistemic circularity appears to involve bootstrapping, and bootstrapping seems objectionable. If you may use a belief source to ascertain that same source's reliability, then independent evidence of its reliability is unnecessary. All you need are outputs of the self-same belief source whose reliability you are looking to ascertain. But this reasoning—a form of bootstrapping—is suspect for at least two reasons. For one, unless qualified it would permit you to use *any* belief source to ascertain that same source's reliability. Using a crystal ball to testify to its putative reliability would be as unobjectionable as any other epistemically circular belief-forming process. For another, it trivializes the justification of higher-order beliefs. Presumably a belief that a belief source is reliable cannot be justified by bootstrapping with that very source. Some independent check on its reliability seems needed.

So epistemic circularity is at least doubly suspicious: it appears dialectically ineffective because it assumes what you are trying to prove; and it appears epistemically vacuous because it allows you trivially to ascertain the reliability of any belief source just by using that source.

Worries about epistemic circularity are not new. To mention just a few examples, they date back at least to Meno's paradox, resurface in Sextus Empiricus' problem of the criterion, and later again in the Cartesian Circle and Hume's problem of induction. But I am going to focus on the debate about epistemic circularity in contemporary epistemology. Roderick Chisholm's discussion of the problem of the criterion, which is closely connected to epistemic circularity, is well-known in this debate, and William Alston's and James Van Cleve's broadly externalist analyses are popular attempts to resolve it in epistemic circularity's favour.¹

¹ Alston (1986; 1993); Van Cleve (1979; 2003)

But some have found these defenses wanting and a sizable literature has developed that tries once again to sort out how epistemic circularity should be understood. Richard Fumerton argues that epistemic circularity should be banned outright, for example.² But in light of the claim that epistemic circularity is unavoidable—very roughly, that every higher-order belief about the reliability of a basic belief source is a product of epistemically circular reasoning—it is difficult to distinguish the problems this ban intends to avoid from the skepticism about higher-order justification that it entails.³ So others shift the debate about epistemic circularity from prohibition to amelioration. Michael Bergmann, for example, asks how the skeptical consequences of epistemic circularity can be avoided without avoiding epistemic circularity itself.⁴ One popular approach says these consequences arise from other philosophical commitments, not from epistemic circularity *per se*. So once these commitments are revised or rejected, the skeptical threat epistemic circularity appears to pose should be neutralized.

I think all these approaches are mistaken. Each views epistemic circularity as at least an apparent if not real threat. None views it as something that might play a positive or even central role in our noetic structure. My goal in this dissertation is to explain and defend this latter possibility. Very generally, I am going to argue that epistemic circularity lies at the heart of an acceptable theory of non-inferential justification. The problems it causes arise when we overlook this fact.

² Fumerton (1995: 177).

³ In Chapter 2 I will unpack this idea that epistemic circularity is unavoidable.

⁴ Bergmann (2006: 179-212).

1.1 Chapter Plan

Before looking more closely in Chapter 2 at what epistemic circularity is, I want to sketch in this chapter a high-level picture of the contemporary debate about epistemic circularity and of how my positive proposal will fit into it. This risks being conceptually top-heavy, since right now our central topic of discussion—epistemic circularity—is only loosely described. But having this framework in place will help me anticipate the positive proposal I will defend in Chapter 5, so in the long run the payoff should be worth it.

To this end, I am going to argue that in the contemporary debate epistemic circularity is assumed to be a property exclusively of arguments we give when exchanging reasons for certain beliefs, and that this assumption is philosophically consequential because it entails commitments that play a role in the problem of epistemic circularity. I call this the *dialectical framing* of the debate about epistemic circularity, and the view that epistemic circularity is a property exclusively of arguments I call *inferential epistemic circularity*. In §1.2 I will argue that this dialectical context is established when we ask an ‘Epistemic Circularity Question’ (EC-Question), and that it is resolved if we can justifiedly believe this question’s answer on the basis of it being the conclusion of a cogent epistemically circular argument. In §1.3 I will then discuss a putatively simple way of responding to EC-Questions. It says these questions are easily answered so long as one’s belief in the premises of the resulting epistemically circular argument meets the very same conditions for justifiedly believing the premises of *any* argument. In other words, from the standpoint of epistemic justification, nothing important hangs on epistemically circular arguments *per se*. But in §1.4 I will argue that the simplicity of this response is belied by the fact that it rests on a challenging distinction between what I call *satisfying* and *discharging* an epistemic principle. Specifically, in §1.5 I will argue that proponents

of this simple response to EC-Questions maintain that epistemic principles are discharged in only one way—through *higher-order ascent* to justified meta-beliefs. In response, using Barry Stroud’s philosophical skepticism as my guide, I will argue in §1.6 and §1.7 that discharging epistemic principles through higher-order ascent leads to a dilemma. This will finally motivate in §1.8 the sketch of my positive proposal that this dilemma arises from not recognizing that the dialectical framing of the debate epistemic circularity is problematic: there is reason to believe epistemic circularity is more fundamentally a property of non-inferential justification, and therefore that the dialectical framing of the debate about epistemic circularity is too narrow.

1.2 The Epistemic Circularity Question

Citing Thomas Reid, Alston says one of the most basic epistemological questions is whether we are “...proceeding rationally in trusting as we do our basic sources of belief...”⁵ We can formulate this question more concretely by substituting ‘basic sources of belief’ with sense perception (SP), the belief source whose reliability is primarily at issue in Alston’s discussion of epistemic circularity:

Alston’s Basic Question: are we proceeding rationally in trusting SP?

Two of Alston’s positions allow us to refine this question. First, as I will discuss in Chapter 2, he imposes a reliability constraint on epistemic justification that says a belief source like SP

⁵ Alston (1986: 1). Alston endorses this question as one of epistemology’s most basic, but he credits this observation to Thomas Reid. In Chapter 1 I will discuss what basic belief sources are.

outputs justified beliefs only if it is reliable.⁶ This amounts to an epistemic principle stating a necessary condition for beliefs to have this epistemic status. Second, Alston maintains that one would be ‘proceeding rationally’ if one *trusts* a reliable belief source to form beliefs.⁷ We can reformulate Alston’s Basic Question accordingly:

Epistemic Circularity Question (EC-Question): is SP reliable such that it can be rationally trusted?

I call this an EC-Question because in Chapter 2 I am going to argue that, for what we will see are *basic* belief sources, this question cannot be answered without epistemic circularity. For now I take this for granted. But if I am right, we get the result that EC-Questions are satisfactorily answered only if this answer is the conclusion of a cogent epistemically circular argument.

This is not the only consequence of framing the debate about epistemic circularity in terms of asking and answering EC-Questions, however. As I will argue in Chapter 2, other consequences include the assumption that EC-Questions are well-formed; that satisfactorily answering these questions requires evidence; that this evidence figures as premises in arguments defending these answers; and, crucially, that epistemic circularity is a property only of these arguments, something that arises only when we make certain kinds of inferences. Taken together, call this network of commitments the *dialectical framing* of epistemic circularity: epistemic circularity arises when we ask EC-Questions and must give epistemically circular arguments to support our answers.

⁶ In fact, Alston imposes a reliability condition on the adequacy of evidence. But later I will argue that this commits him to a reliable process theory as well.

⁷ This is controversial because one concern about externalist theories of justification and knowledge, like reliabilism, is that they cannot account for rationality. This is one interpretation of Bonjour’s (1980) clairvoyant argument. For now I am overlooking these finer issues in interest of setting up the framework of my discussion.

This way of framing of the debate about epistemic circularity is so predominant I am not certain it is recognized. But I think it is mistaken. To motivate this skepticism, in the next few sections I will present a challenge to the *philosophical significance* of epistemic circularity that this dialectical framing invites. This challenge says that epistemic circularity is not philosophically important because conditions for justifiedly believing the premises of epistemically circular arguments are the very same as those for justifiedly believing the premises of *any* argument. Epistemic circularity is just not a difference maker. Discussing this challenge will focus the philosophical terrain of this debate and show hints of why I think the dialectical framing of epistemic circularity is mistaken, making room for my positive proposal that epistemic circularity should not be framed dialectically because it is more fundamentally involved with non-inferential justification.

1.3 The EC-Question: A Simple Response

Here is a straightforward response to an EC-Question: answering it is unproblematic. If formulated as a position this response could take numerous forms. But a common thread in the contemporary literature is a theory of justification that imposes no higher-order belief or higher-order awareness requirements. Externalist theories like reliabilism are obvious examples because they typically reject higher-order requirements altogether. But some internalist theories are examples too. An awareness requirement on justification does not entail one must be aware of every factor that contributes to justification. So what I will call a *first-order internalist* might distinguish first- and second-order awareness, such as being aware that p and being aware that your belief that p is justified because it satisfies a true epistemic principle, and argue that such second-order awareness is unnecessary for justification on pain of regress,

over-intellectualization or vicious circularity.⁸ These externalists and first-order internalists can then argue that EC-Questions are easily answered so long as belief in the premises of the epistemically circular argument given in response satisfies their respective first-order requirement(s). Nothing is needed above satisfying the requirements to justifiedly believe the premises of any argument, in other words. Call these externalists and first-order internalists proponents of the *first-order requirements view*.

One curiosity of this view is that the presence of epistemic circularity in an argument appears to be not merely benign but immaterial. First-order conditions for justification are satisfied or not; if they are satisfied then, save defeaters, justification transfers from an argument's premises to its conclusion; and epistemic circularity has no obvious bearing on either fact. I will challenge this view when I discuss in Chapter 2 what I believe is the problem of epistemic circularity. Right now I want to draw attention to the fact that this apparently simple answer to an EC-Question is not so simple. It succeeds only if the following condition is met, and throughout this dissertation I will argue that meeting this condition is problematic: the epistemic principle(s) a first-order requirements view endorses can be *satisfied* by S's belief B without being *discharged*. This distinction is important and I intend to develop it throughout this dissertation, since I will eventually argue that epistemic circularity helps us make sense of it. What follows here is just an initial gloss.

⁸ Distinguishing epistemic levels this way is Alston's (1980) strategy for solving a number of epistemological puzzles. But it is a very common response to internalists who endorse demanding standards for justification. See also Van Cleve (1979) for an attempt to apply this general strategy to escaping the Cartesian Circle.

1.4 Satisfying versus Discharging an Epistemic Principle

I understand epistemic principles to be conditionals that state necessary and/or sufficient conditions for beliefs to have a particular epistemic status. So consider two (simplified) principles an externalist and a first-order internalist might respectively endorse, each with justification as the target epistemic status. A principle an externalist might endorse says: if S's belief is the output of a reliable belief-forming process, then S's belief is justified. And a first-order internalist might endorse a principle that says: if S clearly and distinctly perceives that p , then S's belief that p is justified. Each conditional is an epistemic principle because it lays down a condition for justification. And each can be satisfied without being discharged, I suggest, because neither the externalist nor the first-order internalist says S must ascertain that his belief satisfies the conditional's antecedent. It is enough for justification that S's belief does satisfy the antecedent.

Discharging an epistemic principle therefore involves more than S having a belief that is justified because it satisfies the relevant part of a conditional. It involves S knowing, in some way, that his belief does satisfy that conditional, thus discharging it because the conditional is no longer hypothetical for S. This arguably makes discharging an epistemic principle a paradigmatically internalist notion, while merely satisfying an epistemic principle is internalist or externalist depending on the first-order requirement(s) a particular theory of justification espouses.

This distinction will need fleshing out. Among other things it:

- (i) Rests on an unspecified account of what 'knowing that a belief satisfies an epistemic principle' involves
- (ii) Trades on a distinction between first- and second-order epistemic requirements that should be clearer

(iii) Is vulnerable to over-intellectualization and regress objections.

Issue (i) is the most important because resolving it amounts to a giving a full account of what it is to discharge an epistemic principle. Resolving (ii) should be part of any informative answer to (i), and if this answer is also viable then it should give us a good response to the problem in (iii). Taken together, therefore, (i)-(iii) give us parameters for a good account of the distinction between satisfying and discharging an epistemic principle.

I will begin filling in these answers in Chapter 2 when I discuss Alston's account of epistemic circularity. But already here we can see that first-order requirements theorists are themselves committed to *some* account of this satisfied/discharged distinction, and that this is because their first-order requirements views *presuppose* it. Externalists presuppose this distinction because, if discharging an epistemic principle is a paradigmatically internalist notion, their position amounts to the claim that every epistemic principle can be satisfied without being discharged. And first-order internalists presuppose it because, though they impose an awareness requirement on justification, they maintain that this requirement need not apply to every factor that contributes to justification. The epistemic remainder, then, whatever it might be, is what they allow to remain undischarged in an instance of first-order justification.

But just because both presuppose this distinction does not mean externalists and first-order internalists agree on all the details. For example, a first-order internalist can argue that an epistemic principle can be fully *discharged*, since this would involve fully expanding the scope of an awareness requirement he already accepts, while an externalist can coherently deny this if he argues that any 'epistemic remainder' is *necessarily* an external condition on epistemic justification. So though both parties would agree that epistemic justification does not entail an

epistemic principle is satisfied if and only if it is discharged, they can disagree whether fully discharging an epistemic principle is possible. This shows that the satisfied/discharged distinction is not equivalent to the internalist/externalist distinction.

1.5 Discharging an Epistemic Principle and Higher-Order Ascent

Regardless of such differences between externalists and first-order internalists, I think they still give the same *kind* of account of what partly or fully discharging an epistemic principle involves. And this is what distinguishes their account of this distinction from my own. Specifically, in Chapter 2 we will see that these theorists think partly or fully discharging an epistemic principle involves what I call *higher-order ascent*: for a belief B, S discharges an epistemic principle only if S has a justified higher-order belief, or for the internalist perhaps just higher-order awareness, that B satisfies that principle's antecedent.

We can illustrate this approach by factoring this account of discharging an epistemic principle back into the simple response to EC-Questions. Our working example of an EC-Question asks whether SP is reliable such that it can be rationally trusted. Assuming for the moment that a reliable belief source is a condition for justification—in other words, that such reliability properly figures as a necessary and/or sufficient condition in an epistemic principle—this EC-Question arises only if this epistemic principle is *undischarged*. Otherwise the fact of whether SP is reliable would be already confirmed. Now assume that S has a first-order belief, B₁, that is an output of SP. Since B₁'s parent epistemic principle is undischarged, S asking an EC-Question about whether SP is reliable amounts to S looking to use an epistemically circular argument to confirm that B₁ satisfies the applicable condition for justification. And S is successful only if B₁'s parent epistemic principle is as a result partly if

not fully discharged. First-order requirements theorists who endorse the simple response to EC-Questions now offer the following account of how S should proceed: to discharge B₁'s parent epistemic principle S must, through higher-order ascent, have a justified higher-order belief ('B₂') that SP is reliable, and (as I will argue in Chapter 2) justification for this higher-order belief can be earned by satisfying the *very same* conditions that apply to first-order justification. As a result, whether the argument that S uses to earn this higher-order justification is *epistemically circular* is immaterial.

In the next section I will raise some problems with this story. First I want to illustrate in broad terms how my view of discharging an epistemic principle is different. I maintain that discharging an epistemic principle is not necessarily a function of higher-order ascent, but can be a function also of the role I think epistemic circularity plays in first-order, non-inferential justification. Specifically, I think that what James Van Cleve calls generation principles—epistemic principles that spell out conditions for non-inferential justification—are satisfied if and only if they are discharged, and that epistemic circularity explains how this biconditional can be true without incurring regress, over-intellectualization and vicious circularity problems.⁹ In fact, the role I believe epistemic circularity plays in non-inferential justification is part of what I think makes this species of justification *sui generis*. If this is right, then EC-Questions need not be raised, since the fact of whether the applicable conditions of justification are satisfied should be already transparent at the level of non-inferential justification. The starting point of the contemporary debate about epistemic circularity—framing it dialectically in terms of asking and answering EC-Questions—is mistaken.

⁹ Van Cleve (1979: 75).

My alternative account of discharging an epistemic principle explains why I have introduced the satisfied/discharged distinction in the first place. If higher-order ascent were the only way to discharge an epistemic principle, this distinction could be folded into one between first- and second-level epistemic requirements. Arguably this is the most common approach. But because I think the expected purchase of satisfying some second-level requirements can be found in the role I will argue epistemic circularity plays in first-order non-inferential justification, I have made room for this alternative by introducing the more general distinction between satisfied and discharged epistemic principles. This allows me to maintain that higher-order ascent might be sufficient for discharging an epistemic principle without agreeing it is necessary.

Motivating, explaining, and defending this alternative view of what discharging an epistemic principle involves, and fleshing out the role I believe epistemic circularity plays in it, are the primary goals of this dissertation. I want to begin here with a bigger-picture discussion of Barry Stroud's challenge to what I am calling first-order requirements views. I am going to argue that using higher-order ascent to meet Stroud's challenge leads to a dilemma, and that this gives us reason to doubt higher-order ascent is the only or the best way to discharge an epistemic principle. The upshot will be that first-order requirements views—and their seemingly simple response to EC-Questions—should be met with skepticism.

1.6 Setting up the Dilemma: Stroud's Challenge to First-Order Requirements Views

Stroud argues that the primary goal of epistemological theorizing is to understand human knowledge in general, and that because this is its proper goal achieving it would bring

philosophical satisfaction.¹⁰ Unpacking this view Ernest Sosa says that traditional epistemology, which I assume is broadly Cartesian epistemology, believes its proper goal is *legitimation* and that achieving this requires satisfying the *meta-epistemic requirement*:

Meta-Epistemic Requirement (MER): In order to understand one's knowledge [or justification] satisfactorily one must see oneself as having some reason to accept a theory that one can recognize would explain one's knowledge [or justification] if [that theory] were true.¹¹

MER says an epistemic theory is legitimating for S only if S sees himself as having reason to believe that theory explains S's own knowledge. Since epistemic principles state conditions for beliefs to have a particular epistemic status, this makes MER a *meta-epistemic* principle for beliefs in *epistemic theories* to have such status. The idea is that an epistemologist whose epistemic beliefs, through higher-order ascent, satisfy MER will have gained philosophical satisfaction because this successful ascent closes the gap between his theory of knowledge and his knowledge. What Stroud calls 'complete generality' or 'philosophical satisfaction', in other words, is at least a close analogue to what I call 'discharging an epistemic principle'.

As I understand him, Stroud imposes a meta-epistemic condition like MER only on epistemological knowledge; it is a demand epistemologists alone are expected to meet. This arguably immunizes him from over-intellectualization objections. But Stroud argues that satisfying such a meta-epistemic principle is nonetheless impossible, not least because of regress and vicious circularity, and this leads him to conclude that philosophical satisfaction is unattainable.¹² So though Stroud seems to believe philosophical satisfaction requires satisfying,

¹⁰ Stroud (2002: 99-121; 139-154).

¹¹ Sosa (2009: 166). It is important to note that Sosa does not endorse MER and this traditional view of epistemology. Sosa proposes MER because he wants to make explicit why he thinks the goal of traditional epistemology is unachievable.

¹² See Stroud (2002) for these arguments in detail. I am not getting into these details here in interest of setting up my framework for discussing epistemic circularity.

through higher-order ascent, a meta-epistemic principle like MER, he denies that any such principle can be satisfied. Philosophical skepticism—a skepticism that afflicts epistemologists aiming for philosophical satisfaction—appears to be the only alternative.

This philosophical skepticism challenges the global ambitions of what Sosa calls traditional epistemology. For the philosopher's goal of understanding knowledge in complete generality—which for Stroud appears to require understanding knowledge without presupposing any knowledge—seems impossible to achieve.¹³ But this philosophical skepticism also challenges *first-order requirements* views. Because these views allow epistemic principles to be satisfied without being discharged, they permit some conditions for knowledge and justification to remain opaque not only from the ordinary knower's point of view, but from the epistemologist's as well. But this runs afoul of Stroud's demand that an epistemic theory is satisfactory only if it is legitimating. So though he believes traditional epistemology's goals are too strong, it seems Stroud would also believe those of first-order requirements views are too weak. The crux of his philosophical skepticism appears to be that meta-epistemic principles like MER are necessary but unsatisfiable.

I am persuaded by some of Stroud's arguments that meta-epistemic principles are unsatisfiable. But more needs to be said about why satisfying such principles *through higher-order ascent* is necessary. In Chapter 3 I will argue that one apparent reason is that the alternative generates the problem of epistemic circularity. But this reason is merely apparent because, though I think the problem of epistemic circularity is real, I deny that solving it requires *higher-order ascent* to meta-epistemic principles like MER. Instead, I think the problem of epistemic

¹³ As Sosa says, it smacks of the paradoxical desire to find the patron saint of modesty who blesses all and only those who do not bless themselves (Sosa 2009: 173-77).

circularity arises from misunderstanding epistemic circularity itself, and that correcting this shows the role it plays in first-order, non-inferential justification.

I will give the bulk of this argument in Chapters 3-5 . But I am going to anticipate it here by presenting a dilemma that challenges an assumption I think Stroud *and* first-order requirements theorists share: that achieving philosophical satisfaction—discharging an epistemic principle, or what Sosa calls ‘legitimizing’ an epistemic theory—*requires higher-order ascent* to a meta-epistemic principle like MER. If this argument is sound, it raises doubt about a necessary connection between discharging an epistemic principle and higher-order ascent, and this opens up space for my positive proposal that epistemic circularity explains how a first-order epistemic principle can be satisfied and discharged without ascent to anything meta-epistemic.

1.7 Dilemma for Higher-Order Ascent

The dilemma’s starting point is the observation that meta-epistemic principles like MER can be satisfied only if they are discharged, because the alternative leads to vicious circularity or regress.¹⁴ To see this, assume S’s perceptual belief B_1 is justified because it satisfies some sufficient condition C_1 in a first-order epistemic principle:

1. S’s belief B_1 satisfies $C_1 \rightarrow J(B_1)$ for S

If C_1 ’s parent epistemic theory, T, permits this first-order epistemic principle to be satisfied without being discharged, then S has no higher-order belief or higher-order awareness that B_1 satisfies C_1 . But S, who we will assume is in Sosa’s sense a traditional Cartesian epistemologist,

¹⁴ Stroud (2002: 99-121) gives regress arguments similar to this one, though I am framing this regress differently because I am using the background of higher-order ascent, which Stroud does not explicitly discuss.

asks whether B_1 does satisfy C_1 because this undischarged principle leaves him philosophically dissatisfied. He wants to legitimate T . MER offers him a meta-epistemic principle:

2. T is legitimated \rightarrow S sees himself as having a reason to accept T

Let us say S has ‘reason to accept’ T only if S justifiedly believes (B_2) T is legitimate, and that S arrives at B_2 through higher-order ascent. If MER were a higher-order requirement on ordinary justification, this step of the argument would be vulnerable to over-intellectualization objections, since presumably we have justified beliefs without ascending to meta-epistemic principles. But since S is a traditional epistemologist let us assume this instance of higher-order ascent is warranted. Two familiar problems nonetheless arise. One, if the condition for B_2 ’s justification is C_1 from (1), then S is reasoning in a circle. Two, if this condition is distinct from C_1 but can still be satisfied as part of an *undischarged* meta-epistemic principle, then S is caught in a regress—this undischarged meta-epistemic principle would leave him again philosophically dissatisfied, albeit one level up. Save these two problems, therefore, a meta-epistemic principle like MER can be satisfied only if it is discharged.

This is where the dilemma takes hold. To meet this condition for satisfying a meta-epistemic principle, the condition C_2 for higher-order justification that MER stipulates must be different *in kind* from the condition C_1 for justification that a first-order epistemic principle stipulates. The reason is that this difference must explain why S can satisfy C_1 in a first-order epistemic principle that is not discharged, but cannot satisfy C_2 in a second-order epistemic principle unless it is discharged, and it is difficult to see how this is possible if the two conditions are the same.

But this requirement now catches us on one of two horns. On one hand, this difference in kind between C_1 and C_2 , whatever it might be, has implausible consequences for

the epistemic status of ordinary, first-order beliefs. Assume S has a justified first-order perceptual belief that <it is raining outside> and a justified second-order belief that <the epistemic theory ‘T’ licensing this first-order belief is legitimate>. If there is a difference in kind between C_1 and C_2 that explains why C_2 is satisfied only if its corresponding second-order epistemic principle is discharged, then this difference should entail that S’s justified higher-order belief is more secure, or of greater epistemic quality, than his first-order perceptual belief. But this seems wrong. Surely our perceptual beliefs are as secure as our epistemological beliefs, if not more secure. Persistent disagreement in epistemology about epistemic principles suggests as much. On the other hand, if to avoid this first horn we allow that there is no difference in kind between C_1 and C_2 , then one principle cannot be discharged without the other. But now the distinction between epistemic levels no longer does its expected work: satisfying a second-order epistemic principle like MER should be no longer necessary for philosophical satisfaction; satisfying the first-order, now-discharged epistemic principle should already be sufficient

So the requirement that a meta-epistemic principle like MER can be satisfied only if it is discharged either has implausible consequences for the epistemic status of ordinary first-order beliefs, or it erodes the epistemic significance of the distinction between first- and second-order justification. The first-order requirements theorist who believes the very same conditions for justification can be iterated through higher-order ascent is stuck with an untenable position.

1.8 Epistemic Levels and Epistemic Circularity

I think the problem underlying this dilemma is that first-order requirements views *and* Stroud's view of philosophical satisfaction rest on a mistaken account of the distinction between satisfying and discharging an epistemic principle. Both assume this distinction should be analyzed in terms of first- and second-order epistemic requirements that are bridged through higher-order ascent: S's belief B_1 *satisfies* an epistemic principle E_1 if and only if it satisfies a first-order requirement stipulated by E_1 ; and S *discharges* that same principle if and only if S has a second belief B_2 that, through higher-order ascent, satisfies a second-order requirement stipulated by a meta-epistemic principle like MER. And, critically, this second-order requirement can be the same *in kind* as the first-order requirement. The fact that this story is convoluted is not the only strike against it.¹⁵ The dilemma shows it is also unstable.

I am going to defend an option that takes a little bit from each of this dilemma's horns. On one hand, I accept the antecedent of the dilemma's first horn that there is a difference between epistemic conditions ' C_1 ' and ' C_2 ', *if* these conditions are what I will later refer to as *sources* and *grounds*. I will argue that these conditions, which I also generically call justifiers, are distinct in virtue of their *epistemic role* in our noetic structure. But I deny the consequent of this first horn that the difference between these particular justifiers entails that higher-order beliefs are more secure than first-order beliefs. The reason is that I do not think the difference between these justifiers' epistemic roles should be analyzed always in terms of first- and second-level requirements that are bridged through higher-order ascent. Instead, I think an adequate account of first-order, non-inferential justification must make sense of an epistemic

¹⁵ Though in fairness to first-order requirements theorists, they would likely argue this higher-order ascent is unmotivated because they reject Stroud's demand for philosophical satisfaction. So Stroudian philosophical dissatisfaction is bullet they are likely comfortable biting. I will discuss this strategy in Chapter 3.

principle whose condition(s) a belief must satisfy on one level entails that this principle is discharged on that same level. I want to defend, in other words, an account of a *self-certifying epistemic principle* that is satisfied by a first-order belief if and only if it is discharged by that belief. With respect to the second horn of the dilemma, then, I bite the bullet: among other conditions I will discuss later, when sources and grounds are the epistemic conditions or justifiers in question, we should accept that in cases of non-inferential justification the first-/second-order distinction assumed by first-order requirements theorists collapses.

Though I believe my account of a self-certifying epistemic principle will be novel, the same cannot be said of my skepticism about higher-order ascent. Richard Fumerton's theory of acquaintance, for example, says S has non-inferential justification to believe that *p* just when "...everything that is *constitutive* of a thought's being true is immediately before consciousness, there is nothing more one could want or need to justify a belief."¹⁶ This sounds similar to my claim that S has non-inferential justification to believe that *p* just when S's justification leaves no 'epistemic remainder' because the operative epistemic principle is satisfied if and only if it is discharged. The shared intuition is not only that justifiedly believing or knowing that *p* require evidence. It is also that S's first-order epistemic standing is, in some as yet unspecified way, *exhaustive*: there is nothing more S could want or need to believe that *p* with first-order, non-inferential justification.¹⁷ Higher-order ascent is therefore unnecessary.

¹⁶ Fumerton (1995: 75; italics his). More precisely, Fumerton says that S has non-inferential justification to believe that *p* if and only if (i) S has the thought that *p*; (ii) is acquainted with his thought that *p* and the fact that *p*; and (iii) is acquainted with the correspondence holding between his thought that *p* and the fact that *p*.

¹⁷ This comes close to saying non-inferential justification is factive because it involves a real relation between a thought and a fact that makes that thought true. Fumerton (1995: 74) notes and appears to accept this consequence for his theory of acquaintance, and I too am sympathetic to it.

The distinguishing feature of my account, however, is the role a self-certifying epistemic principle plays in my response to this skepticism about higher-order ascent. Unlike Fumerton and others who not only overlook the purchase of positing a self-certifying epistemic principle but believe epistemic circularity is vicious, I think an epistemic principle is self-certifying *because of* epistemic circularity. The difference is that I think these critics do not recognize epistemic circularity's full scope, and this leads them to the mistaken conclusion that epistemic circularity is always vicious. In particular, they assume *inferential epistemic circularity*—that epistemic circularity is a property exclusively of arguments—and this commits them to the view that reasons to believe the conclusions of epistemically circular arguments must be premises. But I will argue that premises are a kind of justifier distinguished by their epistemic role as evidence or grounds for belief, and that using such a justifier in an epistemically circular argument entails that Fumerton and other critics are right: epistemic circularity is vicious.

But we do not have to conceive of epistemic circularity only this way. I will defend an alternative that I call *non-inferential epistemic circularity*. Rather than saying it as a property exclusively of arguments, this view says epistemic circularity can be a property also of non-inferential justification. This is because, I will argue, an adequate account of non-inferential justification requires positing a self-certifying epistemic principle, and self-certification is a function of virtuous epistemic circularity. In contrast to inferential epistemic circularity, then, which takes as justifiers *grounds* or evidence that figure as premises in epistemically circular arguments, non-inferential epistemic circularity takes as justifiers *sources* that explain our default entitlement to generative epistemic principles.¹⁸ I maintain that these generative epistemic

¹⁸ That is, to principles that spell out conditions for non-inferential justification.

principles are not themselves grounds—not even for epistemically circular beliefs in their own legitimacy—but are sources because they are conditions for us to possess evidence rather than evidence themselves. Inferential epistemic circularity is vicious because it looks for evidence where none should be found.

1.9 Summary

The argument in this chapter has been elliptical, not least because I have been trying to frame our discussion of epistemic circularity without saying much about epistemic circularity. So let me summarize it.

In §1.2 I argued that framing the debate about epistemic circularity dialectically, by asking EC-Questions and attempting to answer them with epistemically circular arguments, is philosophically consequential. The most important consequence is what I call inferential epistemic circularity: the view that epistemic circularity is a property exclusively of arguments given in response to EC-Questions. This consequence is important because it saddles us with additional commitments that we will later see are ingredients in the problem of epistemic circularity, such as: the view that EC-Questions are well-formed; that satisfactorily answering them requires evidence; and that this evidence figures as premises in epistemically circular arguments defending these answers.

But we saw in §1.3 that there is a simple response to EC-Questions that denies these consequences are problematic. Favoured by what I have called first-order requirements theorists, this response says epistemically circular arguments are cogent just in case belief in their premises meets the same conditions for justifiedly believing the premises of any ordinary, non-epistemically circular argument. So whether an argument is epistemically circular has no

bearing on its capacity to justify belief in its conclusion. First-order requirements theorists espouse this view, I argued in §1.4, because it rests on an interpretation of a critical distinction between satisfying and discharging an epistemic principle that they endorse. This interpretation says that satisfying an epistemic principle is sufficient for justification because one need not also discharge it by ascertaining that one's belief does in fact satisfy the applicable condition(s) for justification. Since it is enough for a belief just to satisfy such condition(s), epistemically circular arguments pose no special problem.

Nonetheless, recognizing this distinction allows that there is *at least some* epistemic remainder to discharge. And in §1.4 I argued that Stroud believes epistemologists uniquely have reason to discharge it because they seek philosophical satisfaction by understanding human knowledge in general. So it is not enough for epistemologists that their beliefs *do* satisfy an epistemic principle; they want to close the question of whether their beliefs *in fact* do, even if they agree that *fully* discharging an epistemic principle is impossible because some epistemic remainder will necessarily be an external condition on justification. Otherwise, why raise an EC-Question at all?

But we saw in §1.5 that first-order requirements theorists are also committed also to a particular *way* of discharging an epistemic principle: through higher-order ascent. The reason is that, as I will discuss further in Chapter 2, their first-order requirements view takes for granted that the distinction between satisfying and discharging an epistemic principle is equivalent to the distinction between first- and second-order justification. In other words, for these theorists discharging an epistemic principle *just is* the result of having a justified meta-belief, earned through higher-order ascent, that a first-order belief satisfies applicable conditions for justification.

In the remaining sections, finally, I presented a dilemma that gives us reason to doubt first-order requirements theorists' story. In §1.6 I argued the fundamental problem is that, to avoid vicious circularity or regress, these theorists must allow that there is a distinction in kind between the conditions for justifying meta-beliefs and those for justifying first-order beliefs. Specifically, the conditions for justifying meta-beliefs must be enough to discharge not only the first-order epistemic principle licensing the first-order belief in question, but *also* the meta-epistemic principle licensing the meta-belief. Otherwise first-order requirements theorists will simply shift their philosophical dissatisfaction up one epistemic level: they will now want to discharge rather than merely satisfy the operative meta-epistemic principle too. But this demand that meta-epistemic principles are satisfied if and only if they are discharged has implausible consequences. On one hand, it entails that our higher-order epistemological beliefs are more epistemically secure than our ordinary first-order beliefs, which even a cursory review of epistemology literature suggests is false. On the other hand, if we avoid this first horn by denying that there is a difference in kind between first- and second-order conditions for epistemic justification, then the first-/second-order distinction on which first-order requirements theorists' view depends collapses.

The root of this problem, I suggested in §1.8, is that first-order requirements theorists mistakenly believe that discharging an epistemic principle is possible only through higher-order ascent. My view, by contrast, is that discharging an epistemic principle is possible without higher-order ascent because an adequate account of non-inferential justification must make sense of an epistemic principle that is satisfied on one epistemic level if and only if it is also discharged on that same level. And we can make sense of this possibility only if we understand that *inferential* epistemic circularity is not exhaustive. Epistemic circularity is also,

and more fundamentally, a property of non-inferential justification. To this end, I turn in the next chapter to discussing what epistemic circularity is.

Chapter 2: What is Inferential Epistemic Circularity?

2.0 Varieties of Epistemic Circularity

Consider four examples of circular reasoning:

- A. *Rule Circularity*: S wants to know whether q : that modus ponens is a reliable inference rule. S reasons as follows: if p then q ; p ; therefore: q .¹⁹
- B. *Criterial Circularity*: S wants to know whether q : that clear and distinct perception is a reliable criterion of truth. S reasons as follows: I clearly and distinctly perceive that p and that p entails q ; therefore: q .
- C. *External Source Circularity*: S wants to know whether q : that a suspected liar, A, is truthful. S reasons as follows: A testifies that he is truthful (p); if p then q ; therefore: q .²⁰
- D. *Internal Source Circularity*: S wants to know whether q : that sense perception is a reliable belief source. S reasons as follows: p , and the belief that p is an output of sense perception; r , and the belief that r is an output of sense perception; ...; therefore: q .²¹

(A)-(D) are widely regarded as examples of *epistemic circularity*. One reason is that they share a structure: S relies on a doubted belief source, such as modus ponens in (A) or sense perception in (D), to determine whether that *same* belief source is reliable.²² Each example is distinguished by a different belief source whose reliability S wants to determine, and (D) is further distinguished from (A)-(C) by the particular inference rule S uses to make this determination: there he uses induction, while in (A)-(C) he uses deduction.

¹⁹ Boghossian (2000: 231; 2001: 12). See also Vogel (2008: 531). The term ‘rule circularity’ is actually used much earlier by James Van Cleve (1984: 558), though perhaps the most famous example is Hume’s problem of induction. Van Cleve distinguishes rule circularity from epistemic circularity, however, reserving the latter term for arguments that are viciously circular. He believes rule circularity is benign. Stipulating ‘epistemic circularity’ to refer only to viciously circular arguments is not shared in contemporary literature on epistemic circularity, however. If it were, the debate whether epistemic circularity is vicious or benign would be trivial. So until I defend my own account of epistemic circularity I will opt for the looser, broader definition that does not entail epistemic circularity is vicious.

²⁰ This example is largely borrowed from Bergmann (2006: 179-180). I have changed minor details.

²¹ This is Alston’s (1986; 1993) operative example of epistemic circularity.

²² For now I will use the ‘belief source’ to refer collectively to inference rules, epistemic criteria, and external and internal belief sources. In Chapter 3 I will argue that that these four things are related in virtue of assuming what I will call the *epistemic role of a non-evidential justifier*. But because this argument requires a fair bit of setup, here I am taking it for granted that these are all belief sources.

This combination of a different belief source and inference rule in each of (A)-(D) shows that epistemic circularity is a more fundamental property of a noetic structure than are these sources and rules. But little has been said about this. Typically one of (A)-(D) is assumed as a paradigm example of epistemic circularity, and discussion of whether this circularity is vicious or benign follows. This leaves epistemic circularity only partly understood. A more complete understanding would determine what epistemic circularity is regardless of what belief source and inference rule a chosen example employs. This is important because, as I will argue later in this dissertation, the problems of epistemic circularity arise from a limited understanding of what epistemic circularity is.

My aim in this chapter is therefore to begin understanding epistemic circularity more completely. To do this I will analyze its basic parts and some of the relations between them. This analysis is complete if these parts and relations can be factored equally into all examples of epistemic circularity, like (A)-(D). But that is a high bar, and among much else I do not cover, it requires argument I will not present until Chapter 3 when I discuss a critical distinction between evidential and non-evidential justifiers. So here I will limit myself to making these parts and relations as explicit as possible, and I will do this by using (D) as my working example, since it is the paradigm case of epistemic circularity in the contemporary literature, and it is the example that Alston himself uses.

2.1 The Epistemic Circularity Question (slight return)

In Chapter 1 I raised the Epistemic Circularity Question:

Epistemic Circularity Question (EC-Question): is sense perception (SP) reliable such that it can be rationally trusted?²³

Recall that this an ‘EC-Question’ because, as I will soon argue in §2.6, this question cannot be answered without epistemic circularity. Also recall that SP is a stand-in for belief sources in general. So this question could be formulated more broadly to ask whether our *belief sources* are reliable such that they can be rationally trusted.

I did not say anything in Chapter 1 about what an answer to the EC-Question looks like. Following Alston, I propose:

SP Reliability (SPR): SP is a reliable belief source

Clearly SPR is an affirmative answer to Alston’s EC-Question. But we want to know whether we can justifiedly believe SPR is true. This is because the EC-Question and SPR are just formalized versions of the question and proposed answer in Chapter 1 that led to puzzlement: we wanted to know whether you are justified in trusting your perceptual faculty (EC-Question), and affirming you are (SPR) by relying on this same faculty seemed wrong. So by examining Alston’s discussion of the prospects for justifiedly believing SPR, which I will argue necessarily involves epistemic circularity, we will shine light on whether our suspicions are founded.

To begin, we need to understand better epistemic circularity itself. So I am going to break down the EC-Question into five sub-questions, and use Alston’s discussion of epistemic circularity to answer each in turn:

1. What is a *belief source*?
2. What is involved in *trusting* a belief source?
3. What is involved in *determining* the reliability of a belief source (e.g. SPR)?

²³ Chapter 1, p. 3.

4. Why *must* we use the same belief source to determine its reliability?
5. Which, if any, belief sources are *basic*?

Answers to (1)-(5) should give us a good inventory of the basic parts of Alston's account of epistemic circularity and of some relations between these parts. As a bonus, this should give us insight into what varieties of epistemic circularity, like (A)-(D), have in common.

2.2 Question 1: What is a belief source?

In Chapter 1 I called perception, introspection, and memory 'belief sources', and said that epistemic circularity arises when you use a belief source to determine whether that same source is reliable. But I did not say what belief sources are. In §2.6 I will introduce the concept of a *basic* belief source. For now I will focus on belief sources simpliciter.

Alston says belief sources are *functions* that take experiential or doxastic inputs and output beliefs whose propositional contents are fixed by those inputs.²⁴ He calls belief sources that take experiential inputs *generational* and those that take doxastic inputs *transformational*.²⁵ The basic idea is that a cognitive system must be able to receive information from its environment, and a minimally sophisticated system must be able to manipulate it. Generational sources enable the former capacity and transformational sources the latter. Sense perception is a generational belief source, for example, because it outputs beliefs whose propositional content is fixed by experiential inputs to the perceptual system. And introspection is plausibly also a generational belief source, since it outputs beliefs whose propositional content is fixed by awareness of one's mental states. Transformational belief sources, on the other hand, such

²⁴ Alston (1993: 4-5).

²⁵ Though Alston (1993: 6) also identifies 'mixed' sources whose inputs are experiential *and* doxastic. The idea is that the contents of our experiences can be influenced by what we believe, making them partly doxastic.

as inference rules like modus ponens, induction and deduction, are distinct because though they too are input/output functions, their inputs are doxastic rather than experiential.

This functionalist account of belief sources is not uncommon.²⁶ But Alston's is distinguished by the fact that he groups belief sources into what he calls *doxastic practices*:

Clearly, what I am calling a 'doxastic practice' is not a single belief-forming disposition [that is, a single belief source], but some family, grouping or system of individual dispositions, bound together in some important way. What binds the components together in practice is some marked similarity in input, output, and/or function.²⁷

For example, Alston identifies sense perception (SP) as a doxastic practice because each of its five modalities—vision, touch, audition, olfaction and gustation—is an individual belief source sharing a function of outputting beliefs on the basis of mode-specific experiential inputs. This makes Alston's account of belief sources more general than typical accounts in epistemology. Often belief sources are used narrowly to refer to psychological faculties like perception and memory, and Alston's inclusion of inference rules, never mind his account of doxastic practices more generally, suggests he takes a broader view. More interestingly, though, Alston's account of doxastic practices also makes his eventual reply to the challenge of epistemic circularity unique. For he interprets doxastic *practices* literally by defending our use of them in terms of what he calls its *practical rationality*.²⁸ So Alston's broader characterization of belief

²⁶ For example Robert Audi discusses belief sources at length in his (2002), and his definition is largely in line with Alston's. He focuses on sources of *knowledge* and *justification* rather than *belief*—though if knowledge and justification entail belief then this marks no drastic departure from Alston—and says that "...a source of knowledge (or justification) is roughly something...that yields beliefs constituting knowledge" (Audi 2002: 72). So, like Alston, Audi is committed to the view that belief sources at least consist in input/output functions. It is worth noting however that Alston and Audi have different accounts of what makes a belief source *basic*. I will return to this issue in § 1.6 when I discuss Alston's account of basicity.

²⁷ Alston (1993: 8). Alston develops this idea in more detail in his (1989).

²⁸ See Alston (1993: 124-133) for this triumphant line of argument.

sources in terms of doxastic practices invites us to consider whether our entitlement to use them cuts across theoretical and practical considerations.

Aside from conceiving of belief sources as sufficiently wide input/output functions that can be grouped into doxastic practices, however, from what I see nothing more about epistemic circularity hangs on these finer details. So I will put them aside. But when Alston discusses epistemic circularity he uses sense perception (SP) as a placeholder for belief sources in general, and most of the contemporary literature on epistemic circularity again follows him. So I will too: unless I note otherwise, when talking about epistemic circularity and our belief sources I will use SP as an example of belief sources at large.²⁹

Our answer to Question 1, therefore, is this: a belief source is a psychologically realized function that can be grouped into a doxastic practice on the basis of its similarity to other belief sources, and this function takes experiential or doxastic inputs and outputs beliefs whose propositional contents are fixed by these inputs.

2.3 Question 2: What is involved in trusting a belief source?

The EC-Question asks whether it is rational to *trust* a belief source. I am going to analyze this trust as a species of the more fundamental relation of *using* a belief source.

In his own discussion of epistemic circularity, David Alexander distinguishes trusting and non-committal uses of a belief source.³⁰ He says I trust a belief source when I use it to form beliefs without questioning the source's reliability, and that I am non-committal towards

²⁹ This follows from what I said on p. 2 about using (D) as my paradigm example of epistemic circularity. It also means that I will be overlooking the distinction between generational and transformational belief sources.

³⁰ Alexander (2011: 227).

a belief source when I withhold belief in its outputs because I question its reliability. He illustrates this distinction with an example of a purported prophet. If I believe the prophet's testimony then I trust it is a reliable belief source. But if am suspicious about his testimony then I might scrutinize it instead, in which case I withhold belief because I am non-committal about its reliability. In each case I am using the prophet's testimony, but in different ways.

Alexander maintains that only trusting uses of belief sources are germane to whether epistemic circularity is problematic, and for this reason he puts non-committal uses aside.³¹ He then proposes the *Trust-to-Commitment Principle*:

Trust-to-Commitment (TC): if one acquires a belief by trusting a source, then one is committed to that source's reliability.

This principle says that using a belief source trustingly involves a commitment to that source's reliability. Following Alexander, I suggest TC implies that this commitment is, in some as yet unspecified way, *rational*: that trustingly using a belief source while at the same time disavowing its reliability would be an epistemic failing. Otherwise it is difficult to see how, as Alexander maintains, TC is relevant to whether epistemic circularity is problematic.³² If this is right, then it is worthwhile analyzing the concepts in TC of *using* a belief source and of being *committed* to that source's reliability in virtue of trusting it. This should give us some insight into what makes this commitment rational, and into where the problem of epistemic circularity might begin taking root.

³¹ Alexander (2011: 227): "There is obviously nothing wrong with relying on the non-committal use of a source in order to acquire a belief in its reliability. This is how we learn of the reliability of many sources, such as the testimony of weather forecasters and the deliverances of scientific instruments. If we were prohibited from relying on the noncommittal use of a source in acquiring a justified belief in its reliability, then there would be many sources that we couldn't justifiably believe to be reliable."

³² Alexander (2011: 227-28).

Starting with TC's antecedent, *using* a belief source does not entail one holds beliefs *about* a belief source. The alternative would mean unreflective subjects who do not hold such beliefs do not use belief sources, which is demonstrably false. More generally, I think using a belief source is not even a representational state of a subject, that is, the object of an intentional act.³³ Instead, it is a cognitive operation—an input/output function in Alston's parlance—that outputs beliefs on the basis of either experiential or doxastic inputs, and only the contents of these input/output beliefs necessarily involve representations. This assigns our use of belief sources a distinct epistemic role in our noetic structure. Instead of being objects of mental representations, they are functions that operate over beliefs whose propositional contents consist in such representations. We reason typically *with* belief sources, not necessarily *from* them.³⁴ So the antecedent of TC should not be read doxastically: trustingly using a belief source does not entail I have any beliefs about that source. If the rational requirement TC implies is grounded in its antecedent, therefore, then this requirement is not grounded in anything doxastic or, more generally still, anything representational.

It is possible however that this rational requirement is grounded instead in a doxastic interpretation of TC's consequent, which says trustingly using a belief source *commits* one to that source's reliability. But a doxastic interpretation does not work here either. For one, if this

³³ I am taking it for granted that not all representational (that is, intentional) states are doxastic. For example, I assume my cats perceptually represent their environment without doxastically representing it. I should also be clear that I do not mean 'representational' to entail anything about indirect realism, for the mere existence of an intentional state does not entail I am aware of the *representation* rather than its object.

³⁴ This observation is closely linked to avoiding Carroll (1985) regresses. I will discuss this in Chapter 3. But briefly: assume you believe *q* on the basis of *p* and *if p then q*. Also assume your belief that *p* is output of a belief source B that you are using. But the proposition 'My belief that *p* is an output of my belief source B' is not a tacit premise in your inference that *q*. If it were, we would need another belief source that outputs *this* belief, and *this* would be another tacit premise, *ad infinitum*. So using a belief source is distinct from reasoning from a belief source.

commitment were necessarily doxastic then, again, unreflective subjects would not trustingly use their belief sources. For TC just says that this commitment is a necessary condition of such use. For another, and more interestingly, Alexander points out that even reflective subjects' attitudes towards their belief sources can be at odds with how they trustingly use those sources, and that this shows a commitment to a belief source's reliability in virtue of using it is not necessarily doxastic:

It is also possible that a reflective individual may have commitments to a source that are distinct from, and even at odds with their doxastic attitudes towards it. For example, one might justifiably believe that someone's testimony is perfectly trustworthy, and yet be incapable of believing what they say due to a psychological disorder. In that case one would believe in the source's reliability without trusting it. Alternatively, a reflective individual might trust a source without believing in its reliability. A Humean, for example, might trust inductive reasoning while withholding belief in that source's reliability. In both of these cases, the individual is subject to a form of incoherence between his belief and the way he trusts or distrusts his sources. Such incoherence between commitments might involve an incoherence between beliefs, but it could also amount to an incoherence between a belief and a non-doxastic commitment to the source.³⁵

Alexander is touching on a few related ideas here. The one I want to emphasize is that we can pry apart our beliefs about a source with our commitments to it. Sometimes the resulting incoherence will be between two doxastic states. But, as Alexander points out, they need not always be, and this means that a commitment to a source's reliability upon trustingly using it is not necessarily doxastic. Alston, finally, gives us a third reason why this commitment to a belief source's reliability is not necessarily doxastic, and this reason bears directly on epistemic circularity. Alston writes about using outputs of a belief source like sense perception to confirm that same source's reliability that:

It is not the most direct kind of logical circularity. We are not using the proposition that sense perception is reliable as one of our premises. Nevertheless, we are *assuming*

³⁵ Alexander (2011: 228).

the reliability of sense perception in using it...to generate our premises. If one were to challenge our premises and continue the challenge long enough, we would eventually be driven to appeal to the reliability of sense perception in defending our right to those premises. And if I were to ask myself why I should accept the premises, I would, if I pushed the reflection far enough, have to make the claim that sense perception is reliable. For if I weren't prepared to make that claim on reflection, why would I, as a rational subject, countenance perceptual beliefs? Since this kind of circularity involves a *commitment* to the conclusion as a presupposition of our supposing ourselves to be justified in holding the premises, we can properly term it 'epistemic circularity'.³⁶

Alston's critical point is that an epistemically circular argument *requires* a non-doxastic commitment to a given source's reliability. Otherwise such an argument would be a logically circular argument in disguise, that is, enthymematic: it would rely on the suppressed premise that sense perception is reliable to conclude that sense perception is reliable. If epistemic circularity is distinct from logical circularity, therefore, then our commitment to the reliability of a belief source when using its outputs as premises in an epistemically circular argument is not doxastic.

Taken together, these three reasons strongly suggest that, like its antecedent, TC's consequent should not be interpreted doxastically. The Trust-to-Commitment principle as a whole therefore does not entail anything doxastic about our *use* of belief sources or about our resulting *commitment* to their reliability.³⁷ Nonetheless, as I mentioned above, this non-doxastic commitment to a source's reliability when trustingly using it plausibly has rational significance. So TC specifically—and, as Alston shows, epistemic circularity more generally—gives us an interesting case of rational significance without doxasticism. Specifically, this rational significance appears to be grounded in a non-doxastic, and I suspect more generally non-

³⁶ Alston (1993: 15; emphasis mine).

³⁷ Though of course it entails something doxastic about the *outputs* of our use of these sources, since these outputs are beliefs.

representational, coherence requirement between trustingly using a belief source and being committed to that source's reliability. For interest, contrast this with traditional coherentism about epistemic justification. Typically formulated as a doxastic theory of justification, coherentism maintains that beliefs are the relata in the epistemic coherence relation, and that this coherence is at least necessary if not also sufficient for epistemic justification. This doxasticism is precisely what I have argued TC denies.³⁸ So not only does epistemic circularity break away from this doxastic view of coherence requirements, coherentist responses to the challenges of epistemic circularity appear to be off-target.³⁹

Our answer to Question 2 therefore is this: trusting a belief source involves non-doxastically using that source to form justified beliefs. And this trusting use entails a non-doxastic commitment to that source's reliability, the rational significance of which is grounded in what appears to be at least a non-doxastic, if not more generally non-representational, coherence requirement between this trusting use and this commitment.

2.4 Question 3: What is involved in determining the reliability of a belief source?

Questions 1 and 2 clarify the concepts in the EC-Question of a *belief source* and *using a belief source*. And though the answer to Question 2 introduces the Trust-to-Commitment Principle and what it implies about the rational significance of trustingly using a belief source, the bulk of my discussion so far has been descriptive rather than normative: I have focused primarily

³⁸ For perhaps the most popular recent version of doxastic coherentism, see Bonjour (1985). For non-doxastic versions of coherentism, see Kvanvig (2003) and Gupta (2006). For a good discussion of doxastic coherentism in general, see Pollack and Cruz (1999).

³⁹ See Schmitt (2004: 386-89) for an excellent discussion of other reasons why coherentism is not a persuasive response to the challenge of epistemic circularity.

on what belief sources are and what it is to use them, rather than on what entitles us to use them. Question 3 turns our attention to normative issues like this.⁴⁰ It asks what is involved in determining the reliability of a belief source. And since reliability is a candidate good-making epistemic property, alongside others like coherence and clarity and distinctness, answering this question plausibly requires an account of what gives us *justification* to believe a belief source is reliable (SPR). To this end, I now turn to Alston's discussion of this normative dimension of the EC-Question.

Alston's Reliability Constraint

We first want to know why determining the *reliability* of a belief source is important. After all, reliability is not the only proposed supervenience base for epistemic justification; others, like coherence and clarity and distinctness, have been invoked as well. I suggest a hint of an answer lies in Alston's functionalist account of belief sources. Above I argued that belief sources operate subpersonally in our noetic structure; we are not introspectively aware of them as input/output functions when we use them. This makes reliability a natural basis for their epistemic appraisal. The reason is that reliability is a statistical property of how something behaves over repeated employments, and this means it is not something that *could* be experienced in a single instance.⁴¹ So when we are looking to determine belief sources' epistemic credibility, in lieu of being directly aware of them as input/output functions when

⁴⁰ I am using the terms 'descriptive' and 'normative' broadly to distinguish between what something is ('Ryan believes that *p* on the basis of the motivational reason that *q*') and whether something meets a standard of success ('Ryan justifiably believes that *p* on the basis of *q* because *q* is a normative reason to believe that *p*'). I do not mean to imply that epistemology is exclusively a normative discipline, or that epistemic justification should be analyzed in terms of epistemic blamelessness and so on. Instead, I am trying to distinguish between description and evaluation.

⁴¹ I will return to this point momentarily to flesh it out in more detail.

we use them. it makes sense instead to use their outputs over time as an evidence base, and this leads us to ask whether they are reliable.

This argument is more suggestive than conclusive. But fortunately Alston gives a more substantial reason why he wants to determine the *reliability* of belief sources. He places three constraints on our justification to believe SPR, and the most general is a *reliability constraint* that he maintains must be met by every justified belief.⁴² This constraint can be understood as an amendment to the following schematic principle of epistemic justification:

Schematic Principle of Epistemic Justification. If a belief of type B is based on a ground of type G, then B is justified.⁴³

This principle is schematic because it says only that epistemic justification can involve a basing relation between a belief and a ground. It says nothing about whether this is also a necessary condition, or about what grounds and basing relations are. Alston's reliability constraint fills out some of this picture by adding a necessary condition for G to justify B: B is justified on the basis of G only if this is "a reliable mode of belief formation".⁴⁴ For example, assume G is a perceptual experience that *p*. The reliability constraint says that a belief that *p* is justified on the basis of G only if forming beliefs on the basis of perceptual experience is a reliable belief-forming method. But for Alston perceptual experiences are just inputs to SP, the belief source that outputs perceptual beliefs. So I maintain that his reliability constraint amounts to the claim that a *reliable belief source* is necessary for any belief to be justified on the basis of that source's inputs.⁴⁵ Accordingly, Alston tells us "...a reliability claim is imbedded in every claim

⁴² See Alston (1988)

⁴³ Alston (1986: 3).

⁴⁴ Alston (1986: 3).

⁴⁵ Alston (1988) does not actually endorse this. But I maintain this is precisely what his reliability constraint commits him to.

to justification; and so what it takes to justify a reliability claim will be at least part of what it takes to justify a justification claim.”⁴⁶

Alston therefore wants to determine the *reliability* of a belief source because he believes reliability is a necessary condition for justification.⁴⁷ We can formulate this condition in terms of an epistemic principle:

Alston’s Reliability Constraint on Justification (Reliability): if a belief B is based on a ground G, then B is justified only if G is an input to a reliable belief source that outputs B.

More simply, Reliability says that if a belief source outputs justified beliefs then that belief source is reliable. This is an epistemic principle because it lays down a (necessary) condition for justification. It is also an *undischarged* epistemic principle. Since reliability is a property of subpersonal belief sources—that is, in the context of this epistemic principle, an externalist condition on justification—it can be satisfied by S’s belief B without S knowing, in some way, that this is the case. This makes Reliability a simple case of an epistemic principle that is undischarged because it is externalist.

Inferentiality

As an undischarged epistemic principle that states a necessary condition for justification, Reliability must play a role in any account Alston gives of our justification to believe SP is reliable (SPR). But even if we agree that Reliability is necessary for justification, it is not sufficient. One reason is that belief sources can output beliefs that are non-inferentially *or* inferentially justified, and Reliability alone does not discriminate these. So it must not give the

⁴⁶ Alston (1986: 4).

⁴⁷ I am unsure whether Alston is making the stronger claim that the reliability constraint is part of an *analysis* of the concept of justification rather than a material condition for justification. So I will opt for the latter, weaker reading.

whole story about what makes a belief justified. With respect to giving an account of what is involved determining the reliability of a belief source like SP, therefore, more is needed than just satisfying the reliability constraint. Alston must also tell us whether justification to believe SPR is inferential or non-inferential.

Alston argues that belief in SPR is justified only *inferentially*:

What does it take to be justified in accepting [SPR]? It seems very plausible to hold that one rationally accepts [SPR] only if one has adequate reasons for that thesis, either in the form of a favorable track record or in the form of more indirect evidence, e.g., evolutionary or theological considerations to the effect that we would not be here with these belief-forming mechanisms unless they mostly gave us true beliefs.⁴⁸

The examples of track-record and evolutionary arguments suggest that by ‘having reasons’ to believe SPR Alston means *inferring* SPR as a conclusion on the basis of these reasons as premises. His argument that SPR can be justified only inferentially appears to proceed by way of exclusion: beliefs like SPR are neither self-evident nor self-justifying, and Alston assumes this exhausts every way SPR could be non-inferentially justified. This might appear too quick. For example, Alston seems to overlook the possibility that belief in SPR is non-inferentially justified because it coheres with a host of mutually supporting beliefs.⁴⁹ But elsewhere he rejects coherentism for the familiar reason that it allows two equally coherent but incompatible sets of justified beliefs to exist simultaneously. So this is not an option he takes seriously.

A more interesting reason can be given for Alston’s view that SPR cannot be justified non-inferentially. It turns again on the role reliability plays in his discussion of epistemic

⁴⁸ Alston (1986: 4).

⁴⁹ Alston (1993: 20-21; 122). Though this argument would assume coherentism includes an account of non-inferential justification. Given its traditional emphasis on doxasticism and inference, this might not be the case.

circularity.⁵⁰ Consider that it is unclear whether it is even possible to have non-inferential justification to believe that SP is reliable. Non-inferential justification does not require transitions between mental states, at least not if mental states are individuated by their propositional contents: if I believe q because I inferred it from my beliefs that p and *if p then q* , then my inference to q involves a transition from my mental states intending p and *if p then q* to my mental state intending q . Instead, non-inferential justification is a function of a single mental state at a single time. So if I have a non-inferentially justified belief that a cup is on the table because I have a perceptual experience of a cup on the table, then the mental state this experience and belief jointly comprise is the only mental state involved in this episode of perceptual non-inferential justification. By definition there is no inference either from the experience to the perceptual belief, or from another belief to the perceptual belief.⁵¹ But it is not clear the same can be said for justifying a reliability belief. When ascribed to belief sources, reliability is again a statistical property of such sources' behaviour over multiple employments. One must justifiably believe of each employment that the belief source functioned accurately, and then infer after a sufficient number of accurate employments that the source is reliable. Or, alternatively, one must have an *a priori* justification derived from premises that do not themselves presuppose reliability for their justification. But, in either case, the justification for the reliability belief requires inference, and this inference involves a transition between mental

⁵⁰ Two points. First, I am picking up on the very brief discussion of reliability at the start of the preceding section on Alston's Reliability Constraint. Second, on a terminological note, I am referring to the *property* of reliability, not the *epistemic principle* Reliability (which I will always capitalize).

⁵¹ There is a subtlety here. This should not be taken to imply that all perceptual experiences are *doxastic*. It's certainly possible to have an *experience* that p without *believing* that p . Instead, I am saying that *if* a belief that p is non-inferentially justified, then by definition this belief is not inferred from a 'non-doxastic interpretation' of an experience. Allowing for a distinction between experience and belief does not mean we must reject the possibility of non-inferential justification.

states. So it appears that if one acquires a justified belief that SP is reliable, then necessarily this justification is not a function of a single mental state, like episodes of non-inferential justification are, but must instead involve a transition between mental states. If this is right, then reliability beliefs are necessarily inferentially justified—that is, necessarily justified via *argument*. Alston’s commitment to reliability as the epistemic property in terms of which belief sources should be evaluated therefore commits him to *Inferentiality*:

Inferential Justification of SPR (Inferentiality): if belief in SPR is justified, then this justification is acquired inferentially via argument.

This commitment does not come for free. It saddles Alston with other commitments—ones he does not make explicit—and these play an important role in his discussion of epistemic circularity. First, consider that it is impossible for an argument to give you justification to believe its conclusion unless you already have justification to believe its premises. Intuitively, this is because justification to believe a conclusion cannot be generated *ex nihilo*. But more interestingly, it is because the alternative violates what Frederick Schmitt calls the *independence requirement*.⁵² This requirement says that an argument successfully adduces its conclusion only if it supports this conclusion independently of any support the conclusion might receive from another argument. Assume this is false: an argument with premises $P_1 \dots P_n$ supports its conclusion C if *another* argument supports C . Because of the oddity that in this case justifiedly believing C on the basis of $P_1 \dots P_n$ does not entail $P_1 \dots P_n$ are sufficient for justifying C , it would be possible to justifiedly believe C without *any* justification to believe $P_1 \dots P_n$ at all. For absent the independence requirement *any* argument supports its conclusion so long as *some* argument supports that conclusion. So, if the independence requirement is

⁵² Schmitt (2004: 382). I have slightly reworded his formulation of the requirement, but my account tracks his.

instead accepted, $P_1 \dots P_n$ must be sufficient for justifiedly believing C , and this means you must have *antecedent justification* to believe $P_1 \dots P_n$, save earning justification for C *ex nihilo*. The upshot is that Alston's commitment to inferentiality for justifying reliability beliefs entails a commitment to the *epistemic priority* of any such argument's premises to its conclusion:

Epistemic Priority (Priority): for S at t , if a proposition p is epistemically prior to a proposition q , then p has some degree of justification for S independent of S 's justification for q .⁵³

In other words, Priority tells us that if an argument is well-formed because S 's justification to believe its premises is sufficient to justifiedly believe its conclusion, then S 's justification to believe these premises must be *epistemically prior* to, and therefore earned independently of, that of believing this conclusion. This ensures that justification runs through an argument in the one right direction, *from* its premises *to* its conclusion. In turn, Priority entails that S 's justification to believe C *depends* on S 's antecedent justification to believe these premises. Call this Dependence:

Epistemic Dependence (Dependence): for S at t , if justification to believe p requires antecedent justification to believe q , then justification to believe p depends on justification to believe q .⁵⁴

So Priority says the *premises* of an argument must be justified independently of that argument's conclusion; and Dependence says that, if Priority is true of an argument A , then the *conclusion* of A depends for its justification on these premises. Taken together, Priority and Dependence

⁵³ I've adapted this definition from Roderick Firth's discussion of epistemic priority (Firth 1964: 553). The main difference is that he introduces epistemic priority in terms of the degree of warrant a belief can possess independent of its *coherence* with other beliefs. I've generalized this to any justification-conferring relation a belief can bear to another belief.

⁵⁴ I owe part of this account of epistemic dependence to R.P. Amico (1995: 98). But I have changed the order of the conditional. Amico puts the dependence clause in the antecedent rather than in the consequent. But this seems to me mistaken. The idea, as I understand it, is that antecedence entails dependence but not the other way around. For the converse of my formulation of the conditional rules out the possibility of symmetric dependence between beliefs like coherentism proposes, and that's an undesirable result.

formalize the truism that any well-formed argument has an asymmetric epistemic structure: justification to believe its conclusion depends only on antecedent justification to believe its premises (Dependence), and therefore justification to believe these premises must be epistemically prior to and therefore earned independently of justification to believe this conclusion (Priority). On any accounting of what makes an argument *epistemically circular*, therefore, Priority and Dependence tell us one way such arguments might go south.

We can push one step further. Assume that S has an argument A to believe a conclusion C on the basis of premises $P_1 \dots P_n$. Priority says S must have antecedent justification to believe these premises and Dependence says S's justification to believe this conclusion depends on his antecedent justification to believe these premises. The question now is how S's justification to believe them is earned. Two options present themselves: these premises are justified inferentially or non-inferentially. If they are justified inferentially then there must be at least one other argument, A' , that justifies $P_1 \dots P_n$, and a question arises about the justification to believe *its* premises, and so on for A'' .⁵⁵ A regress therefore looms unless this tree of justification terminates in premises that are *non-inferentially* justified, that is, in premises whose justification does not *inferentially* depend on any other justified beliefs.⁵⁶ Traditionally foundationalism or coherentism is offered at this juncture to explain the ultimate grounds of justification. But we already know that Alston rejects coherentism. Short of

⁵⁵ I say 'at least one other argument,' but it is plausible that there will be as many additional arguments as there are premises in need of justification, as it is unlikely one argument would justify every premise in the set.

⁵⁶ I say that these premises do not *inferentially* depend on other beliefs for their justification because I want to leave open the possibility that inferential dependence is not the only way beliefs can depend on other beliefs for their positive epistemic status. As we'll see, this becomes important when understanding epistemic circularity.

embracing infinitism, therefore, Alston's commitments to Priority and Dependence entail a commitment to Foundationalism:⁵⁷

Foundationalism: there are non-inferentially justified beliefs, that is, beliefs whose justification does not positively depend on other justified beliefs.⁵⁸

These three theses—Priority, Dependence, and Foundationalism—spell out consequences of Alston's commitment to Inferentiality, and later they will guide our discussion of what in Chapter 1 I called *inferential epistemic circularity*.

For now we can summarize Alston's answer to Question 3 as follows: determining whether a belief source is reliable is important because reliability is a necessary condition on justification (Reliability), and this determination necessarily involves inference (Inferentiality) because reliability is a statistical property of a belief source's behaviour over multiple distinct employments, which makes it impossible to have non-inferentially justified reliability beliefs. This commitment to Inferentiality, finally, entails commitments to Priority, Dependence and, for Alston, Foundationalism.

2.5 Interlude: Alston on Satisfied and Discharged Epistemic Principles

Before turning to Question 4 I want to pause our programming for a note from our theoretical sponsor: the distinction between satisfied and discharged epistemic principles. Recall that in Chapter 1 I said epistemic principles are conditionals that state necessary and/or sufficient conditions for beliefs to have a particular epistemic status like justification, and that there is a

⁵⁷ See Klein (2008) for a defense of infinitism, the view that an infinite regress of epistemic justification is not vicious. Though I have not come across Alston discussing infinitism anywhere, he is a foundationalist. For instance, see Alston (1983).

⁵⁸ Positive dependence describes when a belief depends on another *for* its justification. This contrasts with negative dependence, which is when a belief depends for its justification on *not* being defeated.

distinction between *satisfying* and *discharging* an epistemic principle. My rough gloss of that distinction said that S satisfying an epistemic principle involves S having a belief that is justified because it satisfies the relevant part of that conditional; and that S discharging an epistemic principle involves S knowing, in some way, that his belief does satisfy that conditional, thus discharging it because the conditional is no longer hypothetical for S. I also said this provisional account leaves at least three issues outstanding:

- (i) It rests on an unspecified account of what ‘knowing (‘B₂’) that a belief (‘B₁’) satisfies an epistemic principle’ involves
- (ii) It trades on a distinction between first- and second-order epistemic requirements that should be clearer
- (iii) It is vulnerable to over-intellectualization objections

I want to discuss how I think Alston would fill in these details given what I have said so far about his account of epistemic circularity. This will not only clarify how Alston’s account fits into the conceptual framework I sketched in Chapter 1, but also show where in his account problems with epistemic circularity begin taking root.

Alston on (i)-(iii)

I have argued that Alston wants to determine whether a belief source like SP is *reliable* because he believes reliability is necessary for justification, a commitment I formulated in terms of the undischarged epistemic principle *Reliability*.⁵⁹ I then argued that *determining* whether a belief source like SP is reliable (SPR) requires inference. The conjunction of Reliability and Inferentiality give us Alston’s answer to (i): Reliability says the belief that SPR (call it ‘B₂’) must

⁵⁹ *Reliability*: if a belief B is based on a ground G, then B is justified only if G is an input to a reliable belief source that outputs B.

be the output of a reliable belief source (call it ‘X’), and Inferentiality tells us that B₂ must itself be the product of inference, that is, the conclusion of an argument. If these two conditions are met this will discharge Reliability because one will have reason to believe X is reliable, and this closes the question about whether X’s output beliefs (call them ‘B₁’) are reliably produced: these output beliefs do not merely satisfy Reliability; one now also has reason to believe they do.

As the distinction between B₁ and B₂ implies, Alston’s account of discharging an epistemic principle involves *higher-order ascent*: S discharges an epistemic principle for some belief, B₁, that is an output of a belief source like SP, only if S has a justified higher-order belief, B₂, that says B₁ satisfies that principle. However, this account does not tell us whether the epistemic principle in question is *fully* discharged, that is, whether from S’s perspective there is still an open question about whether the premises on whose basis S infers B₂ themselves satisfy a relevant condition for justification. And if this question is in fact open, then it has not obvious how Alston’s account of discharging an epistemic principle avoids a higher-order regress. I will return to this in a moment.

First consider (ii). Following Alston, we can lay out this distinction between first- and second-order epistemic requirements by reference to a more general distinction between different levels of *beliefs*. When diagnosing in another paper what he calls ‘epistemic level-confusions’, Alston distinguishes epistemic levels on the basis of whether a believed proposition *p* includes as part of its content an ‘epistemic operator’ such as ‘...*justifiedly believes that...*’ or ‘...*knows that...*’.⁶⁰ A belief is *first-order* only if its propositional content contains no

⁶⁰ Alston (1980: 135-36).

such operators. A belief is *higher-order* belief only if its content does.⁶¹ Alston then identifies a belief's *n-order* on the basis of how many epistemic operators are embedded in its propositional content: 'S believes that *p*' is a second-order belief; 'S believes that he justifiedly believes that *p*' is a third-order belief; and so on. I suggest that for Alston, then, *first-order epistemic requirements* for an epistemic status like justification or knowledge attach to beliefs whose contents include no epistemic operators, while *higher-order* epistemic requirements attach to beliefs that do. So a second-order requirement attaches to a believed second-order proposition; a third-order requirement to a believed third-order proposition, and so on. If this answer to (ii) on Alston's behalf is right, then it commits him to the view that lower- and higher-order epistemic requirements are the *same in kind*: the conditions for justifiedly believing that *p* on the first-level are the same as the conditions for justifiedly believing that *q* on the second-level. The only difference between them is whether they attach to a lower- or higher-order belief.

This brings me finally to (iii). The charge is that Alston's account of discharging an epistemic principle through higher-order ascent is guilty of over-intellectualization because it restricts the expected purchase of discharging an epistemic principle to reflective individuals. Ordinary subjects who might not possess the relevant epistemic concepts or cognitive sophistication are excluded from knowing whether their beliefs are justified. Alston can argue this charge is less serious than it appears. The reason is that he is a first-order requirements

⁶¹ I am unsure whether Alston also wants to say the presence of an epistemic operator is also sufficient for a belief to be higher-order. I am sticking with just necessity here because it strikes me that the presence of an epistemic operator is not sufficient. A condition stating that the higher-order belief is directed upon *one's own* lower-level belief(s) (or representational states, more generally) seems needed as well (a 'reflexivity' condition). Otherwise every believed proposition that includes in its content an appeal to another's representational state would be a higher-order belief, and this strikes me as wrong. More generally, then, I suspect that higher-order cognition involves an intentional state that must have as part of its content another of *one's own* intentional states, e.g., 'I believe that I know that...', 'I know that I see that...', and so on.

theorist. He maintains that it is enough for justification that one's beliefs *do* satisfy applicable conditions; one does not need also to know this.⁶² So the only barrier blocking ordinary subjects from higher-order ascent is the same barrier that would block anyone: the contingent fact of whether he possesses the requisite concepts and cognitive ability. This leaves discharging epistemic principles to those doing epistemology. Alston can say this task properly belongs to epistemologists because they want to ascertain conceptually the underlying principles of justification and knowledge. However, if we then find that epistemological inquiry cannot avoid epistemic circularity, Alston must accept that this circularity is a phenomenon unique primarily to epistemologists; it has no role, or at least not a primary one, in the lives of ordinary knowers. Discharging epistemic principles through higher-order ascent therefore invites an intellectualist interpretation of epistemic circularity. My view, that epistemic circularity is more fundamentally a property of non-inferential justification, entails just the opposite.

Alston's answers to (i)-(iii) and Epistemic Circularity

In addition to its intellectualist bent, we learn from Alston's answers to (i)-(iii) something else important about epistemic circularity: it arises for him from a set of commitments that are in tension. On one hand, Alston maintains that EC-Questions are among the most fundamental in epistemology—a view that is tenable only if he believes these questions are well-formed and their answers not immediately obvious—and that answering EC-Questions involves higher-order ascent to epistemically circular arguments. On the other hand, Alston denies that

⁶² See Alston (1983) for his defense of what I am calling first-order requirements views, and what he calls 'immediate knowledge'.

conditions for higher-order justification are different in kind from those for first-order justification. The higher-order belief that, say, SP is reliable, which would be the conclusion of an epistemically circular argument and a candidate answer to an EC-Question about SP, is justified against the same condition, namely Reliability, that Alston believes justifies every belief.

These commitments are in tension because they catch Alston on the second horn of the dilemma for higher-order ascent that I discussed in §1.7. Remember this dilemma arises from the observation that the meta-epistemic principles to which we ascend when answering EC-Questions are satisfied if and only if they are also discharged, as the alternative generates a vicious regress of higher-order justification.⁶³ The problem for Alston is that it is unclear he can meet this demand on meta-epistemic principles if he maintains first- and higher-order epistemic requirements are fundamentally the same in kind. After all, if epistemic requirements stay constant across epistemic levels, then it seems beliefs about meta-epistemic principles cannot have for S a different epistemic status than do beliefs about first-order principles. Alston therefore risks collapsing the very distinction between epistemic levels on which his account of discharging an epistemic principle through higher-order ascent depends: if there is no difference in kind between first- and second-order epistemic requirements, then higher-order ascent to meta-epistemic principles should be unnecessary to discharge a first-order epistemic principle; this first-order principle should be one that is already discharged if it is also satisfied against the same epistemic requirements. The upshot is that, like the so-called simple response to EC-Questions that I canvassed in Chapter 1, Alston's dialectical framing

⁶³ §1.7

of epistemic circularity as a property exclusively of higher-order arguments is unstable. If this is right, it confirms the skepticism about this framing that I motivated in Chapter 1. I will pick up on this point later in the dissertation.

2.6 Question 4: Must we use the same belief source to determine its reliability?

Let us get back to understanding better the EC-Question. So far, Reliability and Inferentiality have given us Alston's answer to Question 3: whether a belief source is *reliable* is important because this is necessary for its output beliefs to be justified (Reliability); and *determining* whether a belief source is reliable necessarily involves inference and hence argument (Inferentiality). But these are not enough to give us an answer to Question 4. For Reliability and Inferentiality do not preclude the possibility that belief that a belief source like SP is reliable could be justified by appealing to the outputs of an independent belief source, one whose outputs do not positively depend on SP. So long as this independent belief source is in fact reliable and outputs beliefs that can be premises in a good inference to SPR, these two constraints are met. To tie them to *epistemic circularity*, therefore, Alston must give an account of why the premises of an inference to SPR *cannot* be outputs of an independent belief source but instead *must* be outputs of SP. A third constraint—an answer to Question 4—is needed.

Alston and Audi on Basic Belief Sources

Alston's account of a *basic belief source* is this third constraint. He defines basic belief sources as those sources we cannot justifiably believe are reliable without epistemic circularity:

Alston Basicity: B is an (epistemologically) basic source of belief [or doxastic practice] = df. Any (otherwise) cogent argument for the reliability of B will use premises drawn from, [that is, be outputs of], B.⁶⁴

So if a belief source is *basic* then to justifiedly believe it is reliable you must rely on its own outputs. If a belief source is *non-basic* then to justifiedly believe it is reliable you can rely on an independent belief source's outputs. The former entails epistemic circularity; the latter does not.

Defining basic belief sources this way is not obvious. Compare Robert Audi's account of a basic belief source:

Audi Basicity: for any belief source B₁, if B₁ yields knowledge or justification without positively depending on any other belief source, B₂, then B₁ is a basic belief source.⁶⁵

For Audi, a belief source is basic if it outputs non-inferentially justified beliefs because it yields justification without positively depending on outputs of another belief source. This says nothing about epistemic circularity. So Alston's account of a basic belief source is more demanding than Audi's: Alston does not leave open the possibility that for any two belief sources B₁ and B₂, B₁ is basic because it outputs non-inferentially justified beliefs *and* outputs of B₂ can justify belief in B₁'s reliability. Nonetheless, Alston's account is consistent with Audi's: like Audi, Alston does leave open the possibility that basic belief sources output non-inferentially justified beliefs. To determine which account of basicity is correct, therefore, we

⁶⁴ Alston (1989: 8). I have substituted the variable 'B' for 'O' in Alston's account.

⁶⁵ Audi (2002: 72). A belief source B₁ *positively* depends on another belief source, B₂, when B₁'s outputs depend for their justification on B₂'s justified outputs. B₁ *negatively* depends on B₂ when B₂'s outputs can defeat B₁'s justified outputs. Audi maintains that basic belief sources may exhibit negative dependence but never positive dependence. It is unclear to me whether Audi is giving a sufficient or necessary and sufficient condition for basicity. I've formulated it as at least a sufficient condition since I do not see him add additional necessary conditions.

must ask whether Alston is right to add the necessary condition that a belief source is basic only if it is impossible to determine its reliability without epistemic circularity.

I am going to argue for this necessary condition. Let me begin by disambiguating Audi's account. Again, this account says only that basic belief sources output non-inferentially justified beliefs. It doesn't say whether, for any basic belief source B, epistemic circularity is unavoidable when determining via argument whether B is reliable because B's outputs *must* ultimately be premises in this argument. So consider two readings of Audi's account of basicity that make this ambiguity explicit:

- (i) For any belief source B₁, if B₁ outputs non-inferentially justified beliefs and belief that B₁ is reliable can be justified by appealing to outputs of *another* basic belief source, B₂, then B₁ is a basic belief source.
- (ii) For any belief source B₁, if B₁ outputs non-inferentially justified beliefs and belief that B₁ is reliable can be justified by appealing *only* to outputs of B₁, then B₁ is a basic belief source.

Reading (ii) entails epistemic circularity; reading (i) does not. So if reading (ii) is correct then Audi and Alston do not disagree: we cannot justifiedly believe any basic belief source is reliable without relying on that same belief source's outputs. But if reading (i) is correct then they do disagree. For this reading denies there is a necessary connection between basicity and epistemic circularity: in principle it is possible to determine the reliability of any basic belief source by appealing to the outputs of an independent belief source.⁶⁶ My aim to defend a

⁶⁶ Walter Hopp has raised a third reading: (iii) for *at least one* basic belief source B, B outputs non-inferentially justified beliefs and belief that B is reliable can be justified by appealing to outputs of *another* basic belief source. Like reading (i), this reading denies that there is a *necessary* connection between basicity and epistemic circularity. But unlike reading (i), it does not eliminate the possibility that for *at least one (other)* basic belief source, justifiedly believing whether that source is reliable *does* entail epistemic circularity. So this appears to be a hybrid view of Basicity.

The question is what its significance is for my argument in the next section that denying reading (i) of Audi's account entails that we have an infinite number of belief sources. I don't think it impacts this argument. Consider that since on reading (iii) it is merely *possible* that justifiedly believing at least one basic belief source is

necessary connection between basicity and epistemic circularity therefore requires me to defend reading (i).

Regress Argument Against Reading (i) of Audi's Account of Basicity

Reading (i) says that if B₁ outputs non-inferentially justified beliefs and belief that B₁ is reliable can be justified by appealing to outputs of *another* basic belief source, B₂, then B₁ is a basic belief source. The crux of this regress argument is that reading (i) entails the absurdity that we must have an infinite number of basic belief sources. This argument rests on two claims. I will introduce these first and then turn to the argument itself.

The first claim has been implicit in our discussion so far. It says that Alston's focus on reliability as a supervenience base for justification entails that his EC-Question is *open* from the first-person perspective. A question is 'open' from a person's perspective whenever the answer to that question is not immediately obvious to that person, even upon *a priori* reflection. A question is 'closed' whenever this is not the case. For example, think about the country Canada and ask the following question: are you thinking about the country Canada? It is difficult to imagine how this question *could* be open from your perspective. For the content of the thought is imminent to your thinking it.⁶⁷ Contrast this with the thought that introspection, one of your belief sources, is reliable. It is difficult to imagine how this question is *not* open

reliable entails epistemic circularity, then this is not necessary and reading (iii) collapses into reading (i). If, on the other hand, it *is* necessary on reading (iii) that justifiably believing at least one basic belief source is reliable entails epistemic circularity, then reading (iii) is distinct from reading (i) only if it relies on an equivocal account of Basicity: those belief sources the verification of whose reliability does not entail epistemic circularity (reading (iii)) are less *fundamental* than those sources that do (reading (i)). It is in these more fundamental belief sources that I'm interested, and the regress argument in the next section shows why we must believe these more fundamental belief sources exist.

⁶⁷ I borrow this line of argument from Walter Hopp, who ran it past me when discussing related topics in my dissertation. Any errors are my own.

from your perspective. The reason is that, as I have argued, reliability is a statistical property of subpersonal belief sources' behaviour over multiple employments. So whether this property inheres in such a belief source is not imminent to your thinking about it. You must undertake some sort of inquiry to close the question.

The second claim is that there is a reasonable expectation that the EC-Question should be closed, that is, answered with justification. Alston agrees. As I've argued, the EC-Question is really just a more specific formulation of the question that Alston takes to be 'most basic' in epistemology: are we proceeding rationally in trusting our basic belief sources? Failing to close this question would therefore not only unduly restrict the scope of our capacity for reflective knowledge. It would also unduly restrict the aims of epistemology: in Stroudian fashion, a viable epistemic theory should give an account of whether we can justifiedly believe our basic belief sources are reliable.

Now here is the argument. Imagine S has two basic belief sources, B_1 and B_2 , and wants to know whether each is reliable. The EC-Question is open about any basic belief source. So assume S raises it about B_1 . To answer this question S can rely on outputs of B_1 or B_2 . Reading (i) of Audi's account of basicity says that it is possible to justifiedly believe *without* epistemic circularity that all our basic belief sources are reliable. So, because by hypothesis is B_2 is independent of B_1 , assume S relies on B_2 to answer this question about B_1 . But asking the EC-Question is always open. So S sees no reason not to ask this question also about B_2 . Realizing that relying on B_2 to answer the EC-Question question about B_2 's reliability is no different from relying on B_1 to answer the EC-Question about B_1 's reliability, and having no third belief source, S is now in a bind: he can either find reason not to question the reliability

of B₂, or he can turn back to B₁ to answer his EC-Question about B₂. Since the EC-Question is open, the first option is foreclosed. So S turns back to B₁.

Has S justified his belief that B₁ *and* B₂ are reliable without epistemic circularity? S *has* in fact avoided epistemic circularity. Epistemic circularity arises only if S's belief that B₁ or B₂ is reliable is based on an output of B₁ or B₂, respectively. And S's reasoning does not involve this direct self-support.⁶⁸ But it is not clear that S has *justified* his belief that B₁ and B₂ are reliable. For if S's initial reason for relying on B₂ was to answer an EC-Question about B₁, then B₁ can be of no use to S to answer his EC-Question about B₂. S holds the epistemic status of B₁ in question. This is why he turned to B₂ in the first place. He cannot then suspend this question about B₁ to answer a *second* question about B₂, as if by relying on B₁ to answer this second question he can then use B₂ to answer his *first* question about B₁. This is patent bootstrapping. And the same is true if S were to reason the other way around, from B₂ to B₁. He cannot hold B₂ in question and at the same time use it to answer an EC-Question about B₁.

So if S stands any chance of answering his EC-Questions about B₁ and B₂ there must be a third basic belief source, B₃, whose outputs do not positively depend on either B₁ or B₂. But this is a short fix. The EC-Question can now be raised about B₃ and, having only three basic belief sources, to answer this question S would be forced to rely on outputs of either B₁, B₂, or both. Though his circle of prospective justification is now larger, S finds himself still in

⁶⁸ It might be objected that S has *not* avoided epistemic circularity because he has fallen prey to it indirectly: when justifying his belief that B₁ is reliable, S *indirectly* relies on B₁'s outputs because he uses these outputs to justify his belief that B₂ is reliable, and this latter belief is used directly to justify his belief that B₁ is reliable. Alexander (2011: 229-232) discusses this possibility and argues it is as problematic as he believes direct epistemic circularity is. If I follow Alexander here, then I could conclude my argument at this juncture, since this suffices to show that epistemic circularity is not in fact avoidable. I will push forward to show we can reach the same conclusion for when the epistemic circularity in question involves only *direct* support from a source's outputs.

the same position: questioning the reliability of B_1 and B_2 brought him to rely on B_3 , so it can be of no use to recur to these questioned belief sources to resolve his doubt about B_3 . S now needs a *fourth* belief source. But then he will find himself raising the EC-Question about *it*, in which case he would need a *fifth*, and so on.

Therefore, if the EC-Question is in principle always open and there is a reasonable expectation that it be closed, then justifiedly believing *without* epistemic circularity that all our basic belief sources are reliable requires that we have an infinite number of basic belief sources. Reading (i) of Audi's account of basicity generates an absurd consequence.

Compare how reading (ii) fares. Recall it says that for any basic belief source B_1 , B_1 outputs non-inferentially justified beliefs and belief in B_1 's reliability can be justified by appealing *only* to an output of B_1 . This entails that the regress can be stemmed right at the beginning. For this account of basicity rules out any need to appeal to the outputs of an independent belief source for this justification. The question that remains is whether, with the regress stopped, S can in fact use epistemically circular reasoning to *justifiedly* believe that B_1 is reliable. That is, it remains to be seen whether on reading (ii) the EC-Question can in fact be closed about B_1 . And this is just the question of whether epistemic circularity is a problem. But even if epistemic circularity *is* a problem and on reading (ii) the EC-Question *cannot* be closed about B_1 , reading (ii) of basicity is still preferable to reading (i): a skeptical account of epistemic circularity is more plausible than an account of basicity that entails we have an infinite number of basic belief sources.

I conclude that reading (ii) of Audi's account of basicity is preferable to reading (i): there is good reason to believe there is a necessary connection between basicity and epistemic circularity. Alston's definition of basicity is the right one. His answer to Question 5,

therefore, is this: we must use the same belief source to determine that source's reliability whenever that belief source is *basic* (Basicity). The reason is that a basic belief source just is a belief source whose reliability cannot be ascertained without relying sooner or later on its own outputs.

2.7 Question 5: Which, if any, belief sources are basic?

The argument for Basicity defended Alston's definition of a basic belief source. But this definition does not tell us which belief sources are basic. It tells us only what a basic belief source is. I am going to fill this gap by arguing that SP is a basic belief source. I maintain that the same could be shown about other belief sources, like memory and introspection. But because SP is my and many others' chosen example of a belief source, I will focus on it. My strategy is to show that SP is a basic belief source because there is no cogent argument for its reliability (SPR) that is not epistemically circular. Of course, this cannot be done piecemeal, looking at every possible individual argument in turn. So I will instead look at two *kinds* of argument for SPR, one that is inductive and another that is deductive, and show that each is epistemically circular in virtue of its logical form as an argument for SPR.

Inductive Argument for SPR

An inductive argument for SPR can proceed in two ways. It can infer SPR either as the best explanation of the truth of its premises, or on the basis of a sufficiently large sample of cases

in which SP is thought to have been accurate.⁶⁹ Alston examines both, concluding that in each case it is impossible to defend SPR without epistemic circularity.⁷⁰ I will examine only the latter.

Alston calls these *track record arguments* (TR-Arguments). Continuing to use SP as our token belief source, TR-Arguments have the following form:⁷¹

Track Record Argument:

1. At t_1 , I formed the perceptual belief that p , and p
2. At t_2 , I formed the perceptual belief that q , and q
3. At t_3 , I formed the perceptual belief that r , and r
- ...
4. Therefore, SP is consistently accurate
5. Therefore, SP is a reliable belief source (SPR)

Alston is careful to point out that a favourable track record, stated in the premises of a TR-Argument, should not be *identified* with the reliability of the belief source stated in its conclusion.⁷² This is because a belief source can be reliable even if it is never employed, and because the accuracy of the source recorded in each premise of the TR-Argument could be a fluke. Nonetheless, a good track record is *evidence* of the reliability of a belief source because it *indicates* how the source would behave over a sufficient number of employments.

⁶⁹ I'm therefore classifying abductive arguments—inferences to a conclusion as the best explanation of the truth of an argument's premises—as a species of inductive arguments. This is primarily to keep the taxonomy of arguments here simple, but it's also grounded in an important similarity between abductive and inductive arguments. Like inductive arguments, abductive arguments do not prove their conclusions and are therefore best evaluated not in terms of validity like deductive arguments, but in terms of their cogency, the degree to which they make their conclusions likely true.

⁷⁰ Alston (1993).

⁷¹ Alston (1989: 8-9).

⁷² Alston (1993: 9)

This argument therefore appears to provide evidence that its conclusion, (5), is true. But to be justified in believing (5) premises (1)-(4) must be justified. Consider (1), as everything to be said about justifiedly believing it applies to the other premises. The question is what justifies you in believing the conjunction in (1) is true. And if this justification *must* rely on outputs of SP, then SP is a basic belief source.

The left conjunct in (1) refers to a belief formed through access to your own mental states, and therefore introspection is the operative belief source. But TR-Arguments purport to generate evidence for the reliability of belief sources like SP by amassing a sufficiently large sample of instances in which the conjuncts of each premise are in agreement, and therefore belief in the right conjunct must also be justified. Moreover, since this argument infers that *SP* rather than introspection is a reliable belief source, it will provide evidence for our claim that SP is a basic belief source only if the justification to believe one of its premises necessarily relies on SP. Therefore, if this argument can tell us anything about whether SP is basic, this will be found in the justification of only this right conjunct.

To check for this justification consider a concrete example of the premise:

1'. At t_1 , I formed the perceptual belief that there is a coffee mug on the table, and there is a coffee mug on the table.

The question is what justifies you in believing the right conjunct, that there is a coffee mug on the table. To find out, we can factor this conjunct into Alston's conditions for epistemic justification. Reliability says that if a belief B is based on a ground G, then B is justified only if G is an input to a reliable belief source that outputs B. This right conjunct can therefore be factored into Reliability as follows:

Reliability Constraint on Right Conjunct of (1'): if the belief that there is a coffee mug on the table is based on a perceptual input to SP, then this belief is justified only if SP is a reliable belief source.

We can eliminate right away one option for how this right conjunct might be justified. Necessarily, justifiedly believing the consequent of this conditional, that SP is a reliable belief source, cannot be a condition on justifiedly believing this right conjunct. The reason is that this would be *logically* circular, since the reliability of SP is just the conclusion of the TR-Argument in question. The justification of this right conjunct must not therefore involve a premise stating that Reliability is met. Reliability must only *be* met. This leaves Inferentiality and its related theses, Priority, Dependence and Foundationalism. Assume that Inferentiality is a condition for this justification. This means that this justification is earned from the antecedent justification of one or more premises in an argument stating this right conjunct as its conclusion. But even if this is true, it cannot be a complete answer to how this right conjunct is justified. This is because, assuming coherentism and infinitism are still off the table, an infinite regress of justification ensues unless justification terminates in non-inferential justification. Therefore, sooner or later, the justification of this right conjunct must terminate in non-inferential justification.

This leaves Reliability and Foundationalism as the remaining options from Alston's conditions on epistemic justification. This right conjunct is therefore either: (i) non-inferentially justified by the outputs of an independent reliable belief source; (ii) non-inferentially justified by outputs of SP, which must be reliable; or (iii) not justifiable.

The problem with (i) is that it seems highly unlikely. Though he is referring to an inductive argument different from our own, Alston makes this very point:

How do we know that predictions formed on the basis of observationally based principles are often correct? By looking to see whether things came out as predicted, or by using instruments to determine this, which in turn...[depend on what we see]. How do we know that different observers generally agree on what is before them? By listening to what they say. Once more we have to rely on sense perception to gather the data that are being used in the argument for its reliability.⁷³

Alston is saying that, if SP beliefs like this right conjunct stand any chance of justification, it is not clear how this justification *could* be earned without relying on SP. The belief that there is a coffee mug on the table is not *a priori*, depending as it does on experience. So this justification will not be found in a claim of reason. And it is highly implausible that any empirical belief source, like memory or introspection, could *independently* justify this belief. Each of these sources outputs beliefs whose contents very likely originated, at least in part, in a perceptual experience. So though in principle they might play a role in the justification of this right conjunct, this entails nothing about independence from SP.

This leaves (ii) and (iii). But (iii) is not a genuine option. This is because the question under consideration is whether it is *possible* to justify SPR without relying on outputs of SP. And it is consistent to maintain that, if this justification is possible, it must rely on SP, but that as a *matter of fact* this justification is not possible, that is, that (iii) is true. Since (ii) is the only remaining option for how this right conjunct *could* be justified, it follows that this conjunct's justification is impossible without relying on outputs of SP.

The upshot is that this TR-Argument is evidence that SP is a basic belief source: there is reason to believe that justifying SPR, the claim that SP is reliable, via an inductive TR-Argument is impossible without relying on SP's outputs in the justification to believe the argument's premises.

⁷³ Alston (1989: 7).

Deductive Argument for SPR

It might be objected that this TR-Argument *obviously* gives evidence that SP is a basic belief source. TR-Arguments use premises derived from experience, and therefore it is more likely than not that the justification of these will depend sooner or later on outputs SP. To really test whether SP is a basic belief source, therefore, we must look to a deductive argument that attempts to derive the reliability of SP from *a priori* premises. If these premises justify SPR, and *a priori* reason is an independent belief source, then we have stronger evidence that Basicity is false of SP.⁷⁴

Consider then the second argument that we will examine for SPR. It presents perhaps the strongest challenge to the basicity of SP, as the dependence on SP enters into the justification of the premises very subtly. Alston designates this argument as (at least *prima facie*) *a priori*:⁷⁵

6. If SPR is false, then there can be no public language
7. If there can be no public language, then no term in a language can have meaning
8. Therefore, if SPR is false, then no term in a language can have meaning (*hypothetical syllogism from 6 and 7*)
9. If no term in a language can have meaning, the issue of the truth of SPR cannot be raised
10. Therefore, if it is possible to raise the issue of the truth of SPR, then terms in a language can have meaning (*transposition from 9*)
11. If terms can have meaning, then SPR is true (*transposition from 8*)

⁷⁴ Depending on one's view of the *a priori*, maintaining that *a priori* reason is wholly independent of empirical belief sources like SP might be controversial. But I'm granting that it is independent for the sake of this argument, as believing otherwise would be to assume what I'm trying to defend here, that SP is a basic belief source because its outputs cannot be independently verified.

⁷⁵ Alston 1993 (55-56). I have largely used Alston's formalization of this argument, though I have rearranged and reworded a few premises.

12. Therefore, if it is possible to raise the issue of the truth of SPR, then SPR is true
(hypothetical syllogism from 10 and 11)

If this argument is sound then we have justification to believe SPR is true. Though he is not explicit, it appears Alston designates this argument as a priori because (6), (7), and (9)—the argument’s substantial premises, those that would not be merely truth-functionally true—purport to rest entirely on conceptual considerations of what is required for a term in a language to have meaning. And if this is true, then this argument would derive SPR without relying on SP, for the justification of its premises would depend only on outputs of *a priori* reason, a presumably independent belief source. It would be false, in other words, that in verifying whether SP is reliable you *must* rely on SP, and therefore it would be false that SP is a basic belief source.

But this *a priori* is precisely what Alston disputes. Consider how the argument works. (7) contends that a public language is necessary for the terms of that language to have meaning. And assuming we *do* in fact meaningfully raise the question of whether SPR is true—that is, assuming we do meaningfully raise the EC-Question—whatever is required for learning a public language is a presupposition of meaningfully raising this question. Now consider (6). It tells us that if SP is unreliable then there can be no public language. So if (6) is true, then the reliability of SP is necessary for meaningfully raising the EC-Question, which entails that SP must be reliable. The question therefore is what justifies (6).

Alston contends that an assumption underlies (6). It assumes that the *only* way we can learn a public language is “...by getting *reliable* perceptual information about the linguistic behavior of speakers of the language.”⁷⁶ Otherwise, the possibility of a public language would

⁷⁶ Alston (1993: 57; italics mine).

not *require* that SP is reliable, for this language might have been learned in a way that does not involve SP. But Alston maintains that a *strictly a priori* interpretation of this argument does not entail this assumption. It remains possible on such an interpretation that our capacity for a public language is innate, or has been developed at least without using SP. So if (6) is true, whatever justifies it must exclude this possibility. The problem is that Alston contends the *only* way this can be done is by *relying on SP*: "...we have learned [that a public language is acquired through experience only by] relying our perception of each other in our physical and social environment and by reasoning from that perceptually generated information."⁷⁷

In other words, we can justifiedly believe (6) only by defending its underlying assumption that acquiring language presupposes the reliability of SP. But defending this assumption requires ruling out the possibility that language can be acquired *a priori*, and to do this we must rely on SP, that is, we must eventually argue that we do not acquire language *a priori* because this does not accord with our *experience*. The argument therefore leaves us with the following dilemma: if (6) is justified, then the argument must rely on outputs of SP and is therefore *a posteriori*; if the argument is *a priori*, then (6) must be unjustified because its underlying assumption is undefended, and therefore its conclusion is not justified either. With respect to whether SP is a basic belief source, this dilemma entails that the argument's conclusion, that SP is reliable, is justified only by relying on outputs of SP in the argument's premises. In other words, the argument succeeds only if it gives evidence that SP is a basic belief source.

⁷⁷ Alston (1993: 57; italics removed).

2.8 Alston and Inferential Epistemic Circularity

We have seen that Alston's thinking about epistemic circularity begins with asking the EC-Question and ends with the recognition that this question can be answered only with epistemically circular arguments. In Chapter 1 I called this the *dialectical framing* of epistemic circularity. In this final section I want to discuss why this framing is important to understanding the problem of epistemic circularity, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

I maintain that the dialectical framing of epistemic circularity entails that epistemic circularity is a property exclusively of arguments, a view that in Chapter 1 I called *inferential epistemic circularity*. To see this it will be helpful to retrace a few steps in Alston's account. As I said in §2.6, Alston believes that an EC-Question is open and that it should be closed. Most obviously, this commits him to the view that EC-Questions are well-formed because they can be legitimately asked and, at least in principle, conclusively answered. Alston's additional commitment to Reliability, then, entails that answering an EC-Question requires inference and hence argument, which Alston says must be epistemically circular whenever the belief source in question is basic. So Alston's account of epistemic circularity appears through-and-through inferential.

Now, it is uncontroversial to say that epistemically circular arguments' premises are candidate *reasons* on whose basis one aims to justifiedly answer an EC-Question. But they are not just any kind of reason. They are *evidential reasons*. The concept of evidence in epistemology is difficult to make precise, and in Chapter 4 I will try to make headway by analyzing evidence in terms of what I call its *epistemic role* as a *ground* rather than a *source* of justification. But for now I can rest on the claim that a sufficient condition for a reason to be evidence is that it is eligible to function as a justifying premise in an inference: if *p* can be a premise on whose basis

I validly infer and justifiedly believe that q , then p is evidence for q .⁷⁸ Alston's commitments to Reliability and Inferentiality therefore entail that justifiedly answering EC-Questions requires evidence.

This is not trivial. Recall from §2.4 that I argued Alston's commitment to Inferentiality saddles him with commitments to Priority and Dependence. These two theses formalize the fact that a well-formed argument records an asymmetric structure of justification: the premises must justify the conclusion, and not the other way around, because otherwise justification to believe these premises will not be earned independently of justification to believe the conclusion, making the argument suspiciously circular. Clearly this raises a challenge for using epistemically circular arguments to answer EC-Questions. For if justification to believe these arguments' premises is earned, even indirectly, from antecedent justification to believe their conclusions, then these arguments will fail because they violate Priority and Dependence. The challenge for defenders of benign inferential epistemic circularity is therefore to show why, despite being structurally circular, such arguments' *structure of justification* is still appropriately asymmetric. In the next chapter I am going to argue that various attempts to show this fail.

⁷⁸ This very loosely follows Nishi Shah's (2006: 484-85) deliberative constraint on reasons, which says that R is a reason for which X φ 's only if R is capable of disposing X towards φ 'ing through R's role in X's deliberation whether to φ , where in the context of my discussion φ 'ing is of course believing.

Chapter 3: The Dilemma for Inferential Epistemic Circularity - Horn 1

3.0 Introduction

Recall the example of epistemically circular reasoning with which we began Chapter 1. You doubted whether your perceptual faculty is reliable, so you used outputs of this same faculty to test its reliability. After completing enough tests to believe you can infer that your perceptual faculty outputs a favourable ratio of true to false beliefs, you concluded that it is reliable. In Chapter 2 I elaborated upon this example by analyzing Alston's account of inferential epistemic circularity. After placing this account within what I called the dialectical context of asking and attempting to answer EC-Questions, I argued that for Alston inferential epistemic circularity arises from three core commitments: Reliability, which says every justified belief is an output of a reliable belief source or belief-forming process; Inferentiality, which says justifiedly believing sense perception is reliable (SPR) necessarily involves inference and hence argument; and Basicity, which says the ultimate premises of any such argument must be outputs of sense perception (SP). With Alston's account on the table I am now going to examine the problem of inferential epistemic circularity.

I want to situate this problem within the context of the Dilemma for Higher-Order Ascent. I discussed this dilemma in §1.7 to motivate skepticism about first-order requirements theorists' strategy for responding to EC-Questions by using higher-order ascent to discharge epistemic principles. And in §2.5 I related this dilemma to Alston's account of inferential epistemic circularity. I will now show how these points relate to the problem of inferential epistemic circularity that is this chapter's focus. Consider this more formal rendition of the dilemma in question:

Dilemma for Higher-Order Ascent:

Assumption: discharging an epistemic principle requires higher-order ascent (*from first-order requirements theory*)

Consequence: the epistemic requirements on higher-order beliefs must be distinct from those on lower-order beliefs, otherwise we cannot explain the difference between satisfying an epistemic principle on one level and discharging it on another

Horn 1: (Consequence) \rightarrow higher-order beliefs are more epistemically secure than first-order beliefs, but this is implausible

Horn 2: \sim (Consequence) \rightarrow higher-order ascent and the distinction between epistemic levels no longer does clear philosophical work, in which case the first-order requirements theory is problematic

In §2.5 I argued Alston's dialectical framing of epistemic circularity is unstable because it appears to be caught on Horn 2. This is because he maintains Reliability is a condition for justification that holds across epistemic levels: regardless of whether one is satisfying an epistemic principle in first-order justification, or looking to discharge it through higher-order ascent, Reliability states the condition that must be met for justification. The problem of inferential epistemic circularity, I am going to argue in this chapter, arises if we attempt to go between this dilemma's horns. The strategy I am going to argue against is exhibited by first-order requirements theorists' so-called simple response to EC-Questions: they accept Assumption, reject Consequence, *and* they reject Horn 2: even though Consequence is false, higher-order ascent can be used to discharge epistemic principles. My position, by contrast, is that if Assumption is true and Consequence is false, then *any* epistemically circular argument issued to discharge epistemic principles through higher-order ascent is vicious. So first-order requirements theorists' relatively straightforward strategy for discharging epistemic principles fails.

The question is where this leaves us. In the short view, it is worth asking whether epistemically circular arguments can be saved. This will be my focus in the next chapter. In the long view, I think we need to re-examine whether epistemic circularity is a property

exclusively of arguments. This is because I am taking for granted that Horn 1 is untenable: an epistemology that favours higher-order epistemic beliefs over first-order beliefs is headed in the wrong direction. So my conclusion will be that, because going between this dilemma's horns fails, Horn 2 is the only way forward: the problem of inferential epistemic circularity shows that the first-order requirements theory is problematic, and therefore we need to rethink the connection between epistemic circularity and higher-order ascent.

3.1 Success Conditions for Arguments and Chapter Plan

Since Inferentiality entails epistemic circularity is a property only of arguments, the *problem* of epistemic circularity must afflict epistemically circular *arguments*. That is, epistemically circular arguments must violate at least one necessary condition for success, and this must be because these arguments are epistemically circular. The independence requirement from Chapter 1 helps us home in on these success conditions. This requirement again says that an argument adduces its conclusion only if its premises support this conclusion independently of any support this conclusion might receive from another argument. An argument is successful, in other words, only if it independently generates and transmits justification from its premises to its conclusion. Success conditions for arguments must therefore stipulate requirements for this generation and transmission to occur, and the problem of epistemic circularity should arise if an argument's epistemic circularity violates any of these conditions.

In his own discussion of the problem of epistemic circularity, Michael Bergmann lays out four success conditions for arguments. Here they are as he states them, with a few minor modifications:

Bergmann's Success Conditions for Arguments

- (a) A subject S has belief sources X_1 - X_n , at least one of which directly produces non-inferentially justified beliefs (*Foundationalism*)
- (b) On the basis of the non-inferentially justified beliefs produced by belief source X_1 (or X_2 ... X_n), S relies on a legitimate form of reasoning (deductive, inductive, abductive) to infer a conclusion (*Validity or Strength of Argument Form*)
- (c) Justification transfers from an argument's premises to its conclusion when S relies on a legitimate form of reasoning to infer that conclusion, which is then believed on that basis and for the first time (*Cogency*)
- (d) In making the inference in (c), it is false that (i) S does take, or (ii) epistemically should come to take, his belief in one of the premises or his reliance on that inference rule to be epistemically inappropriate (*No Defeaters*).⁷⁹

Condition (a) is a *foundationalism* requirement because it says at least one belief source in S's noetic structure must output non-inferentially justified beliefs. Satisfying this requirement ensures that justification is *generated* in at least one of the argument's premises, thus avoiding regress problems because the chain of justification is terminal. Conditions (b)-(d) concern the *transmission* of this justification through an argument. Condition (b) is a *logical* requirement for transmission because it says that for this to occur an argument's premises must bear an appropriate logical relation to its conclusion. This condition is agnostic about the nature of this logical relation; it can be deductive (valid), inductive or abductive (strong). But satisfying it ensures that justification to believe an argument's conclusion is connected in the right way with justification to believe its premises. Condition (c), the *cogency* requirement, goes further. It says that it is not enough for transmission that belief in an argument's premises is non-

⁷⁹ A few points are worth making. First, a coherentist would obviously reject the foundationalism requirement in condition (a) as necessary for justification. But, following Alston, I put coherentism aside in Chapter 2. Second, if Alston's (1986: 11) account of the necessary and sufficient conditions for successful arguments is correct, then Bergmann's conditions are not individually necessary. Alston replaces Bergmann's condition (c) with a requirement that one *justifiedly believe* that the logical relation, stated here in condition (b), exists between the premises and conclusion of an argument. Alston in fact rejects this requirement as an instance of epistemic levels confusion. But he includes it in his set of conditions to foreclose what he argues are unfounded suspicions that epistemically circular arguments are problematic because violate this particular condition. So it is safe to omit it here and use just Bergmann's conditions.

inferentially justified and that these premises bear an appropriate logical relation to its conclusion. Justification to believe these premises must also be *epistemically prior* to—that is, earned independently of—justification to believe that conclusion. This ensures that justification transmits through an argument in the right direction, *from* its premises *to* its conclusion.⁸⁰ Condition (d), finally, is a *no defeaters* requirement. It says that justification to believe an argument’s conclusion on the basis of its premises and in virtue of a particular inference rule should not be epistemically problematic. This means that belief in the conclusion should not be rebutted or undercut by any beliefs or doubts one either has or should have, as this would block transmission.⁸¹

I think the problem of inferential epistemic circularity turns on how the foundationalism requirement in condition (a) is understood. This can be shown with a different dilemma, one that arises as a result of attempting to go between the horns of the Dilemma for Higher-Order Ascent.⁸² Call this second dilemma the Dilemma for Inferential Epistemic Circularity. Its first horn says if the account of non-inferential justification in condition (a) is *too weak* because it allows generative epistemic principles to be satisfied without being discharged, then epistemically circular arguments fall prey to at least one of two related problems: the indiscrimination problem or the bootstrapping problem. But in either case the no defeaters requirement in condition (d) is violated. The dilemma’s second horn says that if,

⁸⁰ ‘Cogency’ is therefore Bergmann’s term for the conjunction of Priority and Dependence, from Chapter 2. The reason is that Priority and Dependence ensure that justification transfers through an argument in the one right direction, *from* its premises *to* its conclusion. Crispin Wright (2000; 2002; 2004; 2008) says arguments that violate this condition are guilty of *transmission failure*, and along with Bergmann he calls arguments that satisfy it ‘cogent’.

⁸¹ In §3.3.2 I will explain why Bergmann makes this distinction between defeaters one has and defeaters one should have, and how it fits into the problem of epistemic circularity.

⁸² I know there are quite a few moving parts, and this can be confusing. Unfortunately, this chapter will introduce still a fair number more. To keep at least these two dilemmas separate, I will now always refer to dilemma from Chapter 1 as the ‘Dilemma for Higher-Order Ascent’.

to avoid this first horn, the conditions for non-inferential justification are strengthened so that generative epistemic principles are satisfied if and only if they are also discharged, then epistemically circular arguments beg the question and thus violate the cogency requirement in condition (c).

In this chapter I am going to present only the argument for Horn 1 of the Dilemma for Inferential Epistemic Circularity. In the next chapter I will present its second horn. I will begin Horn 1 by arguing that epistemically circular arguments cannot violate the logical requirement in condition (b). This will leave (a), (c) and (d) as conditions whose violation would render epistemically circular arguments problematic. After detailing the distinction between weak and strong non-inferential justification, I will argue that whenever non-inferential justification is weak, epistemically circular arguments fall prey to either the indiscriminate problem or the bootstrapping problem, and therefore violate the no defeaters requirement in (d). The upshot will be that any epistemically circular argument issued to discharge an epistemic principle through higher-order ascent fails, and therefore we must strengthen the account of non-inferential justification.

3.2 Condition (b): Validity or Strength of Argument Form

Bergmann's second condition for a successful argument again says:

- (b) On the basis of the non-inferentially justified beliefs produced by belief source X_1 (or $X_2 \dots X_n$), S relies on a legitimate form of reasoning (deductive, inductive, abductive) to infer a conclusion (*Validity or Strength of Argument Form*)

In other words, the conclusion of a well-formed argument depends on its premises by means of a legitimate inference rule that determines that argument's logical form. An epistemically

circular argument cannot violate this condition. The reason is that its epistemic circularity is distinct from, and consistent with, any logical form an argument can have.

Here is another way to state condition (b): any well-formed argument exhibits a valid *conclusion-on-premise* dependence. If the argument is deductively valid then the truth of its conclusion necessarily follows from that of its premises; and if it is inductive or abductive then the truth of its conclusion is probabified to some degree by that of its premises. Now consider a structurally circular argument, epistemic or otherwise. In addition to exhibiting conclusion-on-premise dependence, a structurally circular argument exhibits *premise-on-conclusion* dependence: its conclusion depends in a logically correct way on its premise(s), *and* its premise(s) depend in *some way* on its conclusion.⁸³ So structurally circular arguments exhibit a two-way dependence between their premises and conclusions.

Now, the fact that an argument satisfies condition (b) because it exhibits a legitimate form of conclusion-on-premise dependence entails nothing about whether it also has the particular *kind* of premise-on-conclusion dependence that would make it epistemically circular. For example, the following argument satisfies condition (b) because it is deductively valid:

1. P
2. $P \rightarrow Q$
3. Q

But this tells us nothing about whether it is epistemically circular. The argument's validity entails only that the truth of its conclusion, (3), deductively depends on the truth of its premises, (1) and (2), and therefore that the argument exhibits a legitimate form of conclusion-

⁸³ I am leaving open right now the varieties of premise-on-conclusion dependence. But whatever the eventual account, if the argument is not viciously circular then, despite its structural circularity, it must record an asymmetric structure of justification in virtue of satisfying Priority and Dependence. See Chapter 2, §2.4.

on-premise dependence. If its conclusion states that a belief source is reliable, and if belief in at least one of its premises is an output of this same belief source, then this argument is also epistemically circular. But its logical form alone tells us nothing about whether this is the case. So the property of an argument being logically well-formed is distinct from the property of it being epistemically circular.

Distinct things are not necessarily consistent things, however. So perhaps epistemically circular arguments violate condition (b) because their circularity *entails* they cannot be logically well-formed. But this is a false alarm. In Chapter 2 I argued that deductively and inductively well-formed arguments can quite obviously be epistemically circular. So whether an argument satisfies condition (b) is not only distinct from its possible epistemic circularity; it is also consistent with it.

This shows that any problems with epistemically circular arguments are orthogonal to whether those arguments are logically well-formed because they satisfy condition (b). So we have to look elsewhere for where these problems arise. Bergmann's remaining conditions, (a), (c) and (d), point the way. Rather than focusing on an argument's logical form, these conditions take its good logical form for granted and focus instead on the generation and transmission of justification from its premises to its conclusion. This leaves exactly two ways an epistemically circular argument could fail: either it has false premises or it does not generate and transmit justification from its true premises to its conclusion. But only the latter option is viable. The problem of epistemic circularity does not challenge the possibility of having true beliefs in the premises of epistemically circular arguments. It challenges whether we have justification to make epistemically circular *inferences* from these arguments' premises to their conclusions, *even if* beliefs in those premises are true. So any problem of epistemic circularity must result from

violating at least one of these conditions for justification to be generated and then transmitted through an argument: (a), (c) or (d).

3.3 Horn 1: The Indiscrimination and Bootstrapping Problems (violation of condition [d])

Horn 1 of the problem of epistemic circularity says if we assume a weak account of non-inferential justification, then epistemically circular arguments fall prey to either the indiscrimination problem or the bootstrapping problem, in each case violating the no defeaters requirement in condition (d). This reasoning can now be laid out explicitly:

Horn 1: The Indiscrimination and Bootstrapping Problems for Epistemically Circular Arguments

- I Assume a weak account of non-inferential justification W(NI-J) (interpretation of condition [a] *Foundationalism*)
- II If W(NI-J), then any epistemically circular argument, EC-A, either (a) does not discriminate for S between reliable and unreliable belief sources, or (b) permits bootstrapping for S
- III If (II), then either (a) S does take, or (b) epistemically should come to take, S's belief in one of EC-A's premises or S's reliance on EC-A's inference rule to be epistemically inappropriate (violation of condition [d] *No Defeaters*)
- IV Therefore, on W(NI-J), EC-A violates condition (d) (from II, III)
- V Therefore, EC-A does not transmit justification from its premises to its conclusion (from IV)
- VI Therefore, on W(NI-J) epistemically circular arguments are vicious (from V)

The indiscrimination problem says epistemically circular arguments are problematic because they fail to discriminate between reliable and unreliable belief sources. The bootstrapping problem says these arguments are problematic because they give us higher-order justification too easily. The crux of this just-presented argument is that both these problems afflict epistemically circular arguments when these arguments presuppose a weak account of non-

inferential justification, and that this results in epistemic defeat. I will defend (I)-(III) in turn, after which (IV)-(VI) will follow truth-functionally.

3.3.1 Premise (I): Weak Non-Inferential Justification

I said I will argue the problem of inferential epistemic circularity turns on how the foundationalism requirement in condition (a) is understood. Premise (I) marks the starting point of this argument. Most would agree that a belief is non-inferentially justified if and only if it does not positively depend for its justification on any other belief(s).⁸⁴ But the distinction premise (I) implies between *weak* and *strong* non-inferential justification is much less clear. Drawing from the discussion in Chapter 1, I propose that some *undischarged* epistemic principles describe *weak* non-inferential justification [W(NI-J)], and that some *discharged* epistemic principles describe *strong* non-inferential justification [S(NI-J)].⁸⁵ More specifically, a belief is W(NI-J) if and only if it satisfies a generative epistemic principle without also discharging it; and a belief is S(NI-J) if and only if it cannot satisfy a generative epistemic principle unless it discharges it.

I am now using the language of ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ non-inferential justification because Bergmann’s Success Conditions for Arguments allow me to focus more narrowly on what I believe the crux of the problem of inferential epistemic circularity is. Instead of saying that first-order requirements theorists offer a simple response to EC-Questions, I can now say, drawing from Bergmann’s Conditions, that their response is simple because they weakly interpret Bergmann’s foundationalism requirement for successful arguments. In other words,

⁸⁴ This allows non-inferentially justified beliefs to depend negatively on defeaters.

⁸⁵ Chapter 1, §1.1

what in Chapter 1 I called first-order requirements theorists' simple response to EC-Questions I now call weak non-inferential justification. If I can then show that on W(NI-J) *any* epistemically circular argument falls prey to Horn 1 of this chapter's dilemma, this *ipso facto* shows the same about first-order requirements theorists. The upshot will be that because the problem of epistemic circularity is linked to W(NI-J), we have reason to strengthen it with S(NI-J).

When discussing these arguments it will be helpful to have in hand examples of undischarged generative epistemic principles. So here are two, one externalist and the other internalist:

Ext-W(NI-J): S's belief that p is an output of a reliable belief source \rightarrow S Ext-W(NI-J)

Int-W(NI-J): S's belief that p is based on evidence e and e reliably indicates that $p \rightarrow$ S Int-W(NI-J)⁸⁶

Ext-W(NI-J) first appeared in Chapter 1. Again, the standard interpretation of Ext-W(NI-J)'s antecedent says that the reliability of a belief source is a subpersonal property of S's noetic structure. So, even if S's belief is justified because it satisfies this reliability condition, Ext-W(NI-J) is undischarged because from S's perspective it remains an open question whether his belief is in fact an output of a reliable belief source. Ext-W(NI-J), an externalist epistemic principle, is therefore a clear-cut example of weak non-inferential justification.

Int-W(NI-J) shows that weak non-inferential justification is not restricted to externalism. Forwarded by Alston, this epistemic principle combines one claim about the *grounds* of justification with another about their *adequacy*. Alston maintains that we must be aware of the grounds of justification, which he takes to be the evidence e on which a belief is

⁸⁶ Alston (1988).

based. But he denies we must be aware of the adequacy of these grounds, which he takes to be the degree to which e reliably indicates the truth of that belief. So this epistemic principle combines internalism and externalism, but it nonetheless remains undischarged because even if S 's belief that p satisfies its antecedent, it is an open question for S whether the evidence e on which he bases his belief that p is adequate.

I will now use Ext-W(NI-J) and Int-W(NI-J) as examples of weak non-inferential justification—of undischarged generative epistemic principles—to show that they must be strengthened to avoid two problems of epistemic circularity that cut across the internal/external divide between first-order requirements theorists.

3.3.2 Premises (II) and (III): Indiscrimination, Bootstrapping, and Epistemic Defeat

Premise (II) says that on W(NI-J) any epistemically circular argument EC-A either (II.a) does not discriminate for S between reliable and unreliable belief sources, or (II.b) permits illicit bootstrapping. Premise (III) says that, as a result of (II), S either (III.a) does take or (III.b) epistemically should come to take his belief in one of EC-A's premises or his reliance on EC-A's inference rule to be epistemically inappropriate. I will first disentangle the threads drawn by these sub-clauses, then I will give one argument that epistemically circular arguments are indiscriminate, and another that they sanction illicit bootstrapping.

Whether (II.a) or (II.b) is true depends respectively on whether *Sensitivity* or *Safety* is used to interpret the concept of *reliability* in Ext-W(NI-J) and Int-W(NI-J). Reliability is a modal concept. It describes how a phenomenon would behave over a range of situations. If a belief source like sense perception (SP) is the phenomenon in question, then that source's reliability consists in its tendency to output a favourable ratio of true to false beliefs over a

range of employments. Sensitivity and Safety describe two ways this reliability can be understood when it is a condition for epistemic justification, as it is in Ext-W(NI-J) and Int-W(NI-J):⁸⁷

Sensitivity: $\sim p \Rightarrow \sim S(Bp)$

Safety: $S(Bp) \Rightarrow p$

Jonathan Vogel illustrates this distinction as follows.⁸⁸ Assume a set of possible worlds W that includes the actual world A , where worlds more different from A are further away from A in W . Now consider a subset of W comprising just those possible worlds closest to A , W' . If in W' S believes that p and p is true, then S 's belief that p is safe. But if in W' there is a possible world closer to A in which S believes that p and p is false, then S 's belief is not safe *and* it is not sensitive. The idea is that if S is justified in believing that p , then Safety says that S would not easily believe that p unless p were true within some range of possible worlds, while Sensitivity says that if in *any* possible world it were not so that p , then S would not believe that p .⁸⁹ So Sensitivity is stronger than Safety.

Now consider (III.a) and (III.b).⁹⁰ They respectively say that S either does take, or should come to take, S 's belief in one of EC-A's premises or S 's reliance on EC-A's inference rule to be epistemically inappropriate. Bergmann uses these sub-clauses to distinguish two

⁸⁷ I will use ' \Rightarrow ' to indicate the subjunctive conditional, and ' \rightarrow ' to indicate the material conditional.

⁸⁸ Vogel (2000: 604).

⁸⁹ Two points should be made here. First, Sensitivity and Safety are typically conditions on knowledge rather than justification. But since I am analyzing epistemic circularity in terms of justification, I have adapted them to this epistemic status. Second, though they are similar, Sensitivity and Safety are not equivalent because they are subjunctive conditionals, and these do not contrapose. See Sosa (1999) for an argument for this claim. This matters because Sosa there argues that Sensitivity dooms a Moorean response to skepticism while Safety does not.

⁹⁰ Premise (III): If (II), then either (III.a) S does take, or (III.b) epistemically should come to take, S 's belief in one of EC-A's premises or S 's reliance on EC-A's inference rule to be epistemically inappropriate.

species of doubt that we will see are important to the problem of epistemic circularity: epistemic and non-epistemic. Typically, epistemic doubt is understood as being necessarily founded on an epistemic reason, while non-epistemic doubt is not so founded, denoting instead a psychological fact about S, for example that he lacks confidence or is unsure whether *p*.⁹¹ So S *epistemically doubts* that *p* if S has at least a prima facie reason or evidence to doubt that *p*, while S *non-epistemically doubts* that *p* if S is merely uncertain or lacking in confidence whether *p*.⁹² I am going to amend this distinction slightly. I will call the *philosophical skeptic* who will make an appearance shortly a ‘non-epistemic doubter’ because he *begins* dialectical exchange with doubt. He has ‘antecedent doubt’. This is his default epistemic position, making his doubt non-epistemic because it is not *necessarily* founded on an epistemic reason. Epistemic doubt, by contrast, is ‘posterior doubt’ because it is necessarily founded on an epistemic reason, for example as a fitting *response* to a failed argument that *p*.

But Bergmann also makes a distinction in premise (III) between whether S doubts an argument’s *premises* or its *inference rule*. He distinguishes these because each corresponds with a different kind of defeater. Doubting an argument’s premise(s) is a *rebutting defeater* because it gives you reason to doubt the conclusion is true. Doubting an argument’s inference rule is an *undercutting defeater* because it gives you reason to doubt only the logical connection between its premises and conclusion, without necessarily doubting the conclusion is true. A flawed inference rule is therefore an undercutting defeater. And though arguing for this here would take me too far afield, I maintain that epistemic principles, like instances of W(NI-J) and S(NI-

⁹¹ Bergmann (2006: 197-200). As we will see later, Bergmann makes this epistemic/non-epistemic distinction because he argues that epistemic circularity fails to persuade only non-epistemic doubters, and that for this very reason epistemic circularity is not necessarily vicious.

⁹² I borrow some details of this account from Vogel (2008: 538).

J), are specific *kinds* of rules, and therefore that flawed epistemic principles are also undercutting defeaters. Since premise (II) says that W(NI-J), a general kind of epistemic principle, is the source of the indiscrimination and bootstrapping problems facing epistemic circularity, we can therefore reformulate premise (III).⁹³ Instead of:

III If (II), then either (a) S does take, or (b) epistemically should come to take, S's belief in one of EC-A's premises or S's reliance on EC-A's inference rule to be epistemically inappropriate (violation of condition [d] *No Defeaters*)

We can say:

III If (II), then either (a) S does take, or (b) epistemically should come to take, S's reliance on W(NI-J) to be epistemically inappropriate (violation of condition [d] *No Defeaters*)

This amendment to premise (III) therefore substitutes W(NI-J) for both EC-A's *premises* and EC-A's *inference rule*, focusing this premise on what I will argue is the main offender in epistemically circular arguments.

At last, here is why this nest of distinctions matters. The Indiscrimination Argument against epistemic circularity assumes Sensitivity in (II.a) and the non-epistemic species of doubt in (III.a). It says that epistemically circular arguments violate Sensitivity because these arguments would lead you to believe that p even when $\sim p$. When 'p' is the claim that a belief source is reliable, this entails that epistemically circular arguments fail to discriminate between reliable and unreliable belief sources. I will argue that, as a result, (III.a) is true: because epistemically circular arguments are indiscriminate, a skeptic's non-epistemic, antecedent doubt about their conclusions would persist, leading him to conclude that epistemically circular arguments fail and that epistemic circularity is vicious.

⁹³ Premise (II): If W(NI-J), then any epistemically circular argument, EC-A, either (a) does not discriminate for S between reliable and unreliable belief sources, or (b) permits bootstrapping for S.

But there is reason to believe the Indiscrimination Argument is too concessive to a skeptic harbouring antecedent doubt. A stronger argument for the problem of epistemic circularity would show that anyone *should* doubt the conclusion of an epistemically circular argument, not just that a (possibly obstinate) skeptic *would*. The Bootstrapping Argument aims to meet this challenge. It turns its attention from Sensitivity to Safety in (II.b), and focuses only on epistemic doubt in (III.b). In doing so, this argument *allows* that epistemically circular arguments satisfy Safety. But it contends that epistemic circularity is still problematic because anyone *should* doubt bootstrapping as an illicit form of reasoning.

Summarizing each argument against epistemic circularity, we therefore get:

Indiscrimination Argument: assumes (II.a) Sensitivity and (III.a) non-epistemic doubt; concludes that epistemically circular arguments are vicious because they violate Sensitivity and therefore fail to persuade the skeptic, who endorses (II.a).

Bootstrapping Argument: assumes (II.b) Safety and (III.b) epistemic doubt; concludes that epistemically circular arguments are vicious because, though they satisfy Safety (in place of Sensitivity), they sanction bootstrapping, which is an illicit form of reasoning.

A. The Indiscrimination Argument: (II.a) Sensitivity and (III.a) Non-Epistemic Doubt

Richard Fumerton argues that a belief source cannot be used in an epistemically circular way to give a doubter justification to believe that it is reliable:

If as a philosopher I start wondering about whether perceptual beliefs are accurate reflections of the way the world really is, I would not dream of using perception to resolve my doubt. Even if there is some sense in which the reliable process of perception might yield justified beliefs about the reliability of perception, the use of perception could never satisfy a *philosophical curiosity*.⁹⁴

Fumerton is saying that if one doubts the reliability of a belief source like SP, an epistemically circular argument that SP is reliable will not resolve that doubt. Such an argument would not satisfy one's 'philosophical curiosity'. To understand why this argument shows that

⁹⁴ Fumerton (1995: 177; emphasis mine).

epistemically circular arguments violate Sensitivity and are therefore indiscriminate, two steps need to be distinguished. First, there must be a reason why epistemically circular arguments cannot satisfy one's philosophical curiosity. Second, this must entail epistemically circular arguments violate Sensitivity.

Indiscrimination Argument, Step 1: I Can't Get No (Philosophical) Satisfaction (with Epistemic Circularity)

Responding to this passage, Bergmann says that Fumerton believes epistemically circular arguments cannot satisfy one's philosophical curiosity because they do not meet the *Skeptical Controversy Condition*.⁹⁵

Skeptical Controversy Condition (SCC): if an epistemic property [justification, warrant, knowledge, etc.] is philosophically substantive, then its exemplification [by S's belief that p at t] must be at issue in a controversy between skeptics and non-skeptics.⁹⁶

Bergmann is introducing some terminology that is not quite aligned with my own. So a few clarifying remarks are in order. For Bergmann 'epistemic properties' are things like justification and knowledge that indicate beliefs' epistemic status. And, unless these properties are brute, they are informative only if there are analyses stating condition(s) on which these properties supervene. These analyses, then, take the form of what I have been calling 'conditions' in epistemic principles. Two such analyses are therefore found in Ext-W(NI-J) and Int-W(NI-J). Using justification as the target epistemic property, Ext-W(NI-J)'s antecedent again says that S's justification to believe that p supervenes on S's belief being the output of a reliable belief source, and Int-W(NI-J)'s says it supervenes on the adequate evidence on which S's belief that

⁹⁵ What follows is Bergmann's proposal of what lies behind Fumerton's objection. Bergmann does not himself endorse Fumerton's view about epistemic circularity, but I am relying on Bergmann's rendering because I find he is more explicit than Fumerton. Either way, it is interesting that, on Bergmann's rendering, Fumerton appears to conflate philosophical curiosity and skeptical doubt, as described in the SCC.

⁹⁶ Bergmann (2000: 165). I have reworded Bergmann's formulation of this condition.

p is based. Bergmann's SCC, then, says that for any such analysis of an epistemic property, that analysis is philosophically *substantive*, and therefore would satisfy one's *philosophical curiosity*, only if that property's exemplification by S's belief that p at t is at issue in a debate between skeptics and non-skeptics.⁹⁷

In a moment I will illustrate what this constraint on substantive epistemic principles amounts to. First it will be helpful to see how the SCC figures in Step 1 of the Indiscrimination Argument. My version of this sub-argument is this:

No Philosophical Satisfaction Argument

1. If an analysis of an epistemic property satisfies S's philosophical curiosity, then this analysis satisfies the SCC
2. Undischarged analyses of epistemic properties do not satisfy the SCC⁹⁸
3. Therefore, undischarged analyses of epistemic properties do not satisfy S's philosophical curiosity

I will take premise (1) for granted because I already said the Indiscrimination Argument takes skepticism seriously. The key premise is (2). It makes a stronger claim than the one Bergmann finds in Fumerton's discussion of what I am calling the Indiscrimination Argument. Bergmann rightly says that Fumerton believes only *externalist* analyses of epistemic properties do not satisfy the SCC. I am claiming in (2) that *undischarged* analyses do not satisfy the SCC. This claim is stronger than Fumerton's because undischarged analyses of epistemic properties state conditions for justification that can be satisfied without discharging the parent epistemic

⁹⁷ Bergmann is therefore floating around the same general idea of Stroudian philosophical satisfaction, or what I have been calling discharged epistemic principles. But Bergmann's approach differs because he couches philosophical satisfaction within the context of persuading a skeptic.

⁹⁸ To minimize bulk, at times I will use the abbreviated phrase 'undischarged analysis' to describe weak non-inferential justification. The linking idea is that W(NI-J) refers to an epistemic principle stating conditions (an analysis) for justification, and this account of non-inferential justification is 'weak' because these conditions are undischarged.

principle, and this is not restricted to externalist analyses alone. So I think the Indiscrimination Argument has a broader target than Fumerton appears to believe. The key question this argument raises, then, is this: why do undischarged analyses of epistemic properties fail to satisfy the SCC?

The answer is because they permit epistemic circularity. Consider a familiar piece of epistemically circular reasoning:

Track-Record Argument

1. At t_1 , it appears to me that p (Introspection)
2. At t_1 , p (Sense Perception/SP)
3. At t_1 , it appears to me that p and p (Conjunction from 1, 2)
4. At t_1 , SP is functioning accurately (Deduction from 3)
5. Repeat (1)-(4) x times
6. Therefore, SP functions accurately every time (Deduction from 5)
7. Therefore, SP reliable (SPR) (Induction from 6)

Assume that (i) the *epistemic property* in question is justification; (ii) that the antecedent of the epistemic principle Ext-W(NI-J) is the *analysis* of this property,⁹⁹ and (iii) that you are using this argument to persuade a skeptic—someone Fumerton says is ‘philosophically curious’—that there is justification to believe the conclusion, (7). This argument purports to generate evidence for this conclusion by presenting a sufficiently large number of cases in which (4) can be derived from the conjunction in (3). And this is epistemically circular because premise (2) is an output of SP, the belief source whose reliability this argument affirms in its conclusion.

This argument’s failure to satisfy the SCC comes into focus when we consider your justification to believe (2). *If* the epistemic principle Ext-W(NI-J) is a correct analysis of

⁹⁹ Ext-W(NI-J): S’s belief that p is an output of a reliable belief source \rightarrow S J(B)

justification, and *if* SP is in fact reliable, *then* you have justification to believe that *p*. Assuming the appropriate conditions are met for every repeating set of premises in (5), justification should transfer to this argument's conclusion. But the skeptic would not be persuaded. He maintains that to answer his skeptical challenge—to satisfy his philosophical curiosity—it is not enough to embed the analysis of justification in the antecedent of an undischarged conditional and then declare your non-inferential justification to believe (2). His philosophical curiosity requires that this conditional be discharged. That is, to justifiedly believe (2) he wants to know that the epistemic principle Ext-W(NI-J) *is* true and that SP *is* reliable. Just saying that *if* these are true *then* belief in (2) is non-inferentially justified is not enough. To use terminology from Chapter 1, the skeptic places a meta-epistemic requirement on justifiedly believing (2). Anything less merely assumes that belief in (2) is justified, and this merely moves the goalposts for meeting his skeptical challenge.

This epistemically circular argument therefore fails to satisfy the SCC because the skeptic thinks it delivers justification too easily. So long as this epistemic property is given an analysis that allows its parent epistemic principle to remain undischarged when satisfied, as Ext-W(NI-J) says, a belief will count as justified for S even if it would not close S's question about whether his belief in fact meets the principle's condition for justification. The skeptic can grant that *if* these conditions are satisfied then he has reason to believe this argument's conclusion. But this falls short of knowing *that* these conditions are satisfied. This same objection, moreover, ensnares *any* epistemically circular argument that uses undischarged analyses of epistemic properties. Consider the epistemic principle Int-W(NI-J).¹⁰⁰ Simply

¹⁰⁰ S's belief that *p* is based on evidence *e* and *e* reliably indicates that $p \rightarrow S J(B)$

replacing the reliability of a belief source with the reliability of evidence—even if S must be aware of this evidence—leaves the skeptic no more satisfied because he wants to know *that* the evidence is adequate. So the skeptic thinks that *any* epistemic principle that takes the form of W(NI-)), and that therefore can be satisfied without being discharged, fails to satisfy the SCC. If this is all that is required for epistemic justification, the skeptic insists, victory over his doubts is empty.

It might be objected that the skeptic has argued that only particular *analyses* of epistemic properties in terms of W(NI-)) fail to satisfy the SCC, and therefore that epistemically circular *arguments* are problematic only by extension. So he has not impugned epistemic circularity per se. But the skeptic replies that epistemically circular arguments *must* presuppose epistemic properties with these suspect analyses because they necessarily share with these properties a hypothetical structure. Again, these analyses say that to have a weakly non-inferentially justified belief B that *p*, it is not necessary to discharge the epistemic principle stating the condition(s) for justification. But epistemically circular arguments exhibit this very same hypothetical structure. They say: *if* a belief source is reliable, *then* I can use outputs of that source to justifiedly believe it is reliable. And these arguments *necessarily* exhibit this hypothetical structure because, so long as the belief source in question is basic because its reliability cannot be determined by appealing to the outputs of an independent belief source, discharging the conditional by affirming its antecedent will collapse the argument into logical circularity.¹⁰¹ Therefore, when the skeptic insists that undischarged analyses of epistemic properties

¹⁰¹ This is a preview of the second horn of the dilemma, which says that strengthening the conditions for non-inferential justification risks begging the question when using epistemically circular arguments. I will make this reasoning more explicit when I turn to this second horn.

necessarily fail to satisfy the SCC, he is insisting that epistemically circular arguments necessarily fail to satisfy the SCC too.

Indiscrimination Argument, Step 2: Epistemically Circular Arguments Violate Sensitivity

It remains to be shown why satisfying the SCC should be a requirement for a successful argument in the first place. The skeptic has argued that *his* philosophical curiosity is not satisfied. But perhaps he is too ambitious. Why should ours be unsatisfied too? Why is the satisfaction of one's philosophical curiosity, understood in terms of satisfying the SCC, a requirement for a successful argument?

The skeptic's answer is that an argument that fails to satisfy the SCC violates Sensitivity. Imagine you ask a crystal ball gazer why he believes his crystal ball is reliable. He responds with a familiar epistemically circular argument.¹⁰²

Crystal Ball Argument

1. At t_1 , my crystal ball says that q (Perception)
2. At t_1 , q (Crystal Ball)
3. At t_1 , my crystal ball says that q and q (Conjunction from 1, 2)
4. At t_1 , my crystal ball is functioning accurately (Deduction from 3)
5. Repeat (1)-(4) x times
6. Therefore, my crystal ball functions accurately every time (Deduction from 5)
7. Therefore, my crystal ball is reliable (SPR) (Induction from 6)

The skeptic claims that if the epistemically circular argument for SPR is justifying then—by his lights—this argument is too.¹⁰³ This is because both arguments rely on an undischarged

¹⁰² This is a rendition of a common line of argument in the literature on epistemic circularity. See for example Alston (1993: 17).

¹⁰³ To forestall some obvious objections, assume that mystical vision is a basic belief source because its outputs are not independently testable, and that its output beliefs exhibit a high degree of internal coherence.

conditional to purportedly transfer justification from their premises to their conclusions, leaving us unaware of whether the conditions for justification are in fact satisfied. In both cases it is merely assumed they are satisfied. So if the epistemically circular argument for SPR permits itself this assumption, on what grounds can we deny the same to the crystal ball gazer? What privileges an epistemically circular defense *only* of the reliability of SP?

The obvious reply is that this defense is privileged because SP is reliable and crystal ball gazing (presumably) is not.¹⁰⁴ But it is unclear how this avoids begging the question. Consider again the conjunction of Inferentiality and Basicity from Chapter 2. Inferentiality says that justification to believe a belief source is reliable can be earned only via inference; Basicity says the premises of this inference must themselves be outputs of that same belief source. If both these claims are true of SP, then it is impossible to justifiedly believe SP is reliable without epistemic circularity. The skeptic then insists that, save collapsing an epistemically circular argument into logical circularity, you can *only* assume that the conditions for justification are met. But this is precisely what the crystal ball gazer does with his favoured belief source. So privileging an epistemically circular defense of SP is viciously circular.

Ultimately, then, the skeptic's claim that a successful argument must satisfy the SCC is founded on the conviction that a justified belief must be Sensitive: if you are justified in believing that p through some method M , then M reliably discriminates for you between p and $\sim p$. But beliefs that are conclusions of epistemically circular arguments violate Sensitivity because this method of reasoning permits you to take a putatively dubious belief source, like crystal ball gazing, and use outputs of this source to support your belief that it is 'reliable' (p),

¹⁰⁴ Sosa (2009: 207) makes this move.

even though it is (presumably) unreliable ($\sim p$). And epistemically circular arguments *must* allow this because they necessarily presuppose undischarged analyses of epistemic properties. Epistemically circular arguments do not therefore guarantee the modal connection that Sensitivity stipulates must hold between a belief and the fact that makes it true, and for this reason they cannot overturn non-epistemic doubt.

Indiscrimination Argument: Upsbot for Horn 1 of this Chapter's Dilemma

Bringing this back to our main argument for Horn 1, I suggest premise (II.a) is true:

II.a If $W(NI-J)$, then any epistemically circular argument does not discriminate for S between reliable and unreliable belief sources.

And, though the reason why must be stated carefully, premise (III.a) is also true:

III.a If (II.a), then S does take reliance on $W(NI-J)$ to be epistemically inappropriate (violation of condition [d] *No Defeaters*)

The need for care arises because (III.a)'s antecedent appears inconsistent with its consequent. I said this consequent presupposes the non-epistemic species of doubt: S's doubt is non-epistemic when he *begins* dialectical exchange by doubting. But this conditional's antecedent purports to be *evidence* for its consequent, suggesting instead that the doubt is epistemic.

This inconsistency resolves when we distinguish an argument's *dialectical power* from its *justificatory structure*.¹⁰⁵ An argument's dialectical power is a function of its capacity to persuade its audience. Its justificatory structure is a function of the proper epistemic priority of its premises to its conclusion. These are distinct because an argument that *p* with a sound

¹⁰⁵ I borrow this distinction from Pryor (2004: 368-370). I do not have room to discuss it fully here, but it is very important to debates about epistemic circularity.

justificatory structure will have no dialectical power for someone who would doubt whether p regardless of the evidence the argument presents him.

Now, the skeptic, who endorses the SCC and is the intended audience of the epistemically circular track-record argument that SP is reliable, is a non-epistemic doubter. This is again because he *assumes* doubt in this dialectical exchange; he does not *end* there. This does not entail the skeptic cannot be rationally persuaded. But it does entail he cannot be rationally persuaded with epistemically circular arguments. The reason is that the truth of these arguments' conclusions is a necessary condition for justifiedly believing at least one of their premises, and the skeptic already doubts their conclusions. So even if these arguments' justificatory structures are intact, the skeptic will find them dialectically powerless.

The apparent contradiction in (III.a) is therefore resolved when the premise is read within what Bergmann calls a *question-doubting* epistemic context: *if* the skeptic's antecedent doubt is accepted, *then* from his perspective (II.a) is reason not to believe the conclusions of epistemically circular arguments.¹⁰⁶ Read this way, it follows that epistemically circular arguments cannot dispel non-epistemic doubt, and therefore they violate Bergmann's No Defeaters condition and do not transmit justification to their conclusions.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Bergmann (2006: 198). Bergmann does not include Sensitivity as part of his account of a question-doubting context, however. That is my addition.

¹⁰⁷ This conclusion overlooks a significant amount of philosophical complexity and nuance that I do not have room to discuss. The crucial issue is whether non-epistemic doubt is a genuine defeater. Bergmann (2006: 160-162) argues that it is; Pryor (2004) argues that it can make a belief irrational but not necessarily unjustified. The price of Pryor's approach is a sundering of rationality and justification. The price of Bergmann's approach is susceptibility to skeptical rabble-rousing. The ideal, I suggest, is to have both: a tight connection between rationality and justification that is realistically insusceptible to skepticism. I think a proper analysis of epistemic circularity provides ingredients for this position. But this takes me too far afield and I am still working out my thoughts.

B. The Bootstrapping Argument: (III.a) Safety and (III.b) Epistemic Doubt

A second argument is needed because the Indiscrimination Argument delivers mixed results. On the positive side, it reveals two important facts about epistemic circularity. First, epistemically circular arguments *necessarily* presuppose analyses of epistemic properties that permit epistemic principles to remain undischarged in our reasoning. That is, these arguments necessarily presuppose W(NI-J). The reason, again, lies in their structure. Justification to believe these arguments' premises presupposes the truth of their conclusions. So any analysis of an epistemic property that incorporates these conclusions into the very conditions for justification, and then requires a subject to discharge the parent epistemic principle, will collapse an epistemically circular argument into logical circularity. The upshot is that this is strong evidence W(NI-J) is the fundamental defect in epistemically circular arguments that presuppose Sensitivity and aim to persuade skeptical, non-epistemic doubters.

Second, the Indiscrimination Argument reveals that epistemically circular arguments are dialectically powerless against skeptical doubters. This is no small finding. It is natural to assume that good arguments are persuasive arguments. So it should be news that epistemically circular arguments, by dint partly of their very structure, cannot do this without begging the question.¹⁰⁸ But it is worth asking whether something deeper is wrong. Epistemically circular arguments might be dialectically powerless not because they are offered in question-doubling contexts, as Bergmann argues, but because of the structure of justification itself. Instead of viewing the conclusions of these arguments as susceptible to inferential justification and

¹⁰⁸ This issue cuts deep, since discounting the skeptic's objections to epistemically circular reasoning entails that we reject what Paul Boghossian calls the principle of the universal accessibility of reasons: "If something is a genuine reason for believing that p, then...its rationalizing force ought to be accessible from any epistemic standpoint." (Boghossian 2001: 36). On the face of it, rejecting this principle seems to involve a significant concession to epistemic relativism, if not outright skepticism.

therefore as epistemically posterior to these arguments' premises, our entitlement to them might be epistemically *prior* to our justification to believe these premises. Epistemically circular arguments might then be indiscriminate and dialectically powerless precisely because they get the chain of justification backwards: basic conditions for justification, which are stated in generative epistemic principles and are the intended conclusions of many epistemically circular arguments, are not susceptible to inferential justification because they *just are* antecedent conditions *for* such justification. If this is right, then we can assess epistemic circularity without worrying about persuading the skeptic, since he would be asking for inferential justification where none should be found. I will return to this in Chapter 5.

So we do learn important things about epistemic circularity from the Indiscrimination Argument. But—and this is the negative side—this Argument is not without baggage. For one, its commitment to Sensitivity is dubious because this principle entails justification is not closed under known entailment.¹⁰⁹ So the skeptic must straddle an uncomfortable divide between his commitment to Sensitivity and the role closure might play in other skeptical arguments he favours. For another, and more baldly, the preoccupation with convincing the skeptic at all is dubious. This is shown by the fact that, at least the way I have presented it, the Indiscrimination Argument entails at most the limited thesis that epistemic circularity is powerless against non-epistemic doubters. This is unsatisfying. If epistemic circularity is really a problem, it should make a claim on epistemic and non-epistemic doubters alike.

¹⁰⁹ Justification (or knowledge) is closed under known entailment when: if S justifiedly believes that *p*, and justifiedly believes that if *p* then *q*, then S has justification to believe that *q*. Nozick argues that Sensitivity entails the falsity of closure, because S can be sensitive about whether *p* and about whether if *p* then *q*, but can fail to be sensitive about whether *q*. See Nozick (2008).

The Bootstrapping Argument confronts these challenges. It dispenses with Sensitivity in favour of Safety, and it gives no dialectical authority to the skeptic, ignoring him altogether. If this argument shows that epistemic circularity is still a problem, therefore, then it should suffice to generate epistemic doubt rather than merely confirm non-epistemic doubt, and a rethinking of epistemic circularity will be in order. I will begin by discussing Jonathan Vogel's and Michael Huemer's views on why bootstrapping is objectionable, using as a foil the view that we should bite the bullet on bootstrapping because the alternative entails skepticism. Then I will argue that W(NI-J) is the fundamental defect in bootstrapping arguments.

B.1: Jonathan Vogel and Michael Huemer on Bootstrapping, and Bullet Biting

Vogel problematizes bootstrapping by using the example of Roxanne.¹¹⁰ She has no beliefs about how much gas is in the tank of her car, nor about whether her car's gas gauge is reliable. Assume that her gas gauge and her perceptual faculty, SP, are both reliable because they output beliefs that are *safe*: in the set of close possible worlds in which (i) the gas gauge says that p , (ii) it perceptually appears to Roxanne that p , and (iii) Roxanne believes that p , p is true. Also assume that the epistemic principle Ext-W(NI-J) is true: the reliability of Roxanne's gas gauge and of SP is sufficient for justification.¹¹¹ She need not discharge this principle to believe justifiedly that p .

¹¹⁰ Vogel (2008: 518-19; 2000: 611-14). Vogel attributes an incipient version of this argument to Michael Williams (1991). Fumerton (1995) is also widely credited with a version of it. In Vogel's reliabilist formulation of this argument, which I am giving here, Vogel uses knowledge rather than justification, since he restricts justification to evidentialist (and, in his telling, therefore internalist) epistemic theories. Since I have been using justification more broadly to denote defeasible positive epistemic status in general, I will continue using this term here.

¹¹¹ Ext-W(NI-J): S's belief that p is an output of a reliable belief source \rightarrow S J(B)

Roxanne now undertakes the following procedure. When looking at the gas gauge she forms a belief about how much gas is in her car's tank and she forms a belief about the gas gauge itself. So if the gauge reads 'F' then Roxanne believes <her gas tank is full> and <the gas gauge reads F>. She then reasons in a familiar way:

Roxanne's Bootstrapping Argument

1. At t_1 , the gauge reads 'F' (Perception via Ext-W[Ni-J])
2. At t_1 , the gas tank is F (Gas Gauge via Ext-W[Ni-J])
3. 'F' and F (Conjunction from 1, 2)
4. At t_1 , the gauge is reading accurately (Deduction from 3)
5. Repeat (1)-(4) x times
6. Therefore, the gas gauge reads accurately every time (Deduction from 5)
7. Therefore, the gas gauge is reliable (Induction from 6)

Like the Track-Record and Crystal Ball arguments in the previous section, Roxanne's argument is epistemically circular: her justification to believe (2) presupposes that the argument's conclusion, (7), is true. But it differs from these arguments in two ways. First, Roxanne does not offer it in a dialectical context—Bergmann's 'question-doubting' context—involving a skeptic who already doubts the argument's conclusion. So any problems with this argument must involve Roxanne's epistemic standing alone. Second, the modal concept of reliability in the operative epistemic principle, Ext-W(Ni-J), is interpreted in terms of Safety rather than Sensitivity. So the possibility that Roxanne's epistemically circular reasoning would lead her to believe falsely that her gas gauge is reliable is not epistemically relevant. I will use the term 'bootstrapping' to mark these two distinct features of Roxanne's epistemically circular reasoning.

The burden of the Bootstrapping Argument against epistemic circularity is to generate epistemic doubt. So what is wrong with Roxanne's bootstrapping such that we have good reason to reject it? Vogel maintains that bootstrapping is licensed by what I am calling undischarged epistemic principles, such as Ext-W(NI-J), that state conditions for non-inferential justification, and that bootstrapping is problematic because in conjunction with such principles it too easily gives Roxanne higher-order justification to believe her gas gauge is reliable:

[An epistemic principle like Ext-W(NI-J)] would allow someone who forms a belief by a reliable process to [justifiedly believe] trivially, by bootstrapping, that her belief was formed by a reliable process. But the [justification] in question is not at all trivial, and a person can certainly form a belief by a reliable process without knowing that she did so. [Ext-W(NI-J)] errs by attributing [justification] to subjects who lack it.¹¹²

Vogel rightly observes a tension between the apparent triviality of Roxanne's bootstrapping and the substance of her conclusion that her gas gauge is reliable. There is a clear sense that she too easily earns justification to believe her gauge is reliable, and therefore that epistemic principles such as Ext-W(NI-J) are too permissive because they do not prohibit such bootstrapping. But, like others, Vogel gives no detailed argument *why* bootstrapping is objectionable, focusing instead on *where* in the argument the defect arises. So it seems that for Vogel just observing this tension in Roxanne's bootstrapping argument suffices to generate epistemic doubt about epistemic circularity.¹¹³

The problem with stopping the dialectic here, however, is that some argue bootstrapping is acceptable because the alternative entails skepticism, and it is difficult to

¹¹² Vogel (2008: 518). The large number of amendments in this passage owe to the fact that I am translating many parts of Vogel's nomenclature into my own.

¹¹³ Indeed, this is perhaps the most common response in the literature on bootstrapping. For a contrary perspective, however, see Kornblith (2009).

weigh the price of biting this bullet without a more detailed argument showing why bootstrapping is problematic.¹¹⁴ So, to this end, consider Michael Huemer's argument that bootstrapping arguments like Roxanne's fail because they do not increase the probability their conclusions are true:¹¹⁵

Huemer's No Bootstrapping Argument

1. If J can be a legitimate source of justification for believing P, then it can be rational to raise one's credence in P as a result of one's acquiring J
2. It cannot be rational to raise one's credence in the proposition that M is reliable (e.g. that Roxanne's gas gauge is reliable), as a result of one's acquiring a bootstrapping argument [J] for that conclusion
3. Therefore, a bootstrapping argument cannot be a legitimate source of justification for believing its conclusion

Huemer says (1) is plausibly analytic because it is incoherent to maintain that J is a source of S's justification to believe that *p*, and yet that S would be irrational to raise his credence in P because of J.¹¹⁶ So in his view the substantial premise is (2). Following his example, assume S estimates there is a 90% chance her sense perception (SP) is reliable. She then takes herself to see her hand, and on this basis bootstraps her estimate to 95%. According to Huemer, no such output of a belief source can increase S's credence in the reliability of that same belief source. The crux of his contention appears to be that a legitimate source of justification must satisfy an independence condition.

¹¹⁴ Van Cleve (2003).

¹¹⁵ Huemer (2011: 12-15). Huemer calls these 'track-record arguments,' but for reasons I mentioned above I am calling them bootstrapping arguments. I borrow the structure and enumeration of this argument from Huemer, but I've adapted some of its terms to fit the context of my discussion.

¹¹⁶ In Chapter 3 I will argue that an ambiguity in this premise entails it might be false.

But this condition is difficult to spell out. One proposal is that J epistemically supports S's belief that p only if J's support of p does not depend on S already believing p .¹¹⁷ But we need an account of why J's epistemic support depends on S's epistemically prior doxastic state, especially since the Bootstrapping Argument aims to challenge epistemic circularity without appealing to a quasi-doxastic state like skeptical doubt. So another proposal, which gets closer to Huemer's concern but remains rough, says that J epistemically supports S's belief that p only if J's support is informative for S.¹¹⁸ Consider that Roxanne can determine, *without* actually bootstrapping, that if she were to find that her gas gauge reads 'F', then her gas gauge is reliable. The reason is that her putative justification to believe the premises of bootstrapping arguments is *not* independent of the truth of these arguments' conclusions. So any bootstrapping argument licensed by an undischarged epistemic principle, like Ext-W(NI-J), seems preordained to transmit justification to its conclusion, just because justification to believe its premises presupposes that conclusion. But if Roxanne can determine the results of bootstrapping that p without actually bootstrapping that p , then bootstrapping that p is not genuinely informative.

If this second proposal is roughly right, then Huemer's contention that bootstrapping arguments do not increase the probability their conclusions are true is grounded in an independence condition that these arguments, by their very structure, cannot satisfy. S's

¹¹⁷ This explains how Huemer avoids the objection that, if S's evidence base is not a single output of SP, but rather a *set of propositions* that are the contents of *multiple* outputs, then the coherence of this set can rationally increase S's credence. Huemer's view is that in this scenario what I have called an independence condition is satisfied, because the coherence of the set, rather than the belief source alone, is part of S's evidence base. In other words, in Huemer's view this objection works because it avoids epistemic circularity. See Huemer (2011: 15).

¹¹⁸ Cohen (2010: 143).

estimate that there is a 90% chance SP is reliable should therefore remain fixed, and Huemer's conclusion that bootstrapping is illegitimate follows deductively.

This leaves bullet biters, who believe we avoid skepticism only by accepting bootstrapping, with two choices. They can deny either one of Huemer's premises, or that they must bite a bullet at all. But only the former option is viable. Bootstrapping arguments are necessarily epistemically circular or they are not. When they are not necessarily epistemically circular, this is because the belief source whose reliability is in question is *not* basic: it is possible to verify its reliability independently by appealing to outputs of another belief source. In these cases, bootstrapping problems are solved by not bootstrapping. There is no bullet to bite. But this is not the whole story. Some bootstrapping arguments are *necessarily* epistemically circular because the belief source in question is basic. And in these cases, I suggest, bullet biters must go further and *deny* one of Huemer's premises because accepting bootstrapping *tout court*, on pain of skepticism, is an untenable halfway house.

To see this, consider that Huemer's No Bootstrapping Argument entails *higher-order* skepticism: we cannot have justified beliefs about the epistemic credentials of our basic belief sources.¹¹⁹ The reason is that, if bootstrapping is vicious, then beliefs about any basic belief source whose reliability can be ascertained only via bootstrapping are epistemically out of bounds. But this price is too high for bullet biters. For higher-order skepticism violates what Huemer calls the Metacoherence Requirement:

¹¹⁹ Huemer does not accept higher-order skepticism, however. He does think bootstrapping arguments fail, but also thinks there is another and better way to satisfy MCR.

Metacoherence Requirement (MCR): Categorically believing that P commits one, on reflection, to the view that one knows that P.¹²⁰

Assume that S believes that p and then reflects on whether he knows or justifiedly believes that p . Three responses are logically possible: affirm, deny, or withhold. MCR says S must affirm because denying and withholding evince irrationality: S would be endorsing the Moore-paradoxical claim that \langle I believe that p , but I do not know or justifiably believe that $p\rangle$. So to avoid this epistemic akrasia, MCR imposes a coherence requirement that governs related lower- and higher-order beliefs. But bullet biters violate this requirement. By accepting bootstrapping *tout court*, without rejecting at least one premise of Huemer's No Bootstrapping Argument, they divorce lower- and higher-order justification and, by MCR, collapse their skeptical halfway house into wholesale irrationality.

B.2: Identifying the Defect in Bootstrapping: W(NI-J)

I think we draw three conclusions from this analysis of Vogel and Huemer on bootstrapping. First, as Huemer's No Bootstrapping Argument shows, the appearance of spinning one's gears when bootstrapping is well-founded: these arguments are objectionable because they are not genuinely informative. This tells us *why* bootstrapping is objectionable. But it does not tell us *where* in bootstrapping arguments the defect is found. We can home in on this by considering the two other conclusions. One is that the bootstrapping problem must be solved rather than countenanced—the defect must be ferreted out and corrected, not accepted. The reason, again, is that biting the bullet is too thin: whatever this strategy saves by avoiding skepticism

¹²⁰ Huemer (2011: 2). Huemer spends time unpacking the terms 'categorical belief', 'commitment', and 'on reflection'. His qualifications are important but in interest of brevity I will overlook them. See his discussion in the preceding citation. I should also be clear that Huemer does not use MCR as an objection to bullet biting on epistemic circularity and bootstrapping. This is my application of MCR.

it pays with the irrationality of violating MCR. So there is no promising halfway house when responding to bootstrapping. The other conclusion is that solving this problem must balance two competing demands. On one hand, as Vogel rightly observes, bootstrapping is intuitively objectionable because it too easily gives us higher-order justification, a claim Huemer substantiates with an independence condition on legitimate sources of justification, which bootstrapping arguments clearly violate. On the other hand, as MCR shows, higher-order justification cannot be too hard. Otherwise we risk epistemic akrasia. So solving the bootstrapping problem really requires a correct account of the relationship between lower- and higher-order justification.

If this hypothesis is right, then it points to where the defect in bootstrapping arguments should be found: in a premise or an inference that is in some way related to the distinction between lower- and higher-order justification. Continuing to use Roxanne's bootstrapping argument as an example, I am going to argue that the offending thesis is $W(NI-J)$, which in Roxanne's reasoning takes the form of the epistemic principle $Ext-W(NI-J)$ and licenses her justification to believe the first two premises.¹²¹ Specifically, I think $W(NI-J)$ is *too* weak because, when a belief source is basic such that bootstrapping is unavoidable, an epistemic principle that can be satisfied without being discharged allows Roxanne to bootstrap trivially to a higher-order belief that *does* discharge that principle. Contrast this with an epistemic principle that is satisfied if and only if it is discharged, as $S(NI-J)$ stipulates. It blocks Roxanne's bootstrapping from the start. For discharging such a principle entails that Roxanne could not justifiedly believe her first premise, that her gas gauge reads 'F', without already

¹²¹ $Ext-W(NI-J)$: S 's belief that p is an output of a reliable belief source $\rightarrow S J(B)$

having some kind of epistemic entitlement to the belief that her gas gauge is reliable.¹²² So there is no new knowledge or justification for her to bootstrap to. If this is right, we come closer to the insight that a proper understanding of bootstrapping and, ultimately, epistemic circularity requires that we re-evaluate the role higher-order ascent plays in first-order requirements theorists' attempts to discharge epistemic principles.

B.3: Rollback and Bootstrapping

We can identify W(NI-J) as the fundamental defect in Roxanne's Bootstrapping Argument by considering what Vogel calls *rollback*.¹²³ Rollback describes the logical consequences of rejecting Roxanne's bootstrapped conclusion that her gas gauge is reliable. To illustrate these consequences, I have presented her argument in reverse order. The emboldened lines between premises state conditionals that would be sufficient to block Roxanne's justification to believe the conclusion (7) and, with the exception of Rollback 5, to stop rollback at the premise directly below, thus retaining her justification to believe it.

Roxanne's Bootstrapping Argument (Rollback)

7. Therefore, the gas gauge is reliable (Induction from 6)

Rollback 1: $\sim(6 \rightarrow 7) \rightarrow$ Inductive Defeater

6. Therefore, the gas gauge reads accurately every time (Deduction from 5)

Rollback 2: $\sim(5 \rightarrow 6) \rightarrow \sim$ Closure

¹²² Two points are important. First, I am hedging with 'some antecedent entitlement' because I do not believe that S(NI-J) is coherent if we assume discharging an epistemic principle requires justified belief and possessing esoteric concepts like 'higher-order justification'. I will develop this view in Chapter 4. Second, using Roxanne's bootstrapping as our example in this pending argument is potentially misleading. Her gas gauge is *not* a basic belief source because its outputs could be independently verified (e.g. by going to a mechanic). So I do not believe that S(NI-J) is in fact a condition on Roxanne's gas gauge use. But because she is used as a case study in most of the bootstrapping literature, I will follow suit. I believe my argument that W(NI-J) is the source of her illicit bootstrapping can still be clearly communicated.

¹²³ Vogel (2008: 532).

5. Repeat (1)-(4) x times

4. At t_1 , the gauge is reading accurately (Deduction from 3)

Rollback 3: $\sim(3 \rightarrow 4) \rightarrow \sim\text{Closure}$

3. 'F' and F (Conjunction from 1, 2)

Rollback 4: $\sim([1 \ \& \ 2] \rightarrow 3) \rightarrow \sim\text{Closure}$

2. At t_1 , the gas tank is F (Gas Gauge via Ext-W[Ni-J])

1. At t_1 , the gauge reads 'F' (Perception via Ext-W[Ni-J])

Rollback 5: $\sim(1 \vee 2) \rightarrow \sim\text{Ext-W(Ni-J)}$

Rollback 1 says that blocking the inference from (6) to (7) requires finding an inductive defeater for Roxanne's reasoning, allowing her to retain justification for (5) on down. Rollback 2-4 block inferences from (2) to (3), (3) to (4) and (4) to (5), respectively. Each requires rejecting closure, but allows Roxanne to retain justification for her first two premises, (1) and (2). Rollback 5 blocks her justification to believe (1) and (2), but at the cost of rejecting Ext-W(Ni-J), the epistemic principle that says reliability is sufficient for justification, and that is an instance of W(Ni-J) more generally. So there are three logical junctures where Roxanne's bootstrapping can be arrested: induction failure (Rollback 1), closure failure (Rollback 2-4), and non-inferential justification failure (Rollback 5).

My position that W(Ni-J) is the fundamental defect in Roxanne's Bootstrapping Argument commits me to defending Rollback 5.¹²⁴ The literature on diagnosing the defect in bootstrapping arguments is too complex to discuss fully here. So I will adopt the following

¹²⁴ It is worth noting that Rollback 5 is taken by those who believe bootstrapping is arrested by a more rigorous understanding of 'reliability', or of reliabilism as an epistemic theory. In broad strokes, the strategy is to formulate a version of Ext-W(Ni-J) that entails Roxanne does *not* have justification to believe one or more premises of her bootstrapping argument. See Becker (2013); Douven and Kelp (2011); Kallestrup (2009; 2012); and Kornblith (2009) for a variety of examples. I am taking a different route by rejecting W(Ni-J) in general.

strategy. I assume that closure failure should be resisted at almost all costs.¹²⁵ So Rollback 2-4 are not live options. This leaves Rollback 1 and 5. I will first argue that Vogel's defense of Rollback 1 entails Rollback 5. Then I will argue that Jonathan Weisberg's defense of Rollback 1 entails Rollback 2-4. But because I reject closure failure, by contraposition I reject Weisberg's defense of Rollback 1, leaving Rollback 5 as the only option. These arguments are not conclusive, since other defenses of Rollback 1 are possible. But I think they provide strong evidence that $W(NI-J)$ is the fundamental defect in bootstrapping arguments.

Argument 1: Vogel's Defense of Rollback 1 via 'NRC' Entails Rollback 5

Rollback 1 aims to capitalize on the fact that defeating the final, inductive inference in bootstrapping arguments avoids closure failure and retains the arguments' operative epistemic principle. So it promises a lower-cost solution to the bootstrapping problem. The challenge is finding a defeater that stops at Rollback 1 and that is germane only to inductive inferences in bootstrapping arguments. Otherwise Rollback 1 entails inductive skepticism writ large, which is scarcely preferable to forfeiting closure.

Vogel argues that defending Rollback 1 is necessary only for *some* bootstrapping arguments. These are arguments for which, unlike Roxanne, whose justification is purportedly earned in virtue of satisfying $Ext-W(NI-J)$, an externalist-reliabilist epistemic principle, S has *evidence* to believe the premises. Vogel wants to retain justification to believe some p on the basis of evidence because he believes Roxanne's bootstrapping argument fails precisely

¹²⁵ This is contentious, of course. See Cohen (2002) for an argument that bootstrapping can be corrected by restricting closure to certain kinds of knowledge, though he later revises his position (see Cohen 2010). Another way to address bootstrapping is by rejecting Safety in favour of Sensitivity, since Sensitivity entails closure is false. But this just returns us to the Indiscrimination Argument.

because she has no evidence: her justification to believe her first two premises, (1) and (2), is supposedly earned solely in virtue of the fact that her gas gauge and sense perception are, by hypothesis, reliable. Vogel defends this diagnosis of Roxanne's error by considering Catherine, who uses evidence from a dipstick to confirm independently how much gas is in her tank:¹²⁶

Catherine's Dipstick Argument:

1. At t_1 , the gauge reads 'F' (Gas Gauge)
2. At t_2 , the dipstick reads 'F' (Independent Evidence)
3. Gauge reads 'F' and dipstick reads 'F' (Conjunction from 1, 2)
4. The gauge is reading accurately (Deduction from 3)
5. Repeat (1)-(4) x times
6. Therefore, the gas gauge reads accurately every time (Deduction from 5)
7. Therefore, the gas gauge is reliable (Induction from 6)

Catherine's argument seems unimpeachable. But the only difference from Roxanne's is that in (2) Catherine avers to her dipstick for independent evidence of her gauge's reliability, allowing her to avoid epistemic circularity. Vogel concludes that Roxanne's bootstrapping argument fails at Rollback 5: she has no justification to believe her first two premises because the epistemic principle Ext-W(NI-J) is too permissive, denying as it does the role Vogel thinks evidence properly plays in justification, and permitting as it does epistemic circularity. Bootstrapping appears to be a liability of externalism alone.

So why does Vogel later go on to argue that *other* bootstrapping arguments fail at Rollback 1, the final, inductive defeater step?¹²⁷ The reason is that, in response to Vogel's argument that bootstrapping afflicts only externalism, Cohen argues bootstrapping is a liability

¹²⁶ Vogel (2000: 616-617).

¹²⁷ See Vogel (2008) for his revised position. His initial discussion of Roxanne's bootstrapping procedure is in his (2000).

of *any* epistemic theory, externalist or internalist, that endorses W(NI-J).¹²⁸ So if Cohen's argument is sound, Rollback 1 is Vogel's only option if he believes evidentialism is true, wants to retain closure, but does not accept bootstrapping.

To appreciate Cohen's argument, recall the internalist-evidentialist epistemic principle I introduced in §3.3:

Int-W(NI-J): S's belief that p is based on evidence e and e reliably indicates that $p \rightarrow$ S Int-W(NI-J)

Though evidentialism arguably makes this principle stronger than Ext-W(NI-J), it too is an instance of weak non-inferential justification. S can justifiedly believe that p on the basis of e , and can therefore be aware of e , even though it is an open question for S whether e reliably indicates that p . So it is enough that S's belief that p satisfies the antecedent of Int-W(NI-J); S need not be aware of *this* fact. If Vogel is right that bootstrapping is a liability of externalism alone, then Int-W(NI-J) *cannot* be the conclusion of a bootstrapping argument. But Cohen demonstrates just the opposite:

Evidentialist Bootstrapping Argument:

1. At t_1 , the table looks red (Introspection via Int-W[NI-J])
2. At t_1 , the table is red (Sense Perception via Int-W[NI-J])
3. The table looks red and the table is red (Conjunction from 1,2)
4. At t_1 , the epistemic principle Int-W(NI-J) delivers an accurate result (Deduction from 3)
5. Repeat (1)-(4) x times
6. Therefore, Int-W(NI-J) consistently delivers an accurate result (Deduction from 5)
7. Therefore, Int-W(NI-J) is reliable (Induction from 6)

¹²⁸ Cohen (2002; 2005; 2010). 'Weak non-inferential justification' is my term, however. Cohen uses the term basic knowledge.

This epistemically circular bootstrapping argument is formally identical to Roxanne's, and its conclusion is equally dubious. The only difference is that justification to believe its premises is licensed by an evidentialist rather than reliabilist epistemic principle. This strongly suggests that the defect in bootstrapping arguments is more fundamental than the distinction between externalism and internalism. Anyone, externalists and internalists alike, who endorses W(NI-J) is confronted with this problem.

In response, Vogel looks for a way to preserve weak non-inferential justification to believe, on the basis of evidence rather than reliability, the premises of a bootstrapping argument like this evidentialist one, while still blocking justification to believe its conclusion. He proposes that these evidentialist arguments do not bootstrap to their conclusions because they violate No Rule Circularity:

No Rule Circularity (NRC): A belief that an epistemic rule R is reliable cannot be justified by the application of R. That is, neither the conclusion itself nor any belief which supports the conclusion may be justified in virtue of the application of R.¹²⁹

Like me, Vogel takes 'epistemic rules' and 'epistemic principles' to be synonymous. Epistemic rules are conditionals that state necessary or sufficient conditions for justification, and NRC says these rules cannot be justified by their own application. NRC is therefore really a defeater for epistemically circular arguments in general, and for bootstrapping arguments in particular. So it satisfies the crucial condition that inductive inferences only in epistemically circular arguments are defeated.

¹²⁹ Vogel (2008: 531). NRC is similar to No Self-Support (NSS), Fumerton's principle banning epistemic circularity that I discussed above in the Indiscrimination Argument. Though Vogel thinks NRC is appropriately weaker (Vogel 2008: 531-532).

Vogel proposes that NRC defeats the Evidentialist Bootstrapping Argument at Rollback 1.¹³⁰ His thinking appears to be that the conclusion that Int-W(NI-J) is reliable is defeated because it is inductively inferred partly from two premises, (1) and (2), whose justification is earned in virtue of Int-W(NI-J), contra NRC. But, as Cohen argues, it is difficult to understand why Vogel believes NRC stops at Rollback 1.¹³¹ In fact, it seems quite clear that NRC bites off more than just this final, inductive inference. Consider again what the defeater says: neither (i) the *conclusion* itself (ii) *any belief* which supports the conclusion may be justified in virtue of the application of R.¹³² Vogel's view that the Evidentialist Bootstrapping Argument fails at Rollback 1 focuses on clause (i). But clause (ii) of NRC quite clearly defeats the argument further upstream: justification to believe its first two premises, (1) and (2), is licensed by the epistemic principle Int-W(NI-J) ('R'). So rule circularity actually enters the argument at the very beginning. Vogel could omit (ii) from NRC and focus on defeating only epistemically circular inferences to the *conclusions* of arguments. But, as Cohen observes, this would be *ad hoc*: if NRC prevents us from using a rule to establish its own reliability, then certainly it prevents us from using a rule to establish its own accurate track record too.¹³³

So there is good reason to believe that Vogel's diagnosis of the defect in bootstrapping arguments is too narrow. Looking to defend the superiority of evidentialism over reliabilism, he wants to preserve justification to believe premises (1)-(6) of a bootstrapping argument, and this requires stemming bootstrapping at Rollback 1. But NRC, his proposed inductive defeater, is too strong. If it defeats justification to infer (7) from (6), then it also defeats

¹³⁰ Vogel (2008: 531).

¹³¹ I borrow this argument from Cohen (2010: 145-146), though I have adapted it to my discussion here.

¹³² Italics and enumeration mine.

¹³³ Cohen (2010: 146).

justification to believe (1) and (2). But this justification for (1) and (2) is licensed by Int-W(NI-J). So this epistemic principle, as an instance of W(NI-J) more generally, is plausibly the fundamental defect in bootstrapping arguments.

Argument 2: Weisberg's Defense of Rollback 1 via 'No Feedback' Entails Rollback 5

To bolster my position that W(NI-J) is the fundamental defect in bootstrapping arguments, I want to consider a final argument for Rollback 1. Like Vogel, Weisberg argues that bootstrapping arguments fail at Rollback 1 because they exhibit flawed inductive reasoning. But Weisberg's proposed inductive defeater causes problems for the closure principle, and since I believe the price of forfeiting closure is too steep, I think for this reason his account should be rejected.

The crux of Weisberg's position is that bootstrapping arguments suffer inductive defeat because they mistakenly assume probabilistic support is transitive.¹³⁴ A support relation is transitive if and only if, if A supports B, and B supports C, then A supports C. But probabilistic support relations are *intransitive*: sometimes A (probabilistically) supports B, B supports C, but A does not support C. To borrow Weisberg's example, Canadian citizens (A) likely live in North America (B), people living in North America are likely American citizens (C), but Canadian citizens are likely not American citizens.¹³⁵ Probabilistic support relations are also *cumulatively* intransitive: sometimes A supports B, (A & B) support C, but A does not support C. Borrowing again from Weisberg, someone who scores high on a test (A) is probably competent with the material (B), and someone who scores high on a test and is probably

¹³⁴ Weisberg (2010: 533-537; 2012: 603).

¹³⁵ Weisberg (2012: 603).

competent with the material (A & B) likely did not cheat (C). But scoring high on a test (A) does not alone support that someone did not cheat (C).

Weisberg argues that Roxanne's Bootstrapping Argument assumes that probabilistic support *is* cumulatively transitive, however. Have another look at her argument, with the premises in the supposed transitive relation highlighted:

Roxanne's Bootstrapping Argument

1. At t_1 , the gauge reads 'F' (Perception via Ext-W[Ni-J]) **A**
2. At t_1 , the gas tank is F (Gas Gauge via Ext-W[Ni-J]) **B**
3. 'F' and F (Conjunction from 1, 2) **A & B**
4. At t_1 , the gauge is reading accurately (Deduction from 3)
5. Repeat (1)-(4) x times
6. Therefore, the gas gauge reads accurately every time (Deduction from 5)
7. Therefore, the gas gauge is reliable (Induction from 6) **C**

Weisberg calls B a *lemma* because it is inferred as a sub-conclusion from A, a premise that reports the gauge's reading. His objection that Roxanne's argument assumes probabilistic support is cumulatively transitive amounts to the following claim: the premise reporting the reading of the gas gauge (A), in conjunction with the lemma inferring that the tank is full (A & B), licenses, after a sufficient number of As and Bs, the inductive inference that the gauge is reliable (C). However, A alone does not probabilistically support C. The mere fact that a gauge reads 'F' has no epistemic bearing on its reliability.¹³⁶ So Roxanne's argument succeeds *only if* she assumes that a sufficient number of conjunctions of A and B probabilistically support C. But this is to assume probabilistic support is cumulatively transitive when it is not.

¹³⁶ Remember that, by hypothesis, Roxanne has *no* background knowledge about the gas gauge or her car. So, for example, she does not know whether the car might be brand new, such that she has reason to believe the gauge's readings are accurate.

Formalizing this idea, Weisberg says that Roxanne's Bootstrapping Argument suffers a defeater he calls No Feedback:¹³⁷

No Feedback: If (i) $L_1 - L_m$ are inferred from $P_1 - P_m$, and (ii) C is inferred from $L_1 - L_m$ (and possibly some of $P_1 - P_m$) by an argument whose justificatory power depends on making C at least x probable, and (iii) $P_1 - P_m$ do not make C x probable without the help of $L_1 - L_m$, then the argument for C is defeated.

No Feedback says that, because cumulative transitivity is false, the epistemic value of an argument's conclusion cannot exceed the epistemic value of its premises. But since Roxanne's premises 'A' do not alone support her conclusion, to generate this support she inputs the lemmas 'B' back into her premise-pool and derives the conjunction (A & B). But this illicitly amplifies the probabilistic value of the original, unaugmented premise set, causing 'epistemic feedback'. No Feedback blocks this distortion by limiting the probability of C to what is conferred by the premise-set A alone, as cumulative intransitivity requires. The upshot is that Roxanne's argument is defeated at Rollback 1, the final, inductive inference.

Weisberg's argument is ingenious when applied to inductive reasoning like Roxanne's. It also avoids inductive skepticism because it applies to epistemically circular arguments alone. But, as he himself observes, it might conflict with closure.¹³⁸ The conflict arises when we consider arguments that have a slightly different structure than Roxanne's: A inductively supports B , and B entails C .

To see this, first consider that, as Weisberg notes, probabilistic support also does not obey *cumulative transmission*: it is possible that A probabilistically supports B , that B entails C , but

¹³⁷ Weisberg (2010: 533-534).

¹³⁸ Weisberg (2010: 542). Cohen (2010: 148-149) raises this objection as well and takes it to be decisive against No Feedback.

that A does *not* increase the probability of C. When combined with No Feedback, for example, the falsity of cumulative transmission easily handles arguments that strike many as curious:¹³⁹

Moorean Dogmatism

1. It appears to me that I have hands (introspection)
2. I have hands (induction from 1)
3. Therefore, I am not a (handless) brain in a vat (entailment from 2)

(1) alone does not increase the probability that I am not a handless brain in a vat. So No Feedback says that this argument is defeated because it wrongly assumes cumulative transmission—that probabilistic support transmits across entailment. The problem, however, is that No Feedback defeats *only* the inference to the conclusion. It *allows* that S can be justified in believing (1) and (2). But (2) entails the conclusion. So No Feedback appears to violate closure.¹⁴⁰ Weisberg could restrict No Feedback to inductive arguments, like Roxanne's. But this risks being *ad hoc*, especially since No Feedback capitalizes on the intransitivity of various forms of epistemic support in general, and this includes the intransitivity of probabilistic support across entailments in particular.

This objection warrants further discussion. But I suggest it raises the spectre that No Feedback is inconsistent with closure. And since I believe closure should be retained, and therefore do not think Rollback 2-4 are live options, I think Weisberg's defense of Rollback 1 should be rejected. Only Rollback 5 remains: bootstrapping arguments are defective not because they exhibit flawed inductive reasoning; they are defective because they presuppose

¹³⁹ Weisberg (2010: 541). This is Weisberg's formulation of a Moore-style argument against skepticism. White (2006) uses the falsity of cumulative transmission as an objection to Moore-style anti-skeptical arguments.

¹⁴⁰ Weisberg (2010: 542) tentatively responds to this objection, though he notes that this issue is not fully resolved. His (2012: 604) response is less tentative, but still along the same lines as his (2010).

W(NI-J), an account of non-inferential justification that is not sufficiently strong to block bootstrapping.

Bootstrapping Argument: Upshot for Horn 1 of this Chapter's Dilemma

Bringing this back to our main argument for Horn 1, I therefore suggest premise (II.b) is true:

II.b If W(NI-J), then any epistemically circular argument permits bootstrapping

Remember I distinguished *why* bootstrapping arguments are defective from *where* the defect in the arguments is located.¹⁴¹ Premise (II.b) answers where the defect is located: in an account of non-inferential justification that is too weak. My support for this premise involved defending Rollback 5 against Vogel's and Weisberg's defenses of Rollback 1. Though this argument is not conclusive, I do believe it gives good evidence that, so long as we choose to retain closure and therefore cannot accept Rollback 2-4, W(NI-J) is the root of the bootstrapping problem.

Premise (III.b), by contrast, now answers *how* we should respond to bootstrapping arguments. It says that we have good epistemic reason to doubt their conclusions, and therefore that they are defeated:

III.b If (II.b), then S should take reliance on W(NI-J) to be epistemically inappropriate (violation of condition [d] *No Defeaters*)

I supported this premise with two claims. One, as Vogel and others recognize, bootstrapping arguments appear suspiciously trivial or vacuous. And two, as Huemer's No Bootstrapping Argument shows, their triviality is explained by the fact that they are not genuinely informative. The upshot for Horn 1 of the dilemma for epistemic circularity, therefore, is that

¹⁴¹ See p. 23.

bootstrapping arguments should be rejected because they necessarily presuppose $W(NI-J)$, a flawed account of non-inferential justification.

3.4 Chapter Summary and Upshot

To tie together the many strands of this chapter's argument, let's review the argument for Horn 1:

Horn 1: The Indiscrimination and Bootstrapping Problems for Epistemically Circular Arguments

- I Assume a weak account of non-inferential justification $W(NI-J)$ (interpretation of condition [a] *Foundationalism*)
- II If $W(NI-J)$, then any epistemically circular argument, EC-A, either (a) does not discriminate for S between reliable and unreliable belief sources, or (b) permits bootstrapping for S
- III If (II), then either (a) S does take, or (b) epistemically should come to take, S's reliance on $W(NI-J)$ to be epistemically inappropriate (violation of condition [d] *No Defeaters*)
- IV On $W(NI-J)$, EC-A violates condition (d) (from III)
- V Therefore, EC-A does not transmit justification from its premises to its conclusion (from IV)
- VI Therefore, on $W(NI-J)$ epistemically circular arguments are vicious (from V)

I have argued for this argument's substantive premises, (I)-(III). Though we have seen that the Indiscrimination and Bootstrapping Arguments against epistemic circularity, stated in premise (II), have many different features, they turn on one fundamental issue: how the foundationalism requirement in Bergmann's Success Conditions for Arguments is understood. If foundationalism is understood in terms of a commitment to weak non-inferential justification, then the indiscrimination and bootstrapping problems are unavoidable. The indiscrimination problem is unavoidable because $W(NI-J)$ licenses epistemically circular arguments that can be deployed to support the reliability of dubious belief sources, like crystal

ball gazing. And the bootstrapping problem is unavoidable because W(NI-J) does not make it a condition for justification that one satisfy *and* discharge an epistemic principle, making it possible to bootstrap to higher-order claims about these very principles.

This leaves strong non-inferential justification as the alternative. Very roughly, the promise is that S(NI-J) can defuse the indiscrimination and bootstrapping problems by making some epistemically circular arguments redundant. For the requirement that an epistemic principle must be satisfied and discharged *closes the question* from S's perspective about whether that argument's conclusion is true. However, everything depends on how S(NI-J) and this notion of 'discharging' an epistemic principle is understood. For if discharging an epistemic principle requires inference and evidence, this proposed solution to the problem of epistemic circularity collapses into a problem of logical circularity. This is Horn 2 of the dilemma facing inferential epistemic circularity. I now turn to it in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: The Dilemma for Inferential Epistemic Circularity - Horn 2

4.0 Introduction

Chapter 3 brought us into the weeds of the debate about epistemic circularity. I want to begin this chapter getting out of them. Our discussion has taken place within a dialectical framing of this debate. This framing says epistemic circularity arises when we ask EC-Questions and attempt to answer them through higher-order ascent to epistemically circular arguments. The view that epistemic circularity is a property exclusively of such arguments I call inferential epistemic circularity, and I have argued it follows from Alston's commitment to Reliability, an undischarged generative epistemic principle. In Chapter 1, as a foil to suspicions about epistemic circularity, I introduced a view that finds it unproblematic. Espoused by first-order requirements theorists and cutting across the internalist/externalist divide, this view says it is enough for epistemic justification that one's belief satisfies the condition(s) in a true epistemic principle; one need not also ascertain this fact. In my vernacular, it is enough to satisfy an epistemic principle; one need not also discharge it. But this undischarged epistemic remainder leaves a gap that EC-Questions look to fill, and first-order requirements theorists owe an account of how they would answer these questions. Their so-called simple response says the epistemically circular arguments given in response to these questions are benign because justified belief in their premises needs to satisfy the same epistemic requirements for justified belief in the premises of any argument. In other words, though answering EC-Questions involves higher-order ascent to epistemically circular arguments, these arguments are just vehicles for discharging epistemic principles; nothing else hangs on them.

So far in this dissertation I have challenged this view. In Chapter I presented the Dilemma for Higher-Order Ascent to raise suspicion that this story—and the role higher-

order ascent plays in it—is more problematic than it appears. And in Chapter 2, when discussing Alston’s canonical account of epistemic circularity, I argued that this dilemma challenges him as well. But it was not until Chapter 3 that I dug into the details of the problem of inferential epistemic circularity, and this took me away from this first dilemma into a second that I called the Dilemma for Inferential Epistemic Circularity. The idea is that this second dilemma arises whenever one tries to go between the horns of the Dilemma for Higher-Order Ascent. I now want to lay out a more formal rendition of this dissertation’s argument so far, and then connect it to my argument in this chapter.

4.1 Argument Recap and Motivating Horn 2

Recall the Dilemma for Higher-Order Ascent:

Dilemma for Higher-Order Ascent:

Assumption: discharging an epistemic principle requires higher-order ascent (*from first-order requirements theory*)

Consequence: the epistemic requirements on higher-order beliefs must be distinct from those on lower-order beliefs, otherwise we cannot explain the difference between satisfying an epistemic principle on one level and discharging it on another

Horn 1: (Consequence) \rightarrow higher-order beliefs are more epistemically secure than first-order beliefs, but this is implausible

Horn 2: \sim (Consequence) \rightarrow higher-order ascent and the distinction between epistemic levels no longer does clear philosophical work, in which case the first-order requirements theory is problematic

I am arguing that any attempt to accept Assumption and go between Horns 1 and 2 leads to the Dilemma for Inferential Epistemic Circularity. In Chapter 3 I focused on this dilemma’s first horn, which says weak non-inferential justification [W(NI-J)], a formal rendition of what first-order requirements theorists espouse, runs epistemically circular arguments into the indiscrimination or bootstrapping problems:

I. $W(\text{NI-J}) \rightarrow \text{Indiscrimination} \vee \text{Bootstrapping}$ (Horn 1)

Drawing from Bergmann's Success Conditions for Arguments, I then argued these problems cause epistemically circular arguments to violate the No Defeaters condition:

II. $\text{Indiscrimination} \vee \text{Bootstrapping} \rightarrow \text{Violation of condition (d) No Defeaters}$

Cutting out the middle term, we get:

III. $W(\text{NI-J}) \rightarrow \text{Violation of (d) No Defeaters}$ (I, II)

And since epistemic defeat is undesirable, we can say via contraposition:

IV. $\sim(\text{Violation of (d) No Defeaters}) \rightarrow \sim W(\text{NI-J})$ (III)

So Horn 1 of the Dilemma for Inferential Epistemic Circularity says first-order requirements theorists' simple response to EC-Questions is untenable because it leads to the indiscrimination or bootstrapping problems and thus to defeat for epistemically circular arguments. The lesson is that this particular attempt to go between the horns of the Dilemma for Higher-Order Ascent fails, and that we must therefore reject $W(\text{NI-J})$.

This dissertation's positive proposal is what I will argue we should put in $W(\text{NI-J})$'s place. Given my commitment to some connection between epistemic circularity and non-inferential justification, it is natural to keep looking for this candidate in the 'NI-J' neighbourhood. And since the argument in Chapter 3 says $W(\text{NI-J})$ is defective, it is also natural to look for ways to strengthen it. Very schematically, I propose:

V. $\sim W(\text{NI-J}) \rightarrow S(\text{NI-J})$

Remember a belief is $W(\text{NI-J})$ if and only if it satisfies a generative epistemic principle without also discharging it; and a belief is $S(\text{NI-J})$ if and only if it cannot satisfy a generative epistemic principle unless it discharges it. These definitions clarify (V). But they do not motivate it. Something needs to be said about why $S(\text{NI-J})$ promises a solution to the indiscrimination and

bootstrapping problems arising from W(NI-J). We want to know why satisfying *and* discharging an epistemic principle entails epistemically circular arguments are appropriately discriminate and informative.¹⁴²

In §3.3.2.B I sketched what I think this story looks like for the indiscrimination problem. I will now tie in the bootstrapping problem. The indiscrimination problem again says that, on W(NI-J), epistemically circular arguments that a belief source is reliable do not reliably distinguish for S between reliable and unreliable belief sources. The bootstrapping problem says that, on W(NI-J), epistemically circular arguments too easily give S higher-order justification to believe his belief sources are reliable. The assumption underlying both problems is that, for S, epistemically circular arguments *can* record an appropriately asymmetric structure of justification: S can have justification to believe these arguments' premises without already having justification to believe their conclusions.

Satisfying and discharging an epistemic principle precludes this. If an argument is *necessarily* epistemically circular because its conclusion states a *basic* belief source is reliable, and if the reliability of this basic belief source is a condition in a true epistemic principle, then satisfying this epistemic principle if and only if it is also discharged entails that S can *justifiedly* believe this argument's premises only if he has some epistemic *entitlement* to its conclusion. There is nothing to discriminate between and nothing to bootstrap to. S(NI-J) therefore promises to make the indiscrimination and bootstrapping problems otiose because it rejects the assumption underlying W(NI-J) that justified belief in the conclusions of epistemically circular arguments is epistemically posterior to justified belief in their premises.

¹⁴² Remember that in §3.3.2.B I argued, borrowing from Huemer, that bootstrapping is vicious because it is not a genuinely informative method of reasoning.

The details underlying this move are important. My switch from ‘justification’ to ‘entitlement’ foreshadows some of them. I do not believe our epistemic relation to the *conclusions* of epistemically circular arguments can be given the same analysis as our epistemic relation to their *premises*. That is, I do not think these beliefs have the same *kinds of justifiers*. This is because I think these beliefs are of essentially different *kinds of things*—namely, epistemic grounds and epistemic sources—and that these different things warrant different epistemic treatments. But I have said very little about what grounds and sources are, never mind about what they have to do with epistemic circularity and non-inferential justification. So right now the term ‘entitlement’ is a placeholder. To understand rather than merely label the epistemic relation it denotes, I need to answer finally a critical question: what is it not just to satisfy but also discharge an epistemic principle?

4.2 Chapter Plan

I am going to defend a negative and a positive answer to this question. My negative answer is the focus of this chapter. My positive answer will be the focus of the next chapter. The negative answer is that discharging an epistemic principle cannot require *evidence* (grounds) that figures as one or more premises in an epistemically circular argument because this falls prey to Horn 2 of the dilemma facing inferential epistemic circularity:

VI. (S[NI-J] \rightarrow Evidence) \rightarrow Violation of (c) Cogency (Horn 2)

This says if evidence is necessary for S(NI-J) then epistemically circular arguments are incogent: justification to believe their premises is *not* epistemically prior to—that is, *not* earned independently of—justification to believe their conclusions. So if ‘S(NI-J) \rightarrow Evidence’, then epistemically circular arguments beg the question because they *cannot* exhibit an asymmetric

structure of justification: their premises are not epistemically prior to their conclusions (\sim Priority), and therefore justification to believe their conclusions does not properly depend on their premises (\sim Dependence).¹⁴³

This argument for (VI) will conclude the Dilemma for Inferential Epistemic Circularity. Any attempt to bypass the first dilemma I canvassed in Chapter 1, the Dilemma for Higher-Order Ascent, by maintaining that conditions for justification are constant across levels while denying each of this dilemma's horns cannot succeed: if the conditions for non-inferential justification are too weak [W(NI-J)], these arguments are indiscriminate and permit trivial bootstrapping (Horn 1); if fixing these problems requires using evidence to strengthen W(NI-J) into S(NI-J), these arguments beg the question (Horn 2). The upshot will be that any attempt to use inferential epistemic circularity to bypass the Dilemma for Higher-Order Ascent fails.

4.3 Premise (VI): (S[NI-J] \rightarrow Evidence) \rightarrow Violation of (c) Cogency (Horn 2)

Recall condition (c) from Bergmann's Success Conditions for Arguments:

- (e) Justification transfers from an argument's premises to its conclusion when (i) S relies on a legitimate form of reasoning to infer that conclusion, which is then (ii) believed on that basis and (iii) for the first time (*Cogency*)¹⁴⁴

The phrasing of this condition is ambiguous because it is not clear whether (i)-(iii) are necessary or sufficient for the transmission of justification. But because condition (c) is one of Bergmann's four conditions for a successful argument, it is plausible to assume conditions

¹⁴³ I discussed these theses in §2.4 and §2.7.

¹⁴⁴ §3.1

(a)-(d) are individually necessary and jointly sufficient.¹⁴⁵ So I will reformulate (c) to state explicitly a necessary condition:

- (c) If justification transfers from an argument's premises to its conclusion, then (i) S relies on a legitimate form of reasoning to infer that conclusion; (ii) S believes this conclusion on the basis of these same premises; and (iii) S believes this conclusion on this basis for the first time

The key clause in (c) is (iii). Satisfying it ensures justification transfers through an argument in the *one* right direction, *from* its premises *to* its conclusion.¹⁴⁶ It is this clause I am going to argue epistemically circular arguments violate if S(NI-J) requires evidence, as premise (VI) says. So consider this more precise formulation of (VI) that homes in on our target. For S at *t*, and for the conclusion C of any necessarily epistemically circular argument EC-A with premises $P_1 \dots P_n$.

- VI. $(S[\text{NI-J}] \rightarrow \text{Evidence}) \rightarrow \sim(S \text{ believes } C \text{ of EC-A on the basis of } P_1 \dots P_n \text{ for the first time})$

This says if S(NI-J) requires evidence, then for *any* epistemically circular argument EC-A with conclusion C and premises $P_1 \dots P_n$, it is *false* for S at *t* that he believes C on the basis of $P_1 \dots P_n$ for the first time. Stating this consequent without the negation: for S at *t*, S must already believe C if he believes $P_1 \dots P_n$. The result is that the requirement to discharge an epistemic principle on the basis of evidence used as premises in an epistemically circular argument collapses this argument into *logical* circularity—sooner or later, we are forced to use C illicitly to justify $P_1 \dots P_n$.

¹⁴⁵ At risk of being too persnickety, matters are more subtle. A careful read of Bergmann's conditions suggests they are recursive: each condition except the first incorporates the one prior as a sub-clause. For example, (c) incorporates condition (b) in sub-clause (i). However, since (c) is the third of Bergmann's four conditions, it will still be just necessary: condition (d), No Defeaters, remains unstated. So I think I am still on solid grounding reformulating condition (c) as necessary rather than sufficient.

¹⁴⁶ Recall that in §2.4 I used Schmitt's independence requirement on arguments to derive the claim that premises must be epistemically prior to conclusions. This argument could be marshalled again to defend (c.iii).

Before discussing what it means to say evidence is necessary for S(NI-J), I want to address a worry this is moot because S(NI-J) is implausibly over-intellectualized. Compare it to W(NI-J), the view that it is enough for non-inferential justification to satisfy a condition in a true epistemic principle, even if one does not know one does. W(NI-J) satisfies numerous desiderata for a plausible theory of non-inferential justification, among them: it can explain perceptual justification without being unduly intellectualistic; it can be satisfied by a variety of cognitive subjects; and it does not require these subjects to possess concepts like ‘epistemic principle’ and ‘justification’. ‘S(NI-J) \rightarrow Evidence’ enjoys arguably none of these advantages. It provides no obvious explanation of perceptual justification that would not be over-intellectualized; it cannot be satisfied by a variety of cognitive subjects, for reasons I will get to momentarily; and it appears to require subjects to possess the aforementioned concepts, since otherwise it is unclear how they would know or justifiedly believe their beliefs satisfy a condition in a true epistemic principle.

So why am I taking S(NI-J) seriously? There are two reasons. First, when formulated as part of the conditional ‘S(NI-J) \rightarrow Evidence’, I am considering S(NI-J) only as part of a negative proposal: I think it shows us the limits of the role evidence plays in S(NI-J). Second, this negative proposal narrows logical space for my positive proposal that an adequate account of non-inferential justification—one that, among other things, avoids the problems above—requires taking seriously the role epistemic sources play in S(NI-J). So, as we proceed, my argument for Horn 2 of the dilemma facing inferential epistemic circularity will strain the concept of non-inferential justification, perhaps implausibly so. But I think this shows something in ‘S(NI-J) \rightarrow Evidence’ needs to be fixed.

4.3.1 Antecedent of (VI): S(NI-J) \rightarrow Evidence

Let us begin by interpreting premise (VI)'s antecedent. We know S(NI-J) says an epistemic principle is satisfied if and only if it is discharged; we also know, from Chapter 1, that discharging an epistemic principle requires 'taking into account' any epistemic remainder that a first-order requirements theory denies need be taken into account for first-order justification. For the externalist, this epistemic remainder might be the preferred external condition on justification itself, like reliability or proper function. For the internalist, it might be the absence of defeaters or of reflective access to the fact that one's belief satisfies an applicable condition for justification.¹⁴⁷ But whatever the specific ingredient, as a condition for justification it will figure in an epistemic principle that S(NI-J) says must be discharged.

What then does it mean to say S must take this epistemic remainder 'into account' to discharge the operative epistemic principle? It is tempting to analyze 'S takes epistemic remainder x into account' in terms of 'S is aware of x '. But this would entail externalists cannot discharge epistemic principles—and answer EC-Questions—without endorsing internalism. As it turns out, I think this is right. But this analysis, largely stipulative so far, does not show why. We need an analysis of S discharging an epistemic principle by 'taking epistemic remainder x into account' that is more ecumenical. Otherwise we are begging the question against externalists.

I propose this is found in the concept of *evidence* in the antecedent of (VI). Showing this will require a few steps. First, I will introduce the concept of an *epistemic role* that I will use

¹⁴⁷ See Fumerton (2006) for the argument that some internalists impose higher-order requirements to defuse the threat of defeaters. He argues that BonJour (1985) endorses this view, and this is supported by a common interpretation of BonJour's clairvoyance counterexample to reliabilist externalism. Also see Pryor (2004).

to distinguish epistemic grounds (evidence) and epistemic sources as justifiers with essentially different functions in a noetic structure. Then, borrowing from Jack Lyons, I will provide an account of epistemic grounds followed by an argument that this account entails a thesis I call ‘Evidence and Reasoning’, which roughly says a justifier is evidential for S only if it is eligible to function for S as a premise in reasoning. After explaining why this account of evidence is ecumenical for internalists and externalists alike, I will circle back and conclude my argument for Horn 2 with a defense of premise (VI): if S(NI-J) requires evidence, then epistemically circular arguments are incogent.

4.3.2 Different Epistemic Roles: Grounds and Sources

Call anything in a noetic structure that bears on the justificatory status of a belief a *justifier*. A justifier will be positive or negative depending on whether it contributes to or defeats this status.¹⁴⁸ But we can focus on only positive justifiers to draw a distinction between the different *epistemic roles* grounds and sources play in a noetic structure. Epistemic ‘role’ does not denote that these different justifiers lead to different ‘justifications’—epistemic justification is a single property of a belief. It denotes that they contribute to the same justification in a different way, that they make essentially different *kinds* of contributions. Different kinds of justifiers have different functions, in other words.

Consider a familiar regress argument for this distinction.¹⁴⁹ Assume you believe that q on the basis of your beliefs that p and *if p then q* . This regress argument says we must draw a

¹⁴⁸ Lyons (2009: 21).

¹⁴⁹ In broad outline this regress argument is made by Lewis Carroll (1895). The gloss in terms of ‘epistemic roles’ is my own. For a good discussion of Carroll’s regress, see Besson (2018).

distinction between the kind of contribution the *propositions* $\langle p \rangle$ and $\langle \text{if } p \text{ then } q \rangle$ make to your justification to believe q , and the kind of contribution the *inference rule* $[(P \text{ and } P \rightarrow Q) \rightarrow Q]$ makes to this justification. We might say you reason *from* $\langle p \rangle$ and $\langle \text{if } p \text{ then } q \rangle$ as premises, but that you reason *with* $[(P \text{ and } P \rightarrow Q) \rightarrow Q]$ as an inference rule; or that you reason on the *basis* of $\langle p \rangle$ and $\langle \text{if } p \text{ then } q \rangle$ but *by means of* $[(P \text{ and } P \rightarrow Q) \rightarrow Q]$. For if we do not draw some such distinction an absurdity results. If you reason *from* the propositions $\langle p \rangle$, $\langle \text{if } p \text{ then } q \rangle$ and *from* the inference rule $\langle [(P \text{ and } P \rightarrow Q) \rightarrow Q] \rangle$ as *premises*, then necessarily you are still reasoning *with* an inference rule that takes these premises as arguments. For consistency we will then have to insist this inference rule is also a premise, and this requires us to introduce a second act of reasoning that takes *that* inference rule as a premise, and so on. The absurdity is that, without a distinction between the kinds of contributions different justifiers make to the justification of a belief, reasoning is impossible. So we must allow that justifiers play essentially different epistemic roles in a noetic structure.

Premises and inference rules are not the only justifiers that can assume different epistemic roles, however. Other justifiers can assume them too. So we want an account of the difference between these roles that is fundamental enough to explain how different justifiers assume them. Jack Lyons' account of this distinction in terms of epistemic grounds and epistemic sources—which he also respectively calls evidential and non-evidential justifiers—allows us to do this. It aims to explain the difference between these two basic epistemic roles such that any justifiers assuming them can be analyzed as grounds or as sources of justification. Right now I am concerned with grounds of justification. I will discuss sources later.

4.3.3 Grounds: One Epistemic Role Justifiers Assume

Lyons calls anything on which a belief is *based* its *ground* or *evidential justifier*. Disagreement about the nature of the basing relation is widespread. But the general idea is straightforward. Consider a negative example first. If I justifiedly believe that p and *if p then q* , but then believe that q because my horoscope says that q , my belief that q is not based on my *doxastic grounds* that p and *if p then q* . It is propositionally justified but not doxastically justified: I possess evidence in the form of my beliefs that p and *if p then q* to *justifiably* believe that q , but I have not connected my belief to this evidence in the right way to *justifiedly* believe that q . A basing relation can obtain also between a belief and a *non-doxastic ground*. Consider a positive example. If I am appeared to φ 'ly and believe something φ is nearby because I am appeared to φ 'ly, then this belief is based on this non-doxastic appearance.¹⁵⁰ I do not believe something φ is nearby because I *believe* something nearby appears to me φ 'ly; I believe it because something nearby appears to me φ 'ly. So, very roughly, a basing relation obtains for S between an evidential ground and a belief B whenever that ground is S's reason for B, and this ground can be doxastic or non-doxastic.

Any justifier that is a candidate basis for a belief can therefore assume the epistemic role of an evidential ground. Perceptual seemings, extra-mental facts, states of affairs, experiences, sense data and propositions are all *prima facie* evidential justifiers because they are all *prima facie* bases for a belief's justification. They promise to contribute to a belief's justification in the same way—evidentially. This confirms that the epistemic role of a ground is a functional notion: it describes the *kind* of contribution candidate evidential justifiers make to a belief when they are that belief's basis for justification. In other words, this epistemic role

¹⁵⁰ I loosely borrow this example from Lyons (2009: 68). Though he does not use it as an example of basing but as an example of what he calls experientialism about epistemic justification.

is agnostic about what these evidential justifiers must actually be, so long as they can stand in a basing relation with beliefs. To place evidential grounds in the larger discussion about epistemic reasons, consider that Kurt Sylvan calls them *operative epistemic reasons*: putatively normative or justifying reasons that are also the reasons *for which* S believes some *q*, that is, the reasons *on which* S's beliefs that *q* are *based*.¹⁵¹

Lyons maintains that a basing relation between a justifier and a belief makes that justifier *evidential*—that is, a ground—because he thinks an evidential justifier must be something one takes ‘into account’, and that basing is necessary and sufficient for this to occur. After all, if I base my belief that *q* on my horoscope rather than on my beliefs that *p* and *if p then q*, there is a sense of ‘taking into account’ that says I have taken *only* my horoscope into account. My beliefs that *p* and *if p then q* have been ‘overlooked’.¹⁵² This implies an awareness or access condition on basing: I base my belief that *q* on my belief that *p* only if I am aware or believe that *p* is a reason to believe *q*. But this presents a problem for interpreting ‘S(NI-J) → Evidence’ in a way that is ecumenical for internalists and externalists, since the account of evidence in this conditional would be internalist. As a result, my argument for Horn 2, that

¹⁵¹ In meta-ethics an operative reason is typically referred to as a *motivating* reason. See Sylvan (2016) for discussion. Compare this to an *explanatory* epistemic reason: I might believe that *p* on the basis of the motivating reason that *q*, but in fact my belief that *p* is explained by a strong bias towards *p* *regardless* of whether *q*. In other words, I am deceived about my own reasons; I am rationalizing that *p*. Lyons’ focus on motivating epistemic reasons does not mean he thinks explanatory reasons do not exist. It strikes me that he just does not think they are evidential justifiers, and therefore they do not have a necessary role in a theory of justification.

¹⁵² Lyons (2009: 22). Lyons notes that this account of an evidential justifier is controversial. His critical assumption is that evidence is positively relevant to a belief B only if B is based on that evidence. But it might be objected that this overlooks the evidential significance of propositional justification. It is also worth noting that Lyons takes the notions of an epistemic *ground* and an epistemic *reason* to be interchangeable. Since grounds are evidence, his account therefore rules out non-evidential epistemic *reasons*. For him there are only non-evidential *justifiers*. I will be using his terminology. Likewise, I will be using the terms ‘ground’ and ‘evidential justifier’ interchangeably.

‘S(NI-J) \rightarrow Evidence’ entails epistemically circular arguments are incogent, would not ensnare externalists because they would reject this account of discharging an epistemic principle.

But Lyons *denies* taking evidential grounds ‘into account’ entails internalism: “For something to be the ground of a belief, it must be the sort of thing that the believer can take into account. This is not a statement of internalism but merely an indication of how I’m using the term ‘ground’.”¹⁵³ Putting aside his implication that this issue is semantic, which I do not believe Lyons intends, a battery of arguments can be marshaled that the basing relation—and, by extension, Lyons’ notion of an evidential ground—does not entail internalism. The dispute turns on how to analyze the ‘because of’ relation that obtains for S between a ground and a belief when that belief is based on that ground as an evidential reason. There are causal, counterfactual, causal-doxastic and purely doxastic theories, all with their issues.¹⁵⁴ I cannot get into these theories and their problems here. But the basing relation very likely involves at least a causal condition that is inconsistent with strict internalism—the view that there are *no* external conditions on basing. Otherwise over-intellectualization and regress objections arise. To illustrate just the former: if I must believe *p* is my reason to believe that *q* to base my belief that *q* on my belief that *p*, then I must possess the concepts of ‘reason’ and ‘belief’; but this spells trouble for some subjects, like young children, who typically do not possess these concepts but certainly believe on the basis of reasons.¹⁵⁵ So taking an evidential ground ‘into account’ in virtue of basing a belief on that justifier does not entail internalism about evidential

¹⁵³ Lyons (2009: 23).

¹⁵⁴ See Korcz (2010) for a good summary of these theories and their problems. The main challenge to causal theories is deviant causal objections; the main challenge to doxastic theories is the charge that they are over-intellectualized; and causal-doxastic theories try to shoot up the middle. For a defense of the causal interpretation, see Turri (2011). For a defense of the causal-doxastic theory, see Korcz (2000).

¹⁵⁵ Korcz (2010).

grounds. Instead, as I will argue in the next section, it entails this evidential justifier's eligibility to be a premise for reasoning, and this eligibility is agnostic about internalism and externalism.

4.3.4 Evidence and Reasoning

To fill out Lyons' claim that we take evidential grounds 'into account' when basing our beliefs on them, I am going to add to his discussion of evidential grounds a modal condition that ties evidential grounds to reasoning. The basic idea is that taking evidential grounds 'into account' involves their eligibility to enter the logical space of reasons. I adumbrated this modal condition on evidence in §2.7 when I discussed some consequences of Alston's commitment to Inferentiality, which says believing a belief source is a reliable requires inference. I am now going to tighten it up.

Lyons says taking evidential grounds 'into account' via the basing relation does not entail internalism. But this does not tell us what it does entail. I propose two necessary conditions:

Evidence and Reasoning (ER): if E is S's evidential ground for q because S believes that q on the basis of E, then (i) E can be a premise on whose basis S validly infers that q , and (ii) *ceteris paribus* S will have some degree justification to believe that q on the basis of E in virtue of this valid inference.

ER says a necessary condition of E being S's evidential ground for q is that (i) it can be a premise in a well-formed inference to q that (ii) will be justifying, save defeaters.¹⁵⁶ I am referring to this evidential ground as 'E' rather than as proposition ' p ' because I am including in ER doxastic and non-doxastic evidential grounds. The antecedent of ER says E is an

¹⁵⁶ This condition is inspired by what Nishi Shah (2006) calls a *deliberative constraint* on reasons for belief and action: R is a reason for which X φ 's only if it is possible for X to treat R in favour of φ 'ing in X's deliberation. Shah credits an incipient version of the deliberative constraint to Williams (1981).

evidential ground because a basing relation obtains between E and S's belief that q , and the modal condition tying evidence to reasoning is stated with the phrase 'can be a premise' in clause (i) of ER's consequent. If ER is controversial, this is likely for two reasons. First, it might be thought clause (i) is either too permissive or too restrictive about what evidence is, depending on one's views about the ontology of evidence. Second, it might be thought clause (ii) is too strong because it rules out bad evidence. I will take each objection in turn. But first I want to say more about ER, because this will help defang these objections.

Start with the observation that ER gets *something* right about the connection between evidence and reasoning because it is more plausible than its negation, \sim ER:

\sim ER: E is S's evidential ground for q , and E cannot be a premise on whose basis S validly infers that q .¹⁵⁷

\sim ER would be extremely strange if true. S would have evidence E to believe that q , would base his belief that q on E, but would not be able to validly infer q from E. Put another way: \sim ER says there is no necessary connection between (i) S having an evidential ground on the basis of which he believes that q and (ii) S being able to use this evidential ground as a premise in a valid form of reasoning when deliberating about whether to believe that q . This strikes me as not only wrong but possibly incoherent. For one, S's inability to use an evidential ground in doxastic deliberation suggests this ground is *not* S's operative epistemic reason: S would believe for a reason but would be unable to use this reason to deliberate about what to believe. If \sim ER is true, therefore, we cannot analyze evidential grounds in terms of operative epistemic reasons, at least if these reasons presuppose a subject's ability to use them in doxastic

¹⁵⁷ ER's consequent is a conjunction, so for brevity it is enough in this negation to list just the first conjunct, which if true makes the second conjunct otiose anyways.

deliberation. For another, \sim ER violates the dictum that there is a necessary connection between reasons and guidance: borrowing loosely from Nishi Shah, agents are not passive bystanders watching their reasons operate on them causally; they are able to guide reasons through the process of deliberation. So ER is more plausible than its negation because it recognizes evidential justifiers should be eligible as bases for doxastic deliberation.

The modal ‘can be a premise’ in ER therefore picks up on *some* connection between evidence and reasoning. But everything depends on how strong it is. I maintain that S satisfies this condition just in case it would be psychologically possible, in ordinary circumstances, for him to use his evidence E to infer validly that *q*. Again, S need not actually make this inference. It is enough that he could make it. I am therefore constraining this modal condition with facts about standard human psychology.¹⁵⁸ Linguistically competent and cognitively standard subjects in ordinary circumstances are the targets of ER. I am therefore also biting the bullet on objections to ER citing non-standard subjects: if young child is not fluently lingual and is thereby less capable of inference and reasoning, I maintain that the evidence available to him is accordingly limited. This does not entail these young children do not possess evidence. It entails their grasp of evidence is constrained by their ability to use it inferentially.¹⁵⁹

So ER states a plausible modal connection between evidence and reasoning that is grounded in facts about standard human psychology. This helps defang the objections. The first objection, recall, targets clause (i) as either too restrictive or too permissive about what evidence is. It is too permissive if it identifies as evidence things that are not evidence, yielding

¹⁵⁸ Shah (2006: 485) uses facts about psychology to constrain the modal condition in his deliberative constraint on reasons, as well.

¹⁵⁹ ‘Use it inferentially’ can be interpreted quite broadly. For example, if a pre-lingual child points to a toy when asked what he likes, this ostension counts as inferential: the child understands that the toy stands in an inferential relation to his desires. It is not just an object to him, but a reason.

false positives. For example, even if ER does not equate them, it runs evidence and propositions (premises) closely together, fertilizing the soil for accounts that identify the two. This then raises a worry ER is equivocal. Propositions typically comprise the *contents* of our thoughts and only occasionally their *objects*: we typically think with rather than about them. Short of an account of why propositions rather than their objects are still our evidence proper, therefore, it is reasonable to worry ER fails to distinguish them. On the other hand, clause (i) is too restrictive if it would not identify as evidence things that are evidence, yielding false negatives. For example, one might hold the strong view that only facts and fact-complexes like states of affairs are evidence, and worry that ER cannot accommodate this because only propositions are eligible to function as premises in inferences—a process that necessarily involves linguistic representations. One can reply that this worry is misplaced because ER can be interpreted to say true propositions are just representations of extra-mental facts.¹⁶⁰ But this threatens to make ER even more restrictive, since now justification on the basis of evidence will be factive, a sizable bullet to bite.¹⁶¹

Both these objections assume the modal connection ER stipulates between evidence and reasoning impacts the *ontology* of evidence—whether it consists in facts, propositions, mental states, and so on. But ER is agnostic about the ontology of evidence. Assume this is false: ER entails that, say, only propositions are evidence. The problem is that this trivializes debates about the ontology of evidence. For I have argued that denying the modal connection in ER by endorsing \sim ER is clearly less plausible than the alternative, if not incoherent. So if ER *entails* only propositions—or some other ground—are evidence, then ontological

¹⁶⁰ Though of course we would then want to know what false propositions are of.

¹⁶¹ And it has been bitten—and then digested into a full-length, rigorously argued book. See Littlejohn (2012).

dissidents are not just wrong but confused: they do not understand the modal connection between evidence and reasoning. This is implausible. The better interpretation of ER, I suggest, allows that satisfying the modal condition connecting evidence and reasoning can involve a process of representing evidence propositionally. So nothing in ER commits us to the view that evidence is propositional all the way down—though it is broad enough to allow for propositionalism about evidence, if desired. Either way, ER is consistent with a variety of ontologies of evidence.

The second objection to ER targets clause (ii), which again says that, if *S were* to validly infer *q* from his evidence *E*, all else being equal *S* would have some degree of justification to believe that *q* in virtue of this inference. The worry is that this does not distinguish accurate and misleading evidence. So long as *S* would be able to validly infer *q* from *E*, *E* is evidence for *q*. I think this is fine. First, I am persuaded by New Evil Demon objections to varieties of externalism that capitalize on the intuition that, even in the demon world where external conditions for justification are unmet, a subject has justified beliefs.¹⁶² The reason is that, by hypothesis, in this demon world the subject's illusory experiences are indistinguishable from his veridical experiences. So rejecting this intuition seems to require vanquishing experience of its justificatory import, which is a tall order.¹⁶³ Second, returning to the actual world, assume *S* satisfies the modal requirement in ER because he is linguistically competent. It is then highly plausible that most of *S*'s beliefs—even some that are false—will be part of a systematic network of supporting beliefs. This rationalizes ER because it reduces the chance that *S*'s

¹⁶² Cohen (1984).

¹⁶³ A disjunctivist analysis of perceptual experience might be offered here. But then the problem of bad evidence is moot, since a disjunctivist would deny that demon world evidence is the same in kind as actual world evidence.

evidence for q will be not only misleading but, worse, irrational. So not only do I reject this objection's assumption that evidence is justificatory only if it is accurate, I deny that misleading evidence is a major concern in the first place.

4.3.5 ER for Internalists and Externalists

I have argued ER is true because there is a necessary modal connection between S possessing evidence and S being able to use this evidence in reasoning. The upshot is that this modal connection makes sense of Lyons' claim that evidential grounds are 'taken into account' when we believe on their basis: if S believes that p on the basis of evidence E, then S has taken E 'into account' because it is eligible to function for him as a premise in a valid argument for some q . Along the way, I have resisted the conclusion that this account of evidential grounds is *not* ecumenical for externalists and internalists, for I am trying to secure an interpretation of 'S(NI-J) \rightarrow Evidence' that will satisfy partisans on both sides. But one might wonder whether I have succeeded. Assume S satisfies 'S(NI-J) \rightarrow Evidence' and has fulfilled the modal condition on evidence with an actual argument that C based on premises $P_1 \dots P_n$ that are his evidential grounds. In what sense is S *unaware* of his evidence such that an externalist can endorse this interpretation of 'S(NI-J) \rightarrow Evidence'?

The answer is that ER allows S to be unaware of his evidence because, again, it does not entail his evidence is identical to the premises $P_1 \dots P_n$ of which we will assume he is aware. As I have argued, the modal condition in ER requires only that S be able to represent his evidence propositionally if he uses it in inference. ER does not *identify* S's evidence with $P_1 \dots P_n$. An observation about ER confirms this distinction is principled. ER is agnostic about the justification condition in clause (ii) of its consequent: it does not say what the conditions for

justification are, allowing for externalist and internalist analyses alike. Assume this condition is given an externalist analysis that says $P_1 \dots P_n$ are S's evidence for C because their truth reliability indicates that C, or because they are part of a conditionally reliable process of inferring C.¹⁶⁴ Neither of these facts can be determined through reflection alone. So if S is aware of his premises, he is not *ipso facto* aware of his evidence. ER therefore fails to be ecumenical only if we identify an argument's premises with evidence, and nothing in ER requires this.

4.3.6 Consequent of (VI): $\sim(S \text{ believes } C \text{ of EC-A on the basis of } P_1 \dots P_n \text{ for the first time})$ ¹⁶⁵

Before defending the consequent of premise (VI) and concluding this argument for Horn 2, I want to incorporate this discussion of ER into (VI)'s antecedent. Premise (VI) says S(NI-J) requires evidence, and I have argued ER states a necessary condition on evidence. So instead of 'S(NI-J) \rightarrow Evidence', we can say via hypothetical syllogism:

Antecedent of (6): S(NI-J) \rightarrow ER.

The difference is that ER makes it explicit in (VI) that discharging an epistemic principle by 'taking into account' any given epistemic remainder requires evidence that can figure as one or more premises in a well-formed argument. I am now going to use this modal condition on evidence in my argument for the consequent of (VI).

¹⁶⁴ The first example is a loose formulation of Alston's (1988) reliable indicator theory of evidence, and the second of Goldman's (2008) reliable process theory of inference. See Lyons (2009: 62-68; 167-174) for a good discussion of externalist and internalist theories of evidence.

¹⁶⁵ I borrow the thrust of this argument from Alston (1986). But he argues for the same conclusion from a different direction.

S(NI-J) says S has non-inferential justification if and only if he satisfies and discharges a true epistemic principle. Consider this externalist, undischarged generative epistemic principle from §3.3.1:

Ext-W(NI-J): S's belief that p is an output of a reliable belief source $X \rightarrow$ S Ext-W(NI-J)

This principle is externalist because whether S's belief that p is an output of a reliable belief source is not only introspectively inaccessible, but this access is also not a condition for satisfying this antecedent in the first place. It is enough that S's belief that p is an output of a reliable belief source. So Ext-W(NI-J) is an epistemic principle whose externalism alone entails it is undischarged. Assume S wants to discharge it. This means he wants to ascertain that his belief that p is an output of a reliable belief source X . Call this S's belief that q . Having suffered the noetic catacombs and dialectical sinews of Chapter 3, S justifiably believes W(NI-J) and the epistemically circular arguments it yields are not the way to discharge epistemic principles. So he looks to S(NI-J) instead.

On the current proposal, discharging an epistemic principle requires evidence: S(NI-J) \rightarrow ER. Drawing from our discussion of evidential grounds, we know this evidence will be doxastic or non-doxastic. If it is non-doxastic because, say, it takes the form of S being appeared to φ 'ly, then S's justification to believe that q can be non-inferential; if the evidence is doxastic, then S's justification to believe that q must be inferential.¹⁶⁶ However, the content of Ext-W(NI-J)'s antecedent precludes S from using non-doxastic evidential grounds to

¹⁶⁶ A sufficient condition for valid inference is a mental transition between semantically related propositions. (I suspect this is not necessary because I am allowing for ostension to count as an inference. See fn. 20.) So unless one is a conceptualist about the contents of experience, a non-doxastic evidential ground can be a basis for inferential *or* non-inferential justification. It is more difficult to establish the necessary connection between doxastic grounds and inferential justification. But I suspect it exists because, unless beliefs can be self-justifying, justifiably believing that q on the basis of doxastic ground that p will require an inference from p to q .

discharge this principle. For not only is the reliability of a belief source introspectively inaccessible, I argued in §2.4 that Reliability, which says the reliability of a belief source is at least necessary for justification, entails Inferentiality, that justifiedly believing a belief source is reliable requires inference. So to discharge this epistemic principle S needs doxastic grounds figuring as premises in an argument whose conclusion states S's belief that p is an output of a reliable belief source.¹⁶⁷

So assume S has an argument A with premises $P_1 \dots P_n$ and conclusion C, and C's content says <S's belief B is an output of a reliable belief source X>. Condition (c) of Bergmann's Success Conditions for Arguments says S must believe C on the basis of $P_1 \dots P_n$ for the first time—he cannot justify $P_1 \dots P_n$ on the basis of C because this runs the argument the wrong way. The question then is where S finds $P_1 \dots P_n$. The answer is they must be outputs of this same belief source, X. This is because in §2.6 I argued for a necessary connection between generative epistemic principles like Ext-W(NI-J) and Basicity, the view that a belief source is basic if and only if it is impossible to determine its reliability without epistemic circularity. So S's argument A must be an epistemically circular argument, EC-A.

But now EC-A collapses into logical circularity. Consider: S has an epistemically circular argument EC-A with premises $P_1 \dots P_n$ and a conclusion C, and this argument is epistemically circular because $P_1 \dots P_n$ are outputs of a basic belief source, X. Now, I argued in §2.4 that to justifiedly believe *any* C on the basis of *any* $P_1 \dots P_n$, this justification to believe $P_1 \dots P_n$ must be epistemically prior to this justification to believe C (Priority). However, S(NI-

¹⁶⁷ In §4.3 I said that on S(NI-J) the account of non-inferential justification I will be arguing against is strained. This juncture of the argument is where the strain starts becoming evident, as the pool of non-inferentially justified beliefs has now been restricted to higher-order beliefs taking the form of premises used to justify epistemic principles.

J) says S has justification to believe $P_1 \dots P_n$ if and only if he satisfies and discharges the operative epistemic principle Ext-W(NI-J). And the content of this principle's antecedent is *identical* to C, the conclusion of S's epistemically circular argument. So S has justification to believe $P_1 \dots P_n$ if and only if he already has justification to believe C. His argument EC-A is successful, in other words, if and only if it is logically circular: to justifiedly believe its premises S must already justifiedly believe its conclusion. Expressing this in terms of premise (VI): $[S(\text{NI-J}) \rightarrow \text{ER}] \rightarrow \sim(\text{S believes C of EC-A on the basis of } P_1 \dots P_n \text{ for the first time})$.

It might be objected that this argument capitalizes on an epistemic principle that is *a posteriori*. Whether a belief source is reliable is an empirical matter the determination of which requires inference (Inferentiality), and without inference this argument for premise (VI) collapses: S need not defer to an argument, epistemically circular or otherwise, to discharge the operative epistemic principle, and therefore (VI) is false because its consequent does not obtain. But, the objection continues, not all epistemic principles are *a posteriori*. Consider this broadly Cartesian generative epistemic principle:

Int-W(NI-J): if S clearly and distinctly perceives that $p \rightarrow$ S Int-W(NI-J)¹⁶⁸

This epistemic principle is generative because it spells out a condition for non-inferential justification; it is internalist because clear and distinct perception that p entails awareness that p ; and it is plausibly *a priori* so long as this means S does not need empirical premises to confirm its antecedent. If a story can be told about how Int-W(NI-J) is successfully discharged along the lines of ' $S(\text{NI-J}) \rightarrow \text{ER}$ ', internalists can ride off into the noetic sunset.

¹⁶⁸ I say 'broadly' Cartesian because unless I am mistaken Descartes' C and D Rule is a criterion of truth, not of justification.

I agree that in the final analysis it is internalists who will ride off into the noetic sunset; I disagree it will be on this horse. First, the *a priority* of an epistemic principle is not enough. Discharging this principle must also be non-inferential. Otherwise S will find himself in the same logically circular bind as his externalist predecessor. Second, this objector owes a more specific account of what discharging a principle like Int-W(NI-J)) involves. ‘S(NI-J) \rightarrow ER’ alone does not do the job. Remember this analysis of S(NI-J) says it must be *possible* to use evidential grounds in a valid, justification-conferring argument whose conclusion confirms S’s belief satisfies the relevant part of the operative epistemic principle. But it is a necessary truth about ‘S(NI-J) \rightarrow ER’ that this is *impossible* for *any* necessarily epistemically circular argument: justifiedly believing such an argument’s premises on the basis of evidential justifiers will, sooner or later, draw from antecedent justification to believe its conclusion, collapsing it into logical circularity. This strongly suggests that the root of the problem is that ‘S(NI-J) \rightarrow ER’ is wrong about how evidential justifiers bear upon our entitlement to basic epistemic principles. Given the kind of justifier evidence essentially is—that is, given its epistemic role—using evidence to ground basic epistemic principles cannot succeed.

But this objector might wonder, finally, whether I am pushing too hard on his favoured epistemic principle. If S clearly and distinctly perceives that *p*, does his satisfaction of this condition not wear itself on its sleeve, as it were? In virtue of satisfying this epistemic principle, in other words, is it not also discharged? Exactly what epistemic remainder is there for S to ‘take into account’ along the lines prescribed by *any* analysis of S(NI-J)?

I think these questions point in the right direction. But even Descartes appeared to believe the epistemic merit of clear and distinct ideas requires certification. It was not enough just to perceive clearly and distinctly that *p*—even when *p* is a truth of arithmetic. Instead,

ensuring the *lumen naturale* is reliable requires recourse to nothing less than a divine, non-deceiving Being. In my vernacular, for Descartes a generative epistemic principle is satisfied *and* discharged if and only if I know a non-deceiving God exists. *This* is what Descartes appears to believe is the ‘epistemic remainder’ in non-inferential justification! But this recourse is the genesis of the notorious Cartesian Circle, wherein Descartes allegedly relies on clear and distinct ideas to vindicate them. So even the arch-rationalist himself was entangled in epistemic circularity.

This suggests we need to rethink our treatment of S(NI-J). Not only, as I have argued, is evidence categorically ill-suited for discharging epistemic principles. This cursory discussion of Descartes suggests something deeper is wrong: we need to understand better how we came to believe that a true generative epistemic principle is not already discharged in virtue of its epistemic role in our noetic structure. In other words, we need to ask whether EC-Questions, which aim to close the putative gap between satisfied and discharged epistemic principles, betray a deeper confusion about what non-inferential justification is.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter concludes my argument that inferential epistemic circularity is vicious. This argument took the form of a dilemma I am calling the Dilemma for Inferential Epistemic Circularity. This dilemma’s first horn, the topic of Chapter 3, focused on first-order requirements theorists’ so-called simple response to EC-Questions in which they propose a weak account of non-inferential justification to discharge epistemic principles through higher-order ascent. This dilemma’s second horn focused on one attempt to strengthen this account

of non-inferential justification with evidence. W(NI-J) fails ultimately because it is too permissive about justification; S(NI-J) fails ultimately because it is too restrictive.

This argument against inferential epistemic circularity confirms we need to reexamine our starting points. Specifically, it is false that the Dilemma for Higher-Order Ascent can be bypassed. If discharging an epistemic principle requires higher-order ascent, then either higher-order epistemic beliefs are more secure than first-order beliefs (Horn 1), or the distinction between epistemic levels that higher-order ascent presupposes does not do its expected philosophical work (Horn 2). First-order requirements theorists' middle ground, where they accept higher-order ascent but deny each of these horns, fails: it is false that an epistemic condition like Reliability applies across epistemic levels such that it can be used to discharge epistemic principles with epistemically circular arguments. These theorists must either pick one of these two horns or find a different way to bypass the dilemma. In the next chapter I will defend a modified version of Horn 2.

Chapter 5: Epistemic Circularity and Non-Inferential Justification

5.0 Introduction

To situate my positive proposal I want to reconnect the dots of the major arguments I have given. Consider once again the Dilemma for Higher-Order Ascent:

Assumption: discharging an epistemic principle requires higher-order ascent (*from first-order requirements theory*)

Consequence: the epistemic requirements on higher-order beliefs must be distinct from those on lower-order beliefs, otherwise we cannot explain the difference between satisfying an epistemic principle on one level and discharging it on another

Horn 1: (Consequence) \rightarrow higher-order beliefs are more epistemically secure than first-order beliefs, but this is implausible

Horn 2: \sim (Consequence) \rightarrow higher-order ascent and the distinction between epistemic levels no longer does clear philosophical work, in which case the first-order requirements theory is problematic

We have seen that first-order requirements theorists' so-called simple response to EC-Questions attempts to run between this dilemma's horns. These theorists accept Assumption, reject Consequence, but also reject the conditional in Horn 2: even though Consequence is false, higher-order ascent *can* be used to discharge epistemic principles and therefore the distinction between epistemic levels *does* do philosophical work. I argued in Chapters 3 and 4 that this strategy fails because it runs into another dilemma, which I called the Dilemma for Inferential Epistemic Circularity: if the conditions for non-inferential justification are weak enough to satisfy first-order requirements theorists, then the epistemically circular arguments used to discharge epistemic principles through higher-order ascent are indiscriminate and permit trivial bootstrapping; if to avoid these problems these conditions are strengthened on the basis of evidence, then epistemically circular arguments beg the question. So first-order requirements theorists' attempt to sidestep the Dilemma for Higher-Order Ascent has a price of its own.

Like these theorists, I will defend an option that does not perfectly align with either horn in the Dilemma for Higher-Order Ascent. However, unlike them, I will argue epistemic circularity is not only benign but, more strongly, part of what non-inferential justification *is*. This commits me to the following positions. First, I reject Assumption. I do not believe discharging an epistemic principle requires higher-order ascent. Second, I accept in Consequence that there is a difference in kind between the epistemic requirements for satisfying an epistemic principle and those for discharging one. But, because I reject Assumption, I deny in Consequence that this difference should be construed in terms of lower- and higher-order epistemic requirements. The reason is that the *epistemic roles* of the justifiers satisfying these requirements are not a function of a difference in epistemic levels, but of a difference in the kinds of contribution each justifier makes to a non-inferentially justified belief.

These positions allow me to evaluate Horns 1 and 2 afresh. First, I can ignore Horn 1. Since I reject higher-order ascent, I sidestep the problem of higher-order beliefs being more epistemically secure than first-order beliefs. Second, I accept a truncated version of Horn 2. Though I believe that, contra Horn 2's consequent, there is a place in epistemology for a distinction between epistemic levels, I deny this distinction does the philosophical work in a theory of non-inferential justification that first-order requirements theorists expect of it. To use my jargon, the distinction between epistemic levels does no philosophical work when we are trying to understand how a generative epistemic principle is satisfied if and only if it is discharged. So I think this satisfied/discharged distinction does not map fundamentally onto a difference in epistemic levels, but onto a difference between two epistemic roles justifiers

play in a theory of non-inferential justification: the role of *grounds* in satisfying generative epistemic principles, and the role of *sources* in discharging them.

5.1 Sources: Another Epistemic Role Justifiers Assume

In §4.3.2 I said an epistemic role is a functional notion that describes essentially different kinds of contributions justifiers make to a belief's epistemic status. To motivate this idea I used a Carroll-style regress argument that focuses on an argument's premises and its inference rule as two justifiers with distinct epistemic roles: the argument's premises are evidential justifiers or *grounds*, and its inference rule is a non-evidential justifier or *source*.¹⁶⁹ Because an epistemic role is a functional notion, these examples are contingent; other justifiers can assume these very same roles. So we want an analysis of these roles fundamental enough to accommodate the variety of justifiers that can assume them. In §4.3.3 I argued, following Lyons, that the basing relation is necessary and sufficient for a justifier to be an evidential ground, and therefore that any justifier that is a *prima facie* candidate to be the basis of a belief is a *prima facie* evidential justifier. I will now explore a parallel line of argument for the epistemic role of a source of justification.

5.1.1 Sources as the Metaphysical Basis of Justification

For Lyons, a source or non-evidential justifier is *not* a reason to believe some *p* that has no bearing on whether *p* is *true*. Sometimes called 'pragmatic reasons', these putative justifiers

¹⁶⁹ I will use 'non-evidential justifier' and 'source' interchangeably.

reject alethic norms of belief and Lyons is not committed to this.¹⁷⁰ Instead, he says the distinguishing feature of non-evidential justifiers is that they constitute the *metaphysical* basis of epistemic justification rather than its *evidential* basis. Putting this another way, he says their relevance to justification is *constitutive* rather than *causal*.¹⁷¹ If the epistemic role of sources is genuine, therefore, then the justifiers that can assume it must pertain to the metaphysical basis of justification.

We can begin getting a grip on the metaphysical basis of justification by considering some examples of non-evidential justifiers and seeing what they have in common. Here is list of evidential and non-evidential justifiers, with non-evidential justifiers on the right side of each pair.¹⁷²

Evidential Justifier/Non-Evidential Justifier

- a. the fact that *p*/clarity and distinctness of S's perception that *p*
- b. S's belief that *p*/coherence of S's belief that *q* with S's other beliefs
- c. premise/inference rule

Consider (a) in an ordinary dialectical context. Assume you ask S why he believes that *p*, and he replies because of the fact that *p*. This is a standard case of citing an evidential justifier. S has given you a *non-doxastic ground* on which his belief that *p* is based. Imagine however S says he believes that *p* because he clearly and distinctly perceives that *p*. Though he still refers to the fact that *p*, S is answering a different question. He is not answering on what grounds he

¹⁷⁰ McCormick (2015) uses this sense of 'non-evidential', and I think her use is standard. But I agree with Lyons that non-evidential justification is not synonymous with pragmatic justification. The reason is that I think a justifier can be non-evidential *and* alethic if it is impossible to make it evidential by satisfying a basing relation. I will pick up on this later.

¹⁷¹ Lyons (2009: 26). Lyons says that at least in some cases evidential grounds cause beliefs. This might be contested if someone argues propositions are evidential grounds but, as abstract objects or properties of intentional states, have no causal powers.

¹⁷² These examples are largely my own, though I have adapted some of them from Lyons (2009: 24-26).

believes that p , but rather *in virtue of what* his belief that p is *non-inferentially justified*. To reinforce this difference, consider (b). Assume you ask S why he believes that q , and he says both because he believes that p and because his belief that q coheres with his other beliefs. Again, S is answering different questions. His belief that p answers a question about his *doxastic ground* for believing that q , while the fact that his belief that q coheres answers a question about that in virtue of which this doxastic ground is a *good reason* to believe that p . Finally, consider (c). Unlike (a) and (b), it focuses on inferential rather than non-inferential justification. Assume S has a deductively valid argument that p , and when you ask him why he believes that p he says it is because he used a valid inference rule, like modus ponens. S is no doubt identifying part of the reason he believes that p . But this reason is not his evidential reason. S has not cited his premises for p . He has cited the inference rule he used to infer that p from these premises in the right way. So the epistemic role of non-evidential justifiers is not restricted to explaining non-inferential justification. It includes inference rules that stipulate conditions that explain inferential justification too.

As a first pass, therefore, the distinction in epistemic role between evidential grounds and non-evidential sources turns on a difference between a theory of *evidence* and a theory of *justification*. A theory of evidence identifies what the grounds of justification are, while a theory of justification identifies what the sources of justification are.

5.1.2 Logical Independence between Grounds and Sources

But it is unclear how much further this distinction can be broken down without losing sight of it. Consider that (a) and (b) confirm the distinction between epistemic roles is functional because different justifiers assume the same roles in each. In (a) S cites a non-doxastic ground

as his evidential justifier, while in (b) he cites a doxastic ground. Likewise, S cites in (a) a phenomenological fact as his non-evidential source, while in (b) he cites a fact about coherence. So there is a degree of logical independence between justifiers assuming the same epistemic role. But there is also a degree of logical independence between justifiers assuming different epistemic roles. For example, in (a) the justifier assuming the epistemic role of a ground does not entail the source, for S is a factualist about grounds but could be a mentalist instead while retaining clarity and distinctness. Alternatively, S could retain factualism but switch out this source, choosing coherentism instead so long as he argues the propositional contents of the cohering beliefs are only representations of factual grounds, rather than grounds themselves.

Given my characterization of epistemic roles as functions, some degree of logical independence between justifiers assuming the same epistemic role, and between justifiers assuming different epistemic roles, is expected. But there is reason to worry this logical independence goes too far for my purposes. The reason is that it is also possible for what appears to be the very *same* justifier to assume different epistemic roles at different times, suggesting there are no necessary connections *at all* between specific justifiers and specific epistemic roles. For example, imagine you believe that p in virtue of S's testimony that p . Let us say the propositional content of S's testimony is your evidential ground, and his testimony itself is your non-evidential source: you believe *what* S says in virtue of him *saying* it. You are then queried about S's testimonial reliability. There is no problem arguing as follows:

Argument 1:

1. S testified that p x times
2. Every time S testified that p , I perceptually confirmed that p

3. Therefore, S's testimony is reliable

This argument's first premise makes S's testimony *itself*—not just what he testifies but the fact that he testifies—an evidential ground. So this justifier, which initially assumed the epistemic role of a source, can in another context assume the role of a ground. It appears that nothing about testimony itself makes it an *essential* part of the metaphysical basis of justification. Example (c) illustrates the same point. Again, it identifies premises as evidential grounds and an inference rule as a non-evidential source. So if you believe that p via the inference rule modus ponens, your premises for p are your evidential grounds and modus ponens is your non-evidential source. But in another context this inference rule can assume the role of an evidential ground:

Argument 2:

4. $2 + 2 = 5$ or $[(P \ \& \ [P \rightarrow Q]) \rightarrow Q]$
 5. $\sim(2 + 2 = 5)$
 6. Therefore, $[(P \ \& \ [P \rightarrow Q]) \rightarrow Q]$

This argument does not use modus ponens as an epistemic source. It relies on the inference rule of disjunction elimination as a source. But it does use modus ponens as a premise, thereby assigning this justifier the epistemic role of an evidential ground. So, again, there appears to be no necessary connection between modus ponens as a justifier and its possible epistemic role of a source of justification

A high degree of logical independence therefore exists not only between justifiers assuming the same epistemic role and between justifiers assuming different epistemic roles. There appears to be a high degree of logical independence also between particular justifiers and particular epistemic roles, such that the very same justifier can assume different roles at

different times. And the absence of *this* particular necessary connection suggests an epistemic role might be *strictly* functional: there are *no* constraints on the kinds of justifiers that can assume it. Taken to its extreme, this allows for very strong forms of access internalism that mandate all justifiers must actually or potentially fall within the ken of awareness.¹⁷³ If this awareness is interpreted in terms of awareness of *evidential grounds*, which is a plausible reading of access requirements, these internalisms entail the category of non-evidential justifiers can be empty.

This spells trouble for my developing argument that some justifiers are essentially non-evidential. So our account of epistemic sources needs sharpening. Examples (a)-(c) do not tell us what it means for an epistemic source to constitute the metaphysical basis of justification. We have examples, but we need a rule.

5.1.3 Locating a Criterion for the Metaphysical Basis of Justification

I accept a high degree of logical independence between justifiers assuming the same epistemic role—clarity and distinctness and coherence can both function as epistemic sources, for example. I also accept a high degree of logical independence between justifiers assuming different epistemic roles—there is no problem swapping factualism for mentalism about evidential grounds while retaining clarity and distinctness as a non-evidential source. Both these positions follow from my analysis of epistemic roles as functions. But I deny epistemic roles are *strictly* functional in virtue of there being *no* necessary connections between any

¹⁷³ Consider Bonjour (1992: 32): “all of the factors needed for a belief to be epistemically justified for a given person be *cognitively accessible* to that person, *internal* to his cognitive perspective”. If by ‘cognitively accessible’ Bonjour means ‘available to be a premise in reasoning’, he is arguing the category of non-evidential justifiers is empty.

justifiers and any epistemic roles. The reason is that I think some justifiers are *basic* such that they can assume *only* the epistemic role of non-evidential sources.

To get started, consider an objection to the foregoing argument that the very same justifier can assume different epistemic roles. Argument 2 purports to illustrate this possibility because it says the inference rule modus ponens, which can be an epistemic source in one instance, can in another instance be an epistemic ground.¹⁷⁴ The objection is that this is equivocal. When modus ponens functions as an epistemic source in its capacity as an argument's inference rule, on pain of regress it is not a tacit premise in this argument.¹⁷⁵ On the plausible assumption that any justifier that is not necessarily a premise is also not necessarily represented as a proposition, it follows that inference rules like modus ponens need not be represented propositionally to function as epistemic sources. However, when in Argument 2 this inference rule is used as an evidential ground, it *must* be represented propositionally. Otherwise it cannot be an input to the inference rule of disjunction elimination. So there appears to be an equivocation between using modus ponens as an *inference rule* and using it as a *premise*. The former is not a proposition but something much more like an input/output function, while the latter is not an input/output function but a proposition. If this is right, Argument 2 does not show the *same* justifier can assume different epistemic roles.

This objection is on the right track, but it leaves the answer to the most important question outstanding. It correctly observes a difference in how a justifier is *used* when it assumes different epistemic roles. This alerts us to *some* possibly essential difference between

¹⁷⁴ The same point I am about to make about Argument 2 can be made about Argument 1.

¹⁷⁵ This is the lesson of the Carroll-style regress in §4.3.2.

epistemic roles that might allow us to develop a thicker concept of non-evidential justification. But different uses of an object do not entail differences in the object—I can use a hammer to insert and remove nails, but the hammer’s properties remain the same. So even if the objection correctly spots an equivocation, it does not show this makes a difference to the *justifier* in question. To do this, it needs to say what is distinctive about the *use* of a justifier when it assumes one epistemic role rather than another such that this justifier can occupy *only* this role. It might be proposed that the fundamental difference just is that a justifier assuming the epistemic role of a source need not be represented propositionally. But this is not enough. I want to leave open the possibility that in non-inferential justification evidential grounds need not be represented propositionally either. So the absence of propositional content is not sufficient to demarcate non-evidential justification.

Consider another argument that, although likewise inconclusive, continues tidying up conceptual space. Epistemic sources are more *fundamental* than epistemic grounds. This is because, though there appear to be no entailments between justifiers assuming the same or different epistemic roles, there does appear to be a one-way entailment between the epistemic roles of grounds and sources themselves. A fourth example illustrates this:

Evidential Justifier/Non-Evidential Justifier

d. --/reliable belief source

This says an epistemology can have a theory of justification without a theory of evidence. For on this reliabilist view justification *just is* a property of a belief that is an output of a reliable belief source. No evidential grounds are needed. Critics of reliabilism and other externalist epistemologies might disagree, arguing that the absence of evidential grounds makes these

theories incomplete or even incoherent.¹⁷⁶ But externalists' omission of evidential grounds is less problematic than the alternative. Imagine an epistemology with a theory of evidence but no theory of justification. It proposes facts as evidential grounds, say, but says nothing about what justification on the basis of facts *is*—such as incorrigibility, or perhaps a particular phenomenology. This epistemic theory would be unilluminating. As epistemologists, we would be in no better position to explain *justification* than is anyone who can identify evidence for a belief. The same is not true for the reliabilist. Though he foregoes a theory of evidence, he still has a theory of justification, and this gives him more explanatory power than he would have if he endorsed a theory of evidence alone. Granted, objections to externalist epistemologies target the necessity and sufficiency of their proposed conditions for justification. But it is difficult to infer from these objections that externalist epistemologies are unilluminating unless we are willing to infer the same from necessity and sufficiency objections to conditions proposed in internalist epistemologies. So I tentatively suggest a one-way entailment exists between epistemic roles themselves: grounds require sources for a full account of their justificatory power, but sources do not require grounds for a full account of theirs. In an epistemic theory, sources are fundamental.

This argument gives us additional reason to suspect the epistemic roles of grounds and sources are not strict functions with no constraints on what justifiers can assume them. For if epistemic sources are fundamental, it is plausible they have some property that explains this. Whatever this property is, it should then illuminate what it means to say epistemic sources constitute the metaphysical basis of epistemic justification. If we find particular justifiers have

¹⁷⁶ This type of objection arises when some say externalists are just moving goalposts.

this property as well, we have evidence for a necessary connection between these justifiers and the epistemic role of a non-evidential source. This should then make the concept of non-evidential justification thicker.

5.1.4 Non-Evidential Basicity as the Criterion for the Metaphysical Basis of Justification

Recall Basicity from §2.6, which I now call Belief Source Basicity for contrastive purposes:

Belief Source Basicity: B is an (epistemologically) basic source of belief [or doxastic practice] = df. Any (otherwise) cogent argument for the reliability of B will use premises drawn from, [that is, be outputs of], B.¹⁷⁷

I used a regress argument when defending this account of basicity against Audi's, which does not say there is a necessary connection between a basic belief source and epistemic circularity.

I now want to adapt Source Basicity to state a necessary condition for *justifiers* that assume only the epistemic role of sources rather than grounds:

Non-Evidential Basicity (NEB): if a justifier J necessarily assumes for S the epistemic role of a non-evidential source of justification viz. the justification of a belief B, then J is a basic non-evidential justifier.

NEB says if it is impossible to justify a belief B without relying on non-evidential justifier J, then J is a *basic* non-evidential justifier. If this is right, then basicity is the property of those justifiers that are necessarily restricted to the epistemic role of being non-evidential sources of justification. I will pick this up later. For now, notice this accords with Lyons' claim that non-evidential justifiers are *constitutive* of justification. For if it is impossible to justifiedly believe some *p* without relying on a non-evidential justifier J, then this is evidence that J is part of what this justification *is*, that it is part of the *metaphysical basis* of justification.

¹⁷⁷ Alston (1989: 8).

Consider some other reasons to endorse NEB. First, it handles our examples of justifiers that appear to assume different epistemic roles at different times. Putting aside for the moment the worry about equivocation, the inference rule modus ponens was one such example. In one instance it functioned as a non-evidential source, and in another as an evidential ground. Now, when used only as an inference rule in an argument, modus ponens is a non-evidential justifier. NEB then says it is a *basic* non-evidential justifier if, for some belief B justified via an argument using modus ponens as its inference rule, it is impossible to justify B via argument without using modus ponens as its inference rule. But this is false. Any inference using the connective ‘ \rightarrow ’ out of which modus ponens is composed can be decomposed into an inference using the connectives ‘ \sim ’ and ‘ \vee ’. So modus ponens is not a basic non-evidential justifier. Compare this to the inference rule enumerative induction. If Hume is right, then NEB entails this inference rule is a basic non-evidential justifier. This is because Hume argues it is impossible to support the conclusion of an argument that uses enumerative induction as its inference rule without using enumerative induction. What about non-evidential justifiers like clarity and distinctness, which state conditions for non-inferential justification? Matters here are more complicated, so I will pick this up shortly. But the analysis is roughly the same. Assume you want to justify your belief that clarity and distinctness is a non-evidential justifier. If it is impossible to justifiedly believe this without relying on clarity and distinctness as a non-evidential justifier, then NEB says this non-evidential justifier is basic.

So NEB handles these examples pretty easily. But there is a better argument in its favour, one less susceptible to counterexamples. NEB finds support from two pieces of information arising out of the Carroll-style regress argument for epistemic roles that I gave in

§4.3.2. First, this regress argument says there must be *some* distinction between epistemic roles, and we now know one role is that of an evidential ground and another is that of a non-evidential source. Second, in §4.3.4 I defended a thesis called ‘Evidence and Reasoning’ (ER), which says a necessary condition of E being S’s evidential ground for *q* is that (i) E can be a premise in a well-formed inference to *q* that (ii) will be justifying, save defeaters. Putting these two pieces of information together, we get the following argument for NEB.

Assume J is an epistemic justifier. We know from the Carroll-style regress argument, with some help from Lyons, that J is evidential or non-evidential, and we know from ER that J is evidential only if it satisfies conditions (i) and (ii).¹⁷⁸ Now, a sufficient condition for J to violate condition (ii) is that it cannot be a premise in an argument without that argument collapsing into logical circularity. The reason is that logically circular arguments are not justification-enhancing, contra (ii). But we saw in §4.3.6, where I presented my argument for Horn 2 of the Dilemma for Inferential Epistemic Circularity, that using an argument to determine the reliability of *basic* belief sources like sense perception (SP) violates ER for this very reason. But Source Basicity and Non-Evidential Basicity state the very same condition for basicity, albeit adapted to different targets—in the former case belief sources, in the latter non-evidential justifiers. Therefore, if determining the reliability of basic belief sources cannot involve using evidential justifiers in a justification-enhancing argument, J cannot play this epistemic role in an argument either. But then J cannot be an evidential justifier because it violates ER. So it must be a basic non-evidential justifier, as NEB says.

¹⁷⁸ Evidence and Reasoning (ER): if E is S’s evidential ground for *q* because S believes that *q* on the basis of E, then (i) E can be a premise on whose basis S validly infers that *q*, and (ii) *ceteris paribus* S will have some degree justification to believe that *q* on the basis of E in virtue of this valid inference.

5.2 Basic Non-Evidential Justifiers: NEB is Necessary but not Sufficient

NEB states a necessary condition for a non-evidential justifier to be basic. But it is not sufficient. To see why, assume for argument that satisfying a non-evidential awareness condition is necessary *and* sufficient for non-inferential justification, and that this awareness is a basic non-evidential justifier because it satisfies NEB. Also assume this awareness supervenes on a nomological relation between a belief and the extra-mental fact that makes it true. So this awareness and this nomological relation perfectly covary—nothing changes in facts about the awareness (say, its object) without changes in facts about the nomological relation.

The positions are consistent. Nothing about this brand of internalism entails the awareness that it says is necessary and sufficient for justification does not supervene on nomological relations between facts and beliefs. This internalism just says these nomological relations are not proper parts of a theory of justification. But nomological relations between beliefs and extra-mental facts are themselves paradigmatic non-evidential justifiers, as varieties of reliabilism illustrate.¹⁷⁹ So these internalists owe us an account of how they distinguish their non-evidential awareness condition from the nomological relations that some reliabilists argue are in fact basic non-evidential justifiers proper. The problem is that the internalist cannot look to NEB for this account. For the supervenience relation between this awareness and this nomological relation entails that, from the reliabilist's perspective, this nomological relation satisfies NEB's antecedent: it is a justifier that necessarily assumes for S the epistemic role of a non-evidential source of justification viz. the justification of any belief B. We are therefore

¹⁷⁹ For example, Lyons (2009) builds his entire reliabilist theory of non-inferential justification on this insight.

missing an ingredient that allows us to distinguish these putative non-evidential justifiers in a non-question begging way. The basicity of non-evidential justifiers is not enough.

At this juncture we face a fork in the road. We have seen that non-evidential justifiers state either conditions for non-inferential justification, like clarity and distinctness, or conditions for inferential justification, like a valid inference rule. This distinction blurs when a well-formed argument with non-inferentially justified premises exhibits both kinds of non-evidential justifier. But on pain of regress it is highly plausible that not all justification is inferential, and therefore non-evidential conditions for non-inferential justification are more fundamental than those for inferential justification. Moreover, the epistemology of logic, which includes understanding our entitlement to basic inference rules, introduces a host of complex issues that are not directly related to non-inferential justification.¹⁸⁰ So I am going to put aside basic *inferential* non-evidential justifiers and focus just on basic *non-inferential* non-evidential justifiers.

To determine the missing ingredient keeping NEB from stating a necessary and sufficient condition for basic non-evidential justifiers, we can use the Dilemma for Inferential Epistemic Circularity to gauge what an adequate account of non-inferential justification must look like. Then we can circle back and use this to evaluate candidate basic non-evidential justifiers.

5.3 Satisfying and Discharging an Epistemic Principle: Redux

¹⁸⁰ For example, see the debate between Boghossian and Williamson (2003) on what Boghossian calls ‘blind reasoning’.

In Chapter 3 I argued against weak non-inferential justification [W(NI-J)] because it leads to the indiscrimination or bootstrapping problems for epistemically circular arguments. In Chapter 4 I argued against a version of strong non-inferential justification [S(NI-J) \rightarrow ER] because it collapses epistemically circular arguments into logical circularity. Now that we have a provisional account of non-evidential justification in hand, I want to examine the prospects for a different conditional:

I. S(NI-J) \rightarrow NEB+

NEB+ represents NEB plus whatever condition(s) make it sufficient for a non-evidential justifier to be basic. This conditional therefore says a belief B is strongly non-inferentially justified only if there is a basic non-evidential justifier that genuinely constitutes its metaphysical basis.¹⁸¹ It is important to recognize that right now (I) is not a biconditional. Remember a belief is S(NI-J) if and only if it satisfies *and* discharges a true epistemic principle. Elaborating upon this, I said in §5.0 that justifiers must play two distinct epistemic roles in a theory of non-inferential justification: those that are evidential grounds *satisfy* generative epistemic principles, and those that are non-evidential sources *discharge* these principles.¹⁸² (I) focuses on only this second requirement. So a full account of strong non-inferential justification would say:

II. S(NI-J) \leftrightarrow (NEB+ & ER)

This biconditional says a belief is strongly non-inferentially justified if and only if it satisfies NEB+ *and* ER, the requirement that one possesses evidence only if it is eligible to function as

¹⁸¹ The implication is that constituting the *genuine* metaphysical basis of justification will amount to discharging a true epistemic principle. I will get to this in a moment.

¹⁸² Though we can now say these non-evidential sources that discharge epistemic principles must also be basic.

a premise in inference. For now I am going to simplify matters and focus only on (I). The reason is that a full accounting of (II) requires understanding the conjunction of NEB+ and ER, and this would involve examining how evidential and non-evidential justifiers relate in a noetic act. I will briefly touch on this later, but right now it is better to limit the number of balls in the air.

5.4 Comparing Candidate Basic Non-Evidential Justifiers

I said discharging an epistemic principle requires ‘taking into account’ any epistemic remainder that a first-order requirements theory denies needs to be taken into account for justification. In §4.3.6 I explored whether evidence can be used to satisfy this requirement and concluded it cannot. Then, in §5.1.4, I argued that basic non-evidential justifiers are those justifiers that cannot satisfy ER. Therefore, since the second horn of the Dilemma for Inferential Epistemic Circularity targets epistemic principles that I argued cannot satisfy ER, the conditions these principles state *must* be candidate basic non-evidential justifiers. So here again is one of these principles:

Ext-W(NI-J): S’s belief that p is an output of a reliable basic belief source $X \rightarrow$ S Ext-W(NI-J)¹⁸³

This principle says a sufficient externalist condition for S to have weak non-inferential justification to believe that p is that this belief is an output of a reliable basic belief source X. We know from Chapter 3 that this epistemic principle, as an instance of W(NI-J) more generally, is too weak. And we know from Chapter 4 that this principle cannot be strengthened

¹⁸³ I have added the qualifier ‘basic’. In §4.3.6 I argued that this belief source’s basicity is entailed by the fact that it figures in a generative epistemic principle, which in which in §2.6 I argued entails basicity. I am now taking these connections for granted.

into Ext-S(NI-J) by using evidence. So a reliable basic belief source—such as sense perception (SP)—is a *candidate* basic non-evidential justifier because it cannot satisfy ER. The question is whether it is genuinely basic in virtue of satisfying $S(\text{NI-J}) \rightarrow \text{NEB+}$.¹⁸⁴

Of course, we do not yet know what additional condition(s) are represented by ‘+’ in NEB+. But we can use our findings from previous chapters to find out. NEB+ is constrained by the fact that any non-evidential justifier satisfying it *cannot* be a premise in a well-formed inference. Ext-W(NI-J) satisfies this condition because the belief source in question is basic. But it does not go far enough. The reason is that the role of *Reliability* in this principle entails that discharging it is possible *only* via inference. This follows from my argument in §2.4 that Reliability entails Inferentiality: that we cannot ascertain whether a basic belief source is reliable without inference and argument. So any attempt to translate Ext-W(NI-J) into Ext-S(NI-J) \rightarrow NEB+ collapses. Any candidate basic non-evidential justifier must therefore deny Inferentiality and hence Reliability:

$$\text{III. } ([S(\text{NI-J}) \rightarrow \text{NEB+}] \rightarrow \sim\text{Inferentiality}) \rightarrow \sim\text{Reliability}$$

This says if strong non-inferential justification requires a basic non-evidential justifier, then Inferentiality is not true and therefore Reliability is not either. So we have two *negative* conditions any basic non-evidential justifier must satisfy if it is a necessary condition for S(NI-J).

Let us see if we can flip these negative conditions around. Consider this familiar internalist epistemic principle from §4.3.6:

$$\text{Int-W(NI-J): if } S \text{ clearly and distinctly perceives that } p \rightarrow S \text{ Int-W(NI-J)}$$

¹⁸⁴ If the answer is yes, then ‘Ext-W(NI-J)’ is now a misnomer since this justifier would be an ingredient in strong non-inferential justification instead.

This principle says a sufficient internalist condition for S to have weak non-inferential justification to believe that p is that S clearly and distinctly perceives that p . Before examining whether this principle's antecedent satisfies NEB+, a clarifying note is in order. I said in §5.3 that a belief is S(NI-J) if and only if it satisfies NEB+ and ER. The reason is that I maintain justifiers have two distinct epistemic roles in non-inferential justification: those that are evidential grounds *satisfy* generative epistemic principles, and those that are non-evidential sources *discharge* these principles. Int-W(NI-J) fuses these justifiers together: that p is S's *evidential ground* for believing that p , while the clarity and distinctness of S's perception that p is his *non-evidential source*. I think these are fused together because I do not believe they can be separated in a bona fide internalist epistemic principle; I strongly suspect both are constitutive of intentionality as such. But, again, for now I will focus just on the non-evidential justifier of clarity and distinctness, and will return to the evidential justifier later.

On its face, Int-W(NI-J) looks like a contender for a genuinely basic non-evidential source. First, clarity and distinctness appears to satisfy NEB: any attempt to vindicate clarity and distinctness will rely on clarity and distinctness. Second, this principle's internalism entails that it eschews reliability as an essential part of an explanation of justification. Presumably our faculties *are* reliable. But Int-W(NI-J) maintains this does not satisfactorily explain their epistemic import. Either way, discharging Int-W(NI-J) should not require inference, allowing this principle, once strengthened into S(NI-J) \rightarrow NEB+, to sidestep Horn 2 of the Dilemma of Inferential Epistemic Circularity.

But unfortunately matters are not quite this straightforward. For Descartes thought discharging a close analogue of Int-W(NI-J), namely his C+D Rule, requires recourse via inference to an omnibenevolent deity. So for him phenomenal properties like clarity and

distinctness do not wear their epistemic credibility on their sleeve. This raises the question: why should we think differently?

5.5 Epistemic Circularity and Non-Inferential Justification

We should think differently because a fuller understanding of epistemic circularity allows us to. I have argued that the predominant, if not exclusive, understanding of epistemic circularity views it as a property of certain kinds of arguments. Indeed, this is a primary assumption in the putative Cartesian Circle that embodies so many of the philosophical issues I have been discussing. But I maintain epistemic circularity is more than this. Specifically, I think it is also a property of non-evidential sources of justification that satisfy NEB+. And the specific non-evidential source of justification that I think bears this property is *self-consciousness*: the attendant awareness of oneself in virtue of being a conscious subject. If this is right, then I am arguing that non-inferential epistemic circularity is the missing ingredient, the ‘+’, that makes NEB necessary and sufficient for a non-evidential justifier to be genuinely basic, such that it constitutes part of the metaphysical basis of justification.¹⁸⁵ And self-consciousness just is this metaphysical basis of which non-inferential epistemic circularity is a property. Let me unpack these ideas.

When epistemic circularity is a property of an argument, this argument exhibits a circular structure whose epistemic circularity is defined by a specific two-way dependency between the argument’s premises and its conclusion. Consider again our standby example:

Track-Record Argument

1. At t_1 , it appears to me that p (Introspection)

¹⁸⁵ I say ‘part of’ because, again, I do not think evidence can actually be separated out from this story.

2. At t_1 , p (Sense Perception/SP)
3. At t_1 , it appears to me that p and p (Conjunction from 1, 2)
4. At t_1 , SP is functioning accurately (Deduction from 3)
5. Repeat (1)-(4) x times
6. Therefore, SP functions accurately every time (Deduction from 5)
7. Therefore, SP reliable (SPR) (Induction from 6)

Assume that the reliability of SP is a condition for justification that figures in a true epistemic principle like Reliability. This argument is epistemically circular because justification to believe (2) presupposes that its conclusion, (7), is true. More precisely, the argument exhibits the following two-way dependency: (7) depends for its justification on justification to believe (2), and this justification for (2) depends on the truth of (7). Moreover, the epistemic circularity of (2) and (7) is *unavoidable* because SP is a basic belief source. So not only is this argument epistemically circular, it is necessarily epistemically circular. We can add one last detail. First-order requirements theorists who endorse some version of Reliability will maintain that the reliability of a basic belief source, like SP, is a non-evidential justifier. This is because these theorists maintain that it is enough for justification that my belief is an output of a reliable belief source; I need not also ascertain or be aware of this external fact. We can therefore say this argument's epistemic circularity is distinguished by the fact that it uses an evidential justifier in its premises to certify a non-evidential justifier in its conclusion. If this fact generalizes, then arguments that are necessarily epistemically circular traverse evidential and non-evidential justifiers.

The question is what epistemic circularity looks like if it is not mediated by inference. Consider first why this Track-Record Argument *is* mediated by inference. I have argued it is because this argument presupposes Reliability, an epistemic principle that can be discharged

only via inference. So, as I argued in §5.4, an epistemic principle like Int-W(NI-J), which does not include reliability or other empirical concepts as part of its content, sidesteps this commitment to inference. But if non-inferential epistemic circularity can be a property of Int-W(NI-J), such that this principle is discharged and thereby becomes the stronger thesis $S(NI-J) \rightarrow NEB+$, there must still be a two-way dependency that constitutes this circularity, albeit one not mediated by inference. We want to know what this two-way dependency is, and we have a clue that it might involve evidential and non-evidential justifiers.

5.6 Non-Inferential Epistemic Circularity and Self-Consciousness

In a moment I will make a proposal about in what this two-way dependency consists. First let me introduce the feature the proposal aims to capitalize on. I am proposing that self-consciousness is *the* basic non-evidential source that constitutes the metaphysical basis of justification because it is constitutively *reflexive*. This means, roughly, that for any conscious experience E had by a subject S, S is aware of E being *his own*. And this consciousness is reflexive rather than *reflective* because this self-awareness is an essential function of being conscious. Self-consciousness is not an additional intentional act above ordinary experience; it is constitutive of experience.

Now consider the proposal about in what the two-way dependency of non-inferential epistemic circularity consists. It turns on a particular way of understanding the intentionality of self-consciousness. Two possibilities are salient.¹⁸⁶ On the self-representational view, self-consciousness consists in an intentional act that takes oneself as an object. On the non-

¹⁸⁶ I borrow this discussion from Hopp (2020: 34-44). He also discusses higher-order theories of self-consciousness. But not only are these especially problematic, they are at odds with rejecting higher-order ascent.

representational view, self-consciousness consists in an intentional act that does not take oneself as an object, but that nevertheless affords awareness of oneself. As Walter Hopp observes, the self-representational view faces the challenge of explaining why oneself is not just another object on the right-side of the intentional act, along with tables and chairs. The non-representational view faces the challenge of explaining what self-consciousness is *of* if it is not of oneself as an object.

Regardless of which view is correct, each can accommodate the two-way dependency characteristic of epistemic circularity. But only one view accommodates it naturally. On the self-representational view, this two-way dependency would exist between myself as a conscious subject and myself as an object of self-awareness. But the problem is that it is unclear why this two-way dependency would be *epistemic*. If anything, finding epistemic significance in the self-representational view threatens to make non-inferential justification solipsistic: the only thing I have bona fide non-inferential justification to believe is that I am a conscious subject. This is probably bad news.

The non-representational view handles the epistemology better. Because this view denies that self-consciousness makes oneself an object of awareness, it does not obviously threaten solipsism. Instead, it allows us to locate non-inferential epistemic circularity within the nexus of an ordinary intentional act. Recall I said in §5.4 that Int-W(NI-J)¹⁸⁷ fuses two justifiers together: that *p* is *S*'s *evidential ground* for believing that *p*, while the clarity and distinctness of *S*'s perception that *p* is his *non-evidential source*. I said these are fused together because I suspect these two elements cannot be separated in a genuine internalist epistemic

¹⁸⁷ Int-W(NI-J): if *S* clearly and distinctly perceives that *p* → *S* Int-W(NI-J)

principle—both are constitutive of intentionality as such. The non-representational view is consonant with this. It says that for any intentional conscious experience of an object O, that experience of O will be attended by a non-objectifying consciousness of oneself, the subject. And this translates naturally into the epistemology of evidential and non-evidential justifiers: the self-awareness that is constitutive of an intentional conscious experience is the non-evidential justifier, and the object of the intentional conscious experience is the evidential justifier.

5.7 Self-Consciousness and $[S(\text{NI-J}) \leftrightarrow (\text{NEB+} \ \& \ \text{ER})]$

This does not explain what would make this two-way dependency in the non-representational view *epistemically circular*, however. For this we need to add one more detail: the reflexivity of conscious experience, which the non-representational view aims to explain, itself explains how an epistemic principle like Int-W(NI-J) can *be satisfied if and only if it is also discharged*.

The idea is that there exists an essential relation (i) between self-consciousness as a non-evidential justifier and (ii) the object of an intentional act as an evidential justifier. And this relation has epistemic import in a theory of justification because the two-way dependence between these elements renders the intentional act self-certifying, that is, licensed by non-inferential epistemic circularity. For this reason I think the biconditional $S(\text{NI-J}) \leftrightarrow (\text{NEB+} \ \& \ \text{ER})$ is true: a belief that p is strongly non-inferentially justified if and only if there is a there is (i) a basic non-evidential justifier that constitutes the metaphysical basis of justification, and (ii) an evidential justifier on which S's belief that p is based. The basic non-evidential justifier is self-consciousness, and the evidential justifier is the object of the intentional act of which

self-consciousness is a constituent. And, again, this biconditional obtains in virtue of a two-way dependence between these evidential and non-evidential justifiers that is distinctively epistemically circular. No inference is required.

5.8 Conclusion

This positive proposal is unfortunately just a sketch. A lot more needs to be said about the connections between self-consciousness, non-inferential justification, and epistemic circularity. I have devoted the bulk of this dissertation to motivating this positive proposal, and this has left less time for formulating this proposal. Nonetheless, I do not think the way I have apportioned my efforts is a mistake. The debate about inferential epistemic circularity has a lot of moving parts—indeed, I have touched on only a few of them, notwithstanding Chapter 3's sprawling dialectic. I believe that situating just the idea of non-inferential epistemic circularity requires a lot of conceptual clearing out, and so that is what I have tried to do.

The basic gist of this dissertation, then, has been an attempt to find an argument against varieties of non-inferential justification that will target externalists and internalists equally. Instead of dividing up conceptual space along the lines of internalism and externalism, therefore, I have divided it up along the lines of lower- and higher-order epistemic requirements. For it *is* a shared commitment among many internalists and externalists alike that higher-order ascent is unnecessary for non-inferential justification, and therefore that this justification can leave any epistemic remainder undischarged.

I think this is a mistake, and Chapters 3 and 4 are my attempts to show why. Instead, I think non-inferential justification lies at the heart of epistemology, and therefore it requires

an account that maximally accommodates all the relevant epistemic desiderata. This final chapter is my first attempt at sketching this picture.

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