Spring 5-17-2020

Coherentist Theories of Epistemic Justification

Nicholas Serensits
Dickinson College

Epistemic Responsibility and Coherence Theories of Justification

By
Nicholas Serensits

Submitted in partial fulfillment of Honors Requirements
for the Department of Philosophy

Dr. Susan Feldman, Supervisor
Dr. Crispin Sartwell, Reader
Dr. Amy McKiernan, Reader
Dr. Jeffrey Engelhardt, Reader

May 7, 2020

Abstract

The goal of this paper is to defend my version of a coherence theory of justification by way of showing defects and suggesting refinements to Laurence BonJour's and Keith Lehrer's coherence theories. First, I consider BonJour's and Lehrer's theories. Second, I defend BonJour's and Lehrer's theories against the "consistent fairy story" objection raised in Susan Haack's *Evidence and Inquiry: A Pragmatist Reconstruction of Epistemology* and Ernest Sosa's "The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence Versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge." Third, I consider some issues with BonJour's coherence conditions and some ways that they diverge from a "tracking virtue" theory of epistemic responsibility. Fourth, I consider some issues with Lehrer's coherence conditions and some ways that they diverge from a "tracking virtue" theory of epistemic responsibility. Fifth, I develop two formulations of an idealized system condition that can avoid the issues, and divergence, that I identify with BonJour's and Lehrer's theories.

Table of Contents

Introduction

In this paper, I defend my version of a coherence theory of epistemic justification by way of showing defects and suggesting refinements to Laurence BonJour's and Keith Lehrer's coherence theories. Typically, a theory of knowledge posits necessary, and jointly sufficient, conditions for when an inquirer knows something. A theory of knowledge is typically developed for propositional, rather than know-how, knowledge. Suppose someone contends that she knows that a bicycle has two wheels. Here, she contends that she knows a proposition. She contends that she knows the proposition, "a bicycle has two wheels." However, some knowledge is not propositional. Suppose someone knows how to ride a bicycle. This is an example of know-how knowledge. Know-how knowledge is not reducible to propositional knowledge. Someone may know how to ride a bicycle even if she does not know propositions about the mechanical parts constituting a bicycle. Likewise, propositional knowledge is not reducible to know-how knowledge. Someone may know propositions about the mechanical parts constituting a bicycle even if she does not know how to ride one. I focus on theories of knowledge that posit necessary, and jointly sufficient, conditions for propositional knowledge.

Some theories of knowledge posit that someone knows some proposition if and only if she believes the proposition, she is justified in believing the proposition, and the proposition is true. According to these theories, there are three necessary, and jointly sufficient, conditions for propositional knowledge. There is a "justified" condition, a "truth" condition, and a "belief" condition. These theories are known as J(ustified)T(rue)B(elief) theories of knowledge. In this paper, I will consider two coherence JTB theories of

knowledge. These theories propose slightly different accounts of the "belief/acceptance" condition. However, I will focus primarily on the "justification" condition of these coherence JTB theories of knowledge.

Some epistemologists hold that an inquirer can know that p even if she is not justified in believing that p. So, these epistemologists reject a JTB theory of knowledge. Crispin Sartwell, in "Knowledge is Merely True Belief," offers some examples to suggest that an inquirer can know that p even if she is not justified in believing that p.[1] In "Why Knowledge is Merely True Belief," he offers a positive argument for knowledge minimalism.[2] In addition, Stephen Hetherington develops a "swamping" and "redundancy" argument to suggest that an inquirer can know that p even if she is not justified in believing that p.[3] Both Sartwell and Hetherington acknowledge that justification is epistemically significant even if it is not required for knowledge. Sartwell writes, "The view that knowledge is merely true belief neither makes the question of justification a trivial one, nor relieves us of the epistemological burden of producing an account of justification."[4] Hetherington writes, "Maybe our lives will never actually include some knowledge that is completely unsupported by justification: maybe any knowledge that in fact we will ever have will be supported by justification that we will also have."[5] In other words, there is an important association between knowledge and justification even if justification is not a necessary feature of

[1] Crispin Sartwell, "Knowledge is Merely True Belief," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1991): 157.
[2] Crispin Sartwell, "Why Knowledge Is Merely True Belief," *The Journal of Philosophy* 89, no. 4 (1992): 167.
[3] Stephen Hetherington, "The Redundancy Problem: From Knowledge-Infallibilism to Knowledge-Minimalism," Synthese 195, no. 1 (2018): 4683.
[4] Crispin Sartwell, "Knowledge is Merely True Belief," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1991): 163.
[5] Stephen Hetherington, "The Redundancy Problem: From Knowledge-Infallibilism to Knowledge-Minimalism," Synthese 195, no. 1 (2018): 4701.

knowledge. In addition, epistemic justification relates to the normative aspects of epistemology which are tied to our lives as epistemic agents. For these reasons, epistemic justification is a feature worth exploring even if Sartwell's and Hetherington's cases for knowledge minimalism hold up.

A theory of epistemic justification posits necessary, and jointly sufficient, conditions for when an inquirer is justified in accepting/believing a proposition. An externalist theory of justification contends that the necessary, and jointly sufficient, conditions for justification need not be available to an inquirer that is justified in believing a proposition. An externalist theory may posit that someone is justified in believing that p if and only if p results from a reliable source. In this case, justification is dependent on the external causal history of a belief. This account is externalist because justification does not depend on factors that an inquirer must be, either explicitly or implicitly, aware of. An internalist theory of justification contends that someone is justified in believing some proposition only if the condition, or conditions, that confer justification are something that an inquirer is, either explicitly or implicitly, aware of. An internalist theory may posit that someone is justified in believing some proposition if and only if she can adequately defend the proposition. This theory is internalist because the condition that confers justification, the "adequate defense" condition, is something that an inquirer must be aware of. In this paper, I defend an internalist theory of epistemic justification.

I raise some objections to externalist theories of justification when I consider what a theory of justification should accomplish. An externalist theory contends that an inquirer may be justified in believing some proposition even if she acts, with regard to this proposition,

epistemically irresponsibly because justification is not dependent on factors that she must be, either explicitly or implicitly, aware of. Later, I consider both an epistemic virtue theory of epistemic responsibility and the view that epistemic responsibility constitutes the core notion of epistemic justification. For now, consider a case in which someone believes that a game starts at noon. She may believe this because she heard a stranger mention it. Fortunately, the stranger, unbeknownst to her, is one of the teams' coaches. Notice that it appears reliable for a person to believe game-related propositions endorsed by coaches because coaches are often correct about this information. For this reason, this inquirer's belief appears to result from a reliable source. An underdeveloped externalist theory of justification may suggest that she is epistemically justified in believing this. However, she is not because she is unaware of the external causal history of her belief. Partly for this reason, she epistemically irresponsibly believes that the game starts at noon. For this reason, this underdeveloped externalist theory of justification does not seem to adequately connect epistemic justification to epistemic responsibility. An adequate theory of epistemic justification must connect epistemic justification to epistemic responsibility if epistemic responsibility constitutes the core notion of epistemic justification.

Remember, internalist theories require that a justified inquirer is, either explicitly or implicitly, aware of the condition, or conditions, that confer justification. This "awareness" condition helps connect epistemic justification to epistemic responsibility. Later in this paper, I develop an account of epistemic responsibility to raise some concerns with some coherence theories of epistemic justification. For now, notice that foundationalism and coherentism are two sorts of internalist theories of justification. Both of these theories of justification can

accept a JTB theory of knowledge. However, they diverge in their accounts of the structure of justification. Foundationalists contend that an inquirer is justified if her belief "is either itself basic or can be reached by a succession of accredited inferential moves from some initial collection of basic beliefs."[6] Imagine an inverted pyramid. The foundation of the pyramid, the pyramid's bottom point, supports the rest of the pyramid. For a foundationalist, this bottom foundational point is a basic, or series of, basic beliefs. In *Problems of Knowledge*, Michael Williams writes that basic beliefs are basic because they "are in some sense justifiably held without resting on further evidence."[7] All justified non-basic beliefs are inferentially connected, directly or indirectly, to basic beliefs. Rene Descartes argued that the belief "I am, I exist" is the basic belief from which the justification of all non-basic beliefs are grounded.[8] He wrote, "I conclude that this proposition, I am, I exist, must be true whenever I assert it or think it."[9] For this reason, on Descartes's theory of justification, any justified belief is part of a justificatory chain of beliefs that terminate in the belief "I am, I exist." Basic beliefs play terminating roles in chains of justification because basic beliefs are intrinsically credible.

In this paper, I focus on an alternative theory of epistemic justification. The foundationalist contends that justification is linear. This means that beliefs are justified in a consecutive one-at-a-time manner. A coherentist rejects the foundationalist's linear account of epistemic justification. Further, she contends that some sort of circular justification is

---

[6] Michael Williams, *Problems of Knowledge: A Critical Introduction to Epistemology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 82.
[7] Ibid., 83.
[8] Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, translated by Jonathan Bennett (Early Modern Texts, 2007), 3.
[9] Ibid., 4.

permissible. Rather than an inverted pyramid, imagine a spider web. Points on the spider web, either directly or indirectly, support other points constituting the web. In a similar way, beliefs constituting a web, or system of beliefs, may, either directly or indirectly, support other beliefs. Notice that, there is not, unlike in the pyramid metaphor, a hierarchy of beliefs. Very generally, a coherence theory of justification suggests that beliefs, comprising an inquirer's system of beliefs, mutually support, or justify, each other. Very generally, the coherentist contends that someone is justified in believing that p only if p belongs to her total coherent system of beliefs.[10] Roughly, a belief system is a collection of an inquirer's beliefs that are connected in various ways. Later in this paper, I will discuss the sorts of mutual relations that connect beliefs. In doing this, I defend a coherence theory of justification through the consideration of some competing theories of epistemic justification and epistemic responsibility.

The goal of this paper is to defend my version of a coherence theory of epistemic justification by way of showing defects and suggesting refinements to BonJour's and Lehrer's coherence theories. In Section 1, I will briefly discuss some features of BonJour's and Lehrer's coherence theories. In Section 2, I will defend BonJour's and Lehrer's theories against a general objection to coherence theories raised in Susan Haack's *Evidence and Inquiry: A Pragmatist Reconstruction of Epistemology* and Ernest Sosa's "The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence Versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge." Haack and Sosa argue that coherence theories of epistemic justification are not truth conducive because these theories require that justification depends solely on the relationship between an inquirer's

[10] Michael Williams, *Problems of Knowledge: A Critical Introduction to Epistemology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 117.

beliefs/acceptances. In Section 3, I will consider some issues with BonJour's coherence conditions and some ways that they diverge from a "tracking virtue" theory of epistemic responsibility. In Section 4, I consider some issues with Lehrer's coherence conditions and some ways that they diverge from a "tracking virtue" theory of epistemic responsibility. In Section 5, I will introduce two formulations of an idealized system condition that can avoid some of the issues, and divergence, that I identify with BonJour's and Lehrer's theories. Before concluding, I will consider how the idealized system condition avoids the "consistent fairy story" objection.

Section 1: BonJour's and Lehrer's Coherence Theories

In this section, I introduce Laurence BonJour's and Keith Lehrer's coherence theories. To do this, I first briefly discuss two paradigmatic features of coherence theories. BonJour and Lehrer make use of systems of epistemically relevant data. And, they develop mechanisms to ensure that a justified inquirer's belief/evaluation system is appropriately connected to reality.

For BonJour, an inquirer's system of beliefs is a collection of the inquirer's beliefs that are connected in various ways. Remember, a spider web is a useful metaphor to think generally about a coherent system. Points on the spider web, like beliefs in a system, mutually support, either directly or indirectly, other points, or beliefs, constituting the web or system. Sometimes explanatory relations constitute this mutual support. An inquirer's belief that Bella does not have a reliable mode of transportation is explanatorily connected to her belief that Bella is unemployed. In this case, the beliefs appear to mutually support each other. More generally, beliefs connected in a system increase the likelihood that, if they are

true, then the beliefs that they are connected to, within that system, are also true. Most of BonJour's coherence conditions for epistemic justification focus primarily on an inquirer's system of beliefs.[11]

On the other hand, Lehrer focuses on a series of systems; an acceptance system, preference system, and reasoning system; that together constitute an inquirer's evaluation system.[12] Still, on both coherence theories, some epistemically relevant data is connected in a particular way to constitute a system. Notice that both BonJour's and Lehrer's conceptions of a coherent system includes epistemically relevant data that is not occurently available to an inquirer. At any time, it is likely that an inquirer only occurently holds a handful of beliefs or other epistemically relevant data. However, we will later see that an inquirer's system(s) must be significantly larger to satisfy BonJour's and Lehrer's coherence conditions. Partly for this reason, an inquirer's system(s) includes beliefs; or in Lehrer's case preferences, acceptances, and reasonings; that she does not occurently hold at the time justification is called into question.

Both BonJour and Lehrer develop a condition to ensure that an inquirer is justified in accepting/believing that p only if her system(s) is appropriately connected to reality. On its own a coherent belief, or evaluation, system cannot confer justification because this theory of justification would not be truth conducive. It would not be truth conducive because a belief, or evaluation, system may be coherent, but disconnected from reality. I discuss this issue in more depth, in Section 2, when I consider Haack's and Sosa's "consistent fairy story"

[11] Laurence BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*. (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), 153.
[12] Keith Lehrer, *Theory of Knowledge*. (Colorado: Westview Press, 2000), 126.

objection to coherence theories.[13] BonJour develops an observation requirement to try and solve this problem.[14] The requirement is a "regulative meta principle" that "effectively guarantees that a system which satisfies it will receive at least apparent input from the world."[15] It blocks cases where an inquirer "persistently rejects apparent observations in order to preserve some favored view or theory."[16] On the other hand, Lehrer distinguishes between personal and ultra justification. The latter sort involves purging false acceptances, preferences, and reasonings from an inquirer's system. This ensures that a justified inquirer's system corresponds to reality.[17]

There are two additional BonJourian elements worth flagging. First, the doxastic presumption regards an inquirer's grasp of her own system of beliefs. BonJour acknowledges that "no actual believer possesses an explicit grasp of his overall belief system; if such a grasp exists at all, it must be construed as tacit or implicit."[18] But, some grasp is required for an internal coherence theory. BonJour writes that the presumption "is only that my representation of my overall system of beliefs is approximately correct."[19] Second, BonJour's

[13] Susan Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry: A Pragmatist Reconstruction of Epistemology*. (New York: Prometheus Books, 1993), 94.
[14] Susan Haack points out that BonJour inconsistently defines the observation requirement. Sometimes it requires that an inquirer, or possibly belief system, is justified only if the inquirer considers, or the belief system receives, apparent input from the external world. However, sometimes the condition requires that an inquirer, or possibly belief system, is justified only if the inquirer considers, or the belief system receives, input from the external world. Related to this, BonJour, more generally, shifts between the justification of an empirical belief and the justification of an inquirer. In this section, I lean toward the former interpretation, but shift between the two as I describe different parts of his theory. In Section 3, I discuss the significance and reason for doing this. On both formulations of the observation requirement, it aims to connect an inquirer, or a system of beliefs, to the external world.
[15] Laurence BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*. (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), 142.
[16] Ibid., 154.
[17] Keith Lehrer, *Theory of Knowledge*. (Colorado: Westview Press, 2000), 153.
[18] Laurence BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*. (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), 104.
[19] Ibid., 104.

meta justificatory argument "is an argument to show that a system of empirical beliefs that is justified according to a coherence theory of this sort is thereby also likely to correspond to reality."[20] BonJour contends that "adhering to coherentist standards over the long run is likely eventually to yield beliefs which correspond to reality."[21] Further, he suggests that correspondence to reality is the best explanation for the long-run coherence of a system that satisfies the observation requirement.

In *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*, BonJour develops four necessary, and jointly sufficient, conditions for justification.[22] First, "a belief must belong to a system of beliefs which is actually held by someone."[23] Second, "the system of beliefs in question must be coherent to a high degree and more coherent than any alternative which would also satisfy the observation requirement."[24] Third, S's system of beliefs must satisfy the observation requirement.[25] Fourth, S "must have a reflective grasp of the fact that her system of beliefs is coherent to a high degree and more coherent than any alternative which would also satisfy the observation requirement."[26] So, S is justified in believing an empirical p if and only if S satisfies these four conditions.

Remember, BonJour's first necessary condition is that "the belief must belong to a system of beliefs which is actually held by someone."[27] In other words, S is justified in believing that p only if p is in S's system of beliefs. Here, BonJour lays the framework for an

[20] Ibid., 169.
[21] Ibid., 169.
[22] Ibid., 153.
[23] Ibid., 153.
[24] Ibid., 154.
[25] Ibid., 152.
[26] Ibid., 154.
[27] Ibid., 153.

internalist theory of justification because all beliefs that an inquirer is justified in believing exist in her own belief system.[28] His fourth, and final, condition builds on, and clarifies, this internalist point. Further, his conception of a "system of beliefs" is illuminated through his discussion of coherence. For now, notice that this condition does not require that an inquirer grasps her system of beliefs. Rather, it only requires that a justified belief exists in her system. In this way, BonJour attributes persisting belief systems to individual inquirers. For BonJour, beliefs that "belong to a system" exist on equal footing with other belonging beliefs. In other words, no belief in an inquirer's system has justificatory priority over any other belief.[29]

BonJour's second necessary condition is that "the system of beliefs in question must be coherent to a high degree and more coherent than any alternative which would also satisfy the observation requirement."[30] For BonJour, coherence refers to the way that beliefs hang together to form a structured system. He writes that beliefs may hang together through "various sorts of inferential, evidential, and explanatory relations."[31] Notice that coherence is not simply a matter of logical consistency. Instead, BonJour points out that richer connections are required to ensure that a coherence theory is truth-conducive. Still, a system is coherent only if it is logically consistent. Richer relations, such as inferential connections, are "relations which would allow one belief or set of beliefs, if justified, to serve as the premises of a cogent epistemic-justificatory argument for a further belief."[32] An ideally coherent system is one that forms a unified structure tied together through a significant

[28] Ibid., 89.
[29] Ibid., 92.
[30] Ibid., 154.
[31] Ibid., 93.
[32] Ibid., 96.

number of inferential relations.[33] Consider the following sets of beliefs. Set 1; b1: the Astros won the American League Pennant, b2: the Astros competed in the World Series, and b3: the Astros won the final game of the Championship Series. Set 2; b4: the Nationals won the National League Pennant, b5: the Tigers' manager was fired, and b6: the Rays purchased a new stadium. Both sets are logically consistent. The truth of any belief in the first set increases the likelihood that any other belief in that set is also true. So, any belief in the first set may serve as a premise for another belief in that set. On the other hand, the beliefs in the second set cannot serve as premises for other beliefs in that set. Partly for this reason, the first set of beliefs is more coherent than the second set. A system of beliefs is less coherent when beliefs lacking inferential connections are added to the set. The addition of b7: the first pitch of the World Series was thrown in Houston, increases the coherence of the first set of beliefs and decreases the coherence of the second set of beliefs. Notice that coherence is a matter of degree. Beliefs 1-3 are coherent and beliefs 1-3 and 7 are also coherent. The latter set is more coherent than the former.

Remember, the second condition suggested that an inquirer is justified in believing that p only if her system is more coherent than any other system that also satisfies the observation requirement.[34] Notice that an inquirer is not justified simply if her system is more coherent than any other system. Suppose an inquirer believes that the Earth is flat. Suppose she has a large cluster of beliefs that are connected, possibly through explanatory relations, to her belief that the Earth is flat. In addition, many of her non-scientific beliefs are likely logically consistent with this belief. For this reason, she may be able to create a large and

[33] Ibid., 97.
[34] Ibid., 154.

significantly coherent system of beliefs. If coherence alone is sufficient to confer justification, then she may be justified in believing that the Earth is flat. However, she is not justified in believing this because her system is not sufficiently connected to reality. The inquirer likely disregards a significant amount of external world evidence to sustain a coherent system which includes the belief that the Earth is flat. So, coherence alone is not sufficient to confer justification. Another condition, BonJour's observation requirement, must supplement his coherence condition to ensure that an inquirer is justified only if her system is appropriately connected to reality.

BonJour's third necessary condition is that S's system of beliefs satisfies the observation requirement.[35] BonJour writes that the observation requirement "effectively guarantees that a cognitive system which satisfies it will receive at least apparent input from the world."[36] So, if an inquirer is justified in believing that p, then her system receives at least apparent input from the external world. In other words, her system receives at least apparent cognitively spontaneous beliefs. A belief is cognitively spontaneous if it "simply occurs" to an inquirer.[37] In other words, it strikes an inquirer in a "manner which is both involuntary and quite coercive."[38] The observation requirement also requires that a belief that is not justified a priori can be checked by observation.[39] In addition, it requires that an inquirer "makes a reasonable effort to seek out relevant, possibly conflicting observations, if her beliefs are to be justified."[40]

---

[35] Ibid., 152.
[36] Ibid., 142.
[37] Ibid., 117.
[38] Ibid., 117.
[39] Ibid., 141.
[40] Ibid., 142.

Remember, BonJour develops the observation requirement to block the justification of an inquirer who "persistently rejects apparent observations in order to preserve some favored view or theory."[41] He mentions that this is unlikely because frequently occurring cognitively spontaneous beliefs often connect an inquirer's system to reality. Notice that arbitrarily constructed systems are often inconsistent with cognitively spontaneous beliefs. However, an inquirer may consistently dismiss cognitively spontaneous beliefs so that her disconnected system remains coherent. In this case, the inquirer's system is similar to a "consistent fairy story." Here, the observation requirement blocks justification because an inquirer's system does not "receive at least apparent input from the world."[42] Also, the inquirer does not "make a reasonable effort to seek out relevant, possibly conflicting observations" for beliefs in her system.[43]

BonJour's fourth necessary condition is that S has "a reflective grasp of the fact that her system of beliefs is coherent to a high degree and more coherent than any alternative which would also satisfy the observation requirement."[44] Related to this, S must believe that p due to her "reflective grasp" of her system of beliefs. This condition ensures that BonJour's theory of justification is internalist because it ensures that a system's coherence is accessible to a justified inquirer. BonJour writes, "if the fact of coherence is to be accessible to the believer, it follows that he must somehow have an adequate grasp of his total system of beliefs."[45] This is because BonJour's first and second necessary conditions, for justification, require that an inquirer's belief that p coheres with her system of beliefs. Later in this paper, I

[41] Ibid., 154.
[42] Ibid., 142.
[43] Ibid., 142.
[44] Ibid., 154.
[45] Ibid., 102.

discuss a seeming issue with this part of BonJour's "reflective grasp" condition. For now, notice that BonJour concedes that "if such a grasp exists at all, it must be construed as tacit or implicit."[46]

BonJour's "reflective grasp" condition is related to his account of the doxastic presumption. In motivating this presumption, BonJour writes, "what we must now ask is whether and how the fact that a belief coheres in this way [the way required by his second condition] is cognitively accessible to the believer himself, so that it can give him a reason for accepting the belief."[47] Remember, if an inquirer cannot realize that one of her beliefs coheres with her system of beliefs and this condition partly confers justification, then the coherence theory is an externalist theory of justification because an inquirer may be justified in believing that p even if she is unaware of some of the conditions that confer justification. In this way, BonJour's "reflective grasp" condition, and the doxastic presumption more generally, ensure that his theory of justification is internalist. BonJour writes that the presumption "is only that my representation of my overall system of beliefs is approximately correct."[48]

BonJour acknowledges a seeming issue with the doxastic presumption. It seems like a series of empirical beliefs would constitute an inquirer's grasp of her system. Notice that these beliefs also require justification. But, BonJour writes, "it is beyond any doubt viciously circular to claim that the meta beliefs which constitute the believer's grasp of his system of beliefs are themselves justified by virtue of their coherence with that system."[49] In other

[46] Ibid., 102.
[47] Ibid., 101.
[48] Ibid., 104.
[49] Ibid., 102.

words, the justification of an inquirer's belief that she has a grasp of her system of beliefs cannot be justified in terms of its coherence with the inquirer's system because the grasp of her system depends on the justification of this belief. For this reason, an inquirer's approximate grasp of her system of beliefs is a presumption, or "unavoidable feature of cognitive practice, rather than a justified belief."[50] BonJour writes, "raising an issue of empirical justification presupposes the existence of some specifiable system of empirical beliefs."[51] In other words, concerns about epistemic justification only arise after an approximate grasp of an inquirer's belief system is accepted. Notice that the presumption only requires that an inquirer has an 'approximate" grasp of her system so that "although assessments of coherence can be made only relative to a system of beliefs of which one has some prior grasp or representation, this does not mean that no aspect of that representation can be questioned."[52]

Before developing these four conditions, BonJour writes, "one can finally know that a given set of standards for epistemic justification is correct or reasonable only by knowing that the standards in question are genuinely conducive to the cognitive goal of truth."[53] BonJour develops his meta justificatory argument in terms of the long-run coherence of an inquirer's system of beliefs. In doing this, he writes, if an inquirer's system of beliefs did not correspond with reality, then "it is inherently unlikely that [this] system of beliefs which is constantly receiving that sort of input that is asserted by the observation requirement would remain coherent from moment to moment." Related to this, if an inquirer satisfies the

[50] Ibid., 102.
[51] Ibid., 103.
[52] Ibid., 104.
[53] Ibid., 9.

observation requirement and her system of beliefs remains coherent in the long-run, then this phenomenon is significant and requires an explanation. From here, BonJour contends that the best explanation of this phenomenon is that the inquirer's system of beliefs corresponds with reality.[54] So, the long-run coherence of an inquirer's system of beliefs suggests that the inquirer's system corresponds to reality. If this is correct, then his coherence theory appears truth conducive.

Now let me introduce Keith Lehrer's coherence theory. Lehrer contends that knowledge is reducible to undefeated justification. He writes, "knowledge is undefeated justified acceptance."[55] Lehrer develops four necessary, and jointly sufficient, conditions. First, S must accept that p.[56] Second, it must be true that p.[57] Third, S, by means of her evaluation system, must be justified in accepting that p.[58] Notice that the coherence quality of Lehrer's theory is mostly packed into this third condition. Fourth, S is justified in accepting that p in a way that is not defeated by any false statement.[59] So, on Lehrer's coherence theory, S knows that p if and only if S satisfies these four conditions. Let's consider some of these conditions in more depth.

In *Theory of Knowledge*, Lehrer writes, "justification is coherence with a background system."[60] An inquirer's background system is comprised of a series of propositions that she accepts in the interest of obtaining truth and avoiding error. Lehrer contends that coherence with a background system involves accepting propositions that it is reasonable for an inquirer

[54] Ibid., 171.
[55] Keith Lehrer, *Theory of Knowledge*. (Colorado: Westview Press, 2000), 169.
[56] Ibid., 169.
[57] Ibid., 169.
[58] Ibid., 169.
[59] Ibid., 170.
[60] Ibid., 123.

to accept given her background system. Notice that Lehrer distinguishes between believing that p and accepting that p. An inquirer knows that p only if she accepts that p because accepting that p is connected to the "quest for truth."[61] Lehrer contends that an inquirer may believe a proposition that she knows is false. For instance, someone may believe something a politician says, even if she knows that the politician is untrustworthy, because she eagerly wants to consider the claim true. Some inquirers wish to believe that the economy is healthy. If a politician says it is, an inquirer may believe the politician even if she knows that the economy is sick. However, the inquirer does not accept that the economy is healthy because accepting this proposition, rather than believing it, is tied to "the quest for truth." So, for Lehrer, an inquirer's acceptance system determines whether an inquirer is justified because this system informs an inquirer about how reasonable it is for her to accept some proposition in the "quest for truth."[62]

An acceptance system, and related systems concerned with acceptance, constitute an inquirer's evaluation system. An evaluation system is the background system that "provides an evaluation of the reasonableness of what we accept."[63] An inquirer's preference system is one system that constitutes her evaluation system. An inquirer's preferences, in terms of accepting what is true and avoiding what is false, is part of her evaluation system because these preferences influence what it is reasonable for her to accept. A system consisting of the "reasonings from acceptances to further acceptances as conclusions" also constitutes an inquirer's evaluation system. Notice that the way in which an inquirer reasons from premises

[61] Ibid., 124.
[62] Lehrer's distinction between "acceptance" and "belief" is not important for my latter discussion. When I write about both BonJour's and Lehrer's coherence theories, I will frame my discussion in terms of an inquirer's belief that p, but the discussion also applies to an inquirer's acceptance that p.
[63] Ibid., 126.

to conclusions influences what it is reasonable for her to accept.[64] So, an acceptance system, preference system, and reasoning system constitute an inquirer's evaluation system. From here, an inquirer is epistemically justified in accepting that p only if p coheres with her evaluation system.

Lehrer uses a game model to explain his theory of justification.[65] An inquirer and critic play the justification game. The game begins when an inquirer contends that she knows some proposition. A critic then raises an objection to this proposition. If it is more reasonable for the inquirer to accept her claim, based on her evaluation system, then the inquirer wins this round of the justification game.[66] This process is repeated until an inquirer answers all of a critic's objections or the inquirer loses one round of the game. If the inquirer answers all of the objections, or in other words it is more reasonable for her to accept that p on the basis of her evaluation system, then she is personally justified in accepting that p.[67] If it is more reasonable for the inquirer to accept any objection, then she is not personally justified in accepting that p. Importantly, Lehrer contends that "it is not necessary that a person has reflected on the objection for the objection to be answered." Still, it is necessary that an inquirer's evaluation system implies that it is more reasonable for her to accept that p rather than any objection to p.[68]

Suppose Bella attends a baseball game. And, that she is unfamiliar with the game's rules. Still, Bella contends that she knows that the home team is winning. Here, Bella enters into the justification game. In the first round, a critic may contend that Bella is actually

[64] Ibid., 127.
[65] Ibid., 132.
[66] Ibid., 131.
[67] Ibid., 132.
[68] Ibid., 132.

asleep and dreaming that she is at the ball game. Bella may respond that it is more reasonable for her, given her evaluation system, to accept that she is at the ball game because she has a distinct memory of what preceded her experience at the game.[69] So, Bella wins the first round of the justification game. In the second round, a critic may accept that Bella is awake but contend that she is hallucinating that the home team is winning.[70] Bella may respond that it is more reasonable for her to accept that she is not hallucinating because there is nothing in her past experience to suggest that she is hallucinating. Now, the critic may contend that Bella is mistaken because she is unfamiliar with the game's rules and because the scoreboard shows that the visiting team is winning. Bella may respond that it is more reasonable for her to accept that the home team is winning, that the scoreboard is mistaken, and that her lack of understanding is irrelevant because she accepts that the team with the more pleasing uniforms, the home team in this case, never trails its competition. From here, the justification game continues until Bella answers every objection or it is more reasonable for her to accept one of the critic's objections. In the former case, Bella is personally justified in accepting that the home team is winning.[71]

This example shows a limitation of Lehrer's coherence theory of personal justification. An inquirer may be personally justified in accepting that p because she recklessly accepts unreasonable propositions. Bella may have been personally justified in accepting that the home team was winning because she accepted that a team's uniforms influence the game's score. Lehrer develops a second sort of justification to block this

[69] Ibid., 133.
[70] Ibid., 133.
[71] Ibid., 132.

possibility.[72] Ultra justification is personal justification that is not based on any false acceptances.[73] Ultra justification depends on "a new system that retains only what is true in the person's evaluation system."[74] This is an inquirer's ultra system. S is ultrally justified in accepting that p if and only if it is more reasonable for S to accept that p, rather than any objection to p, based on her ultra system.[75] In the previous example, Bella won the round where she referred to the team's uniforms because she accepted that a team's uniforms influence the game's score. In the ultra game, Bella cannot answer like this because this false acceptance is purged from her ultra system.[76] So, Bella cannot win every round of the ultra justification game. For this reason, Bella is not ultrally justified in accepting that the home team is winning.

Remember, an inquirer is personally justified in accepting that p if and only if it is more reasonable for her to accept that p, rather than any objection to p, given her evaluation system.[77] Also, recall that personal justification is less demanding than ultra justification because an inquirer's ultra system is her evaluation system purged of all false statements. In this way, an inquirer can rely on false statements to be personally justified but not to be ultrally justified. Remember, an inquirer is ultrally justified in accepting that p if and only if it is more reasonable for her to accept that p, rather than any objection to p, given her ultra system.[78] Some of Gettier's examples help illuminate the difference between these types of

[72] Ibid., 153.
[73] Ibid., 153.
[74] Ibid., 154.
[75] Ibid., 154.
[76] Ibid., 155.
[77] Ibid., 133.
[78] Ibid., 171.

justification.[79] For instance, an inquirer is personally justified in believing that someone in her class owns a Ferrari because she accepts that Nogot owns a Ferrari. However, she is not ultrally justified in accepting this because her acceptance that Nogot owns a Ferrari is purged from her ultra system.

Section 2: Haack's and Sosa's Consistent Fairy Story Objection

In *Evidence and Inquiry: A Pragmatist Reconstruction of Epistemology*, Susan Haack develops some objections to coherence theories of epistemic justification.[80] First, Haack develops the "consistent fairy story" objection.[81] Then, she objects to the way that BonJour tries to avoid the "consistent fairy story" objection. Haack writes, "the fundamental problem with coherentism, according to this objection, lies precisely in the fact that it tries to make justification depend solely on relations among beliefs."[82] In other words, non-belief input does not play a justificatory role in coherence theories.[83] For this reason, Haack contends that justification, on a coherence theory, cannot be an indication of a belief "correctly representing how the world is."[84] Imagine an inquirer who creates a consistent and comprehensive system of beliefs. This is similar to the way an author creates a consistent fairy tale.[85] Suppose Bella creates a series of explanatorily connected beliefs about an imaginary event occurring in a faraway land. Notice that these beliefs are likely consistent with her comprehensive system because the beliefs only relate to an imaginary event in a

[79] Ibid., 154.
[80] Susan Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry: A Pragmatist Reconstruction of Epistemology*. (New York: Prometheus Books, 1993), 93.
[81] Ibid., 65.
[82] Ibid., 65.
[83] Ibid., 66.
[84] Ibid., 66.
[85] Ibid., 65.

faraway land. From here, the "consistent fairy story" objection suggests that a coherence theory of justification judges that Bella is epistemically justified in believing these disconnected propositions. However, these propositions do not correspond to reality. For this reason, justification, on a coherence theory, may not track whether a belief "correctly represents how the world is."[86]

In "The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge," Ernest Sosa develops a similar objection to coherence theories.[87] He writes, "the view that justification is a matter of relations among beliefs is open to an objection from alternative coherent systems or detachment from reality."[88] From the alternative coherent systems perspective, the external world may remain constant while an inquirer's system of acceptances/beliefs changes. From the detachment from reality perspective, an inquirer's system of acceptances/beliefs may remain constant while the external world changes. From both perspectives, Sosa contends, on a coherence theory, "there could be no effect on the justification of any belief."[89] He develops this objection through an inquirer's belief that she has a headache.[90] Imagine that this belief coheres with Bella's present system of beliefs. The belief may be explanatorily connected with other beliefs about Bella's pain.[91] Now, suppose, Bella, while still having a headache, believes that she does not have a headache, that her head does not hurt, and that she is not in pain. Sosa contends that an inquirer may alter her system of beliefs like this without changing anything that occurs in the external world. Sosa writes,

---

[86] Ibid., 66.
[87] Ernest Sosa, "The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence Versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (1980): 18.
[88] Ibid., 18.
[89] Ibid., 18.
[90] Ibid., 19.
[91] Ibid., 19.

the "resulting hypothetical system of beliefs would cohere as fully as does the original system."[92] So, it seems like Bella may be justified in believing that she does not have a headache. In this way, Haack and Sosa suggest that justification, on a coherence theory, is not truth conducive.

Haack objects to the way that BonJour tries to avoid the "consistent fairy story" objection.[93] In Section 1, I introduced BonJour's observation requirement. Haack points out that BonJour inconsistently formulates the observation requirement.[94] She writes, "BonJour tells us that the observation requirement 'effectively guarantees that a cognitive system which satisfies it will receive at least apparent input from the world.'"[95] Then, she points out BonJour later drops the "at least apparent" part of the requirement. She writes, "one finds BonJour claiming that 'the observation requirement guarantees that the system of beliefs will receive ongoing observational support.'"[96] For this reason, Haack distinguishes between two formulations of the observation requirement. On the doxastic interpretation, "the observation requirement requires that the subject believes that he has cognitively spontaneous beliefs and that the subject believes that cognitively spontaneous beliefs are generally reliable."[97] Notice that this interpretation does not imply that an inquirer is justified only if her system receives external world input. On the experientialist interpretation, the observation requirement requires "that the subject has cognitively spontaneous beliefs, and that he believes that

[92] Ibid., 19.
[93] Susan Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry: A Pragmatist Reconstruction of Epistemology*. (New York: Prometheus Books, 1993), 94.
[94] Susan Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry: A Pragmatist Reconstruction of Epistemology*. (New York: Prometheus Books, 1993), 96.
[95] Ibid., 100.
[96] Ibid., 100.
[97] Ibid., 99.

cognitively spontaneous beliefs are generally reliable."[98] Notice that this interpretation implies that an inquirer is justified only if her system receives external world input. Haack contends that the latter interpretation of the requirement is not consistent with a coherence theory because justification is no longer couched purely in terms of the relations among beliefs.[99] So, BonJour's theory does not guarantee external world input or it is not a coherence theory of justification.

Let's focus on the doxastic interpretation of the observation requirement. On the doxastic interpretation, an inquirer is justified only if her system of beliefs receives, at least apparent, input from the external world.[100] In other words, the system must include, at least apparent, cognitively spontaneous beliefs. This interpretation blocks Sosa's formulation of the "consistent fairy story" objection because "headache" beliefs are apparently cognitively spontaneous. Remember, Sosa writes, "let everything remain constant, including the splitting headache, except for the following: replace the belief that I have a headache with the belief that I do not have a headache."[101] Recall that BonJour writes that a belief is cognitively spontaneous if it "simply occurs" to an inquirer.[102] In other words, it strikes an inquirer in a "manner which is both involuntary and quite coercive."[103] A headache belief likely "simply occurs" to an inquirer. It seems to strike an inquirer in a "manner which is both involuntary and quite coercive." If this is right, then the inquirer, in Sosa's "headache" counterexample, does not satisfy the doxastic interpretation of BonJour's observation requirement. Therefore,

---

[98] Ibid., 99.
[99] Ibid., 101.
[100] Ibid., 100.
[101] Ernest Sosa, "The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence Versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (1980): 19.
[102] Ibid., 117.
[103] Ibid., 117.

the inquirer, on BonJour's coherence theory, is not epistemically justified in believing that she does not have a headache because she does not satisfy the doxastic interpretation of BonJour's observation requirement.

BonJour's meta justificatory argument diminishes Sosa's and Haack's formulation of the "consistent fairy story" objection because they both focus on an inquirer's short term justification. Recall that BonJour points out that it is sufficient to show that "adhering to coherentist standards over the long-run is likely eventually to yield beliefs which correspond to reality."[104] If an inquirer adheres to BonJour's conditions, in the long-run, then her system will likely correspond to reality because an inquirer's future cognitively spontaneous beliefs will motivate the revision of mistaken empirical beliefs. In other words, if Bella mistakenly believes a proposition that does not correspond to reality, then her system will not remain coherent because future cognitively spontaneous beliefs will be inconsistent with her system. At this point, Bella can reject her future cognitively spontaneous beliefs or drop her mistaken beliefs from her system. If she does the former, then she is not justified because her system does not satisfy the doxastic interpretation of the requirement. If she does the latter, then she satisfies the doxastic interpretation of the observation requirement. In this case, Bella's system likely corresponds to reality. In this way, the long-run development of an inquirer's system of beliefs increases the likelihood that, if she satisfies BonJour's conditions, then her system corresponds to reality.

Haack points out that, on the doxastic interpretation of the observation requirement, an inquirer may be justified in believing that p even if her system of beliefs does not receive

[104] Ibid., 169.

actual external world input. Instead, her system only receives apparent external world input. These examples do not pose a threat to the general truth conduciveness of BonJour's coherence theory because they are unrealistic. If an inquirer persists, then she is minimally connected to reality. An inquirer will not survive if she constructs a system of beliefs with apparent, but not actual, external world input. For instance, Bella will not survive if she is not actually aware of her surroundings. She will also not survive if she is not actually aware of her body's functions. In this way, it is unlikely that an inquirer survives, satisfies the doxastic interpretation of the observation requirement, and her system does not receive actual external world input.

I tried to defend BonJour's coherence theory against Haack's and Sosa's "consistent fairy story" objection. I suggested that the doxastic interpretation of the observation requirement can defeat Sosa's formulation of the objection because headache beliefs are cognitively spontaneous. In addition, the long-run coherence of an inquirer's system and the requirements for her survival can weaken Haack's formulation of the objection. From here, remember that Lehrer's theory of ultra justification guarantees that an ultrally justified inquirer is connected to reality. Lehrer writes, "the claimant must accept that she is connected with external reality to win the justification game yielding personal justification."[105] This is because a critic may always contend that an inquirer is sensually disconnected from reality. If an inquirer wins this round, then she accepts that it is more reasonable for her to accept that she is connected to reality. If she is not connected to reality, then she cannot respond in this way. For this reason, she cannot respond to every objection to her acceptance. For this

[105] Keith Lehrer, *Theory of Knowledge*. (Colorado: Westview Press, 2000) 136.

reason, she is not ultrally justified in accepting that p. In this way, as Lehrer writes, ultra justification "ensures the appropriate truth connection between internal coherence and external reality."

Section 3: Epistemic Responsibility and BonJour's Theory of Justification

In *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*, BonJour wavers between developing necessary, and jointly sufficient, conditions for the justification of an inquirer and the justification of a belief within an inquirer's system of beliefs. BonJour writes, "It follows that one's cognitive endeavors are epistemically justified only if and to the extent that they are aimed at this goal, which means very roughly that one accepts all and only those beliefs which one has good reason to think are true. To accept a belief in the absence of such a reason, however appealing or even mandatory such acceptance might be from some other standpoint, is to neglect the pursuit of truth; such acceptance is, one might say, epistemically irresponsible. My contention here is that the idea of avoiding such irresponsibility, of being epistemically responsible in one's believings, is the core notion of epistemic justification."[106] So, BonJour ties epistemic justification to epistemic responsibility. It seems like inquirers, and not beliefs, can be epistemically responsible. So, he may be focused, primarily, on the justification of an inquirer in believing that p. He also writes, "coherentist justification depends essentially on one's reflective grasp of one's own system of beliefs."[107] This condition likely relates to justification of an inquirer rather than the justification of a belief within an inquirer's system. But, sometimes BonJour seems focused on the justification of a belief within an inquirer's system. BonJour, before re-capping his theory, writes, "According

[106] Laurence BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*. (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), 8.
[107] Ibid., 137.

to this position, in order for a belief which is contingent, and therefore not justified a priori, to be empirically justified, the following four main conditions must be satisfied."[108] Here, BonJour appears focused, primarily, on the justification of a belief within an inquirer's system of beliefs.

In addition, BonJour seems to waver between the justification of an inquirer and the justification of a belief within an inquirer's system when he considers other coherence conditions. He, in developing the observation requirement, writes, "the system of beliefs in question must satisfy the observation requirement."[109] So, the requirement may apply to the justification of an inquirer's system. However, BonJour also writes that the requirement requires "that a user of the system makes a reasonable effort to seek out relevant, possibly conflicting observations."[110] Here, it seems like the requirement is concerned with an inquirer's activity relevant to her beliefs. So, an inquirer and an inquirer's system may be candidates to satisfy the requirement. More generally, BonJour's coherence conditions may apply to both the justification of an inquirer and the justification of an inquirer's belief. His contention that "being epistemically responsible in one's believings, is the core notion of epistemic justification" requires that his theory is, to some extent, concerned with the justification of an inquirer.[111]

In this section, I focus on BonJour's contention that, "being epistemically responsible in one's believings, is the core notion of epistemic justification."[112] So, I focus on his theory of justification in terms of the justification of an inquirer who believes that p. First, I consider

[108] Ibid., 153.
[109] Ibid., 153.
[110] Ibid., 142.
[111] Ibid., 8.
[112] Ibid., 8.

some theories of epistemic responsibility to further develop BonJour's theory of justification. From here, I suggest that a theory of epistemic responsibility is best unpacked in terms of "virtue tracking." Then, I re-examine some parts of BonJour's coherence theory. Sometimes his conditions require that a justified inquirer's epistemic activity tracks intellectual vices. Sometimes they do not ensure that a justified inquirer's activity tracks intellectual virtues. So, after considering the theory of epistemic responsibility required for BonJour's theory of justification, the second half of this section suggests that some of his conditions are incompatible with his theory of justification. In Section 5, I will introduce a condition that will establish the compatibility between BonJour's coherence theory and his theory's account of epistemic justification.

Remember, BonJour contends that "the idea of avoiding such irresponsibility, of being epistemically responsible in one's believings, is the core notion of epistemic justification."[113] This suggests that an inquirer is justified in believing that p if and only if she epistemically responsibly believes that p. BonJour also writes, "a given set of standards for epistemic justification is correct or reasonable only by knowing that the standards in question are genuinely conducive to the cognitive goal of truth."[114] From here, it may seem like BonJour ascribes to the duty sense of epistemic responsibility. In "Epistemic Responsibility," J. Angelo Corlett discusses this interpretation of BonJour's theory.[115] The duty interpretation contends that an inquirer has a duty to act in a virtuous way. An inquirer epistemically responsibly believes that p if and only if she fulfills her epistemic duty with regard to p. On

[113] Ibid., 8.
[114] Ibid., 9.
[115] J. Angelo Corlett, "Epistemic Responsibility," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 16, no. 2 (2008): 183.

this interpretation, BonJour's coherence conditions should ensure that a justified inquirer fulfills her cognitive duty. For instance, if an inquirer is justified in believing that p, then her system of beliefs receives at least apparent input from the external world because her system satisfies BonJour's observation requirement. Notice that it seems like it is an inquirer's epistemic duty to act epistemically curiously and thus, to some minimal extent, consider external world evidence.

There are issues with the duty interpretation of epistemic responsibility. BonJour suggests that an inquirer is justified in believing that p if and only if she epistemically responsibly believes that p.[116] So, if she knows that p, then she epistemically responsibly believes that p because an inquirer knows that p only if she is justified in believing that p. But, an inquirer cannot perform her epistemic duty if she does not act voluntarily.[117] Corlett writes, "the formation and acceptance of beliefs requires agency, which involuntariness prohibits."[118] On this interpretation of responsibility, if an inquirer involuntarily believes that p, then, she cannot know that p. Many first-person present tense beliefs are involuntary. In "Responsibility and Reliability," Michael Williams writes, "belief is generally involuntary. Believing is not something that one decides to do."[119] If he is right, then an inquirer cannot perform her epistemic duty with regard to a wide swath of her beliefs because these beliefs are not subject to duty. Thus, if an inquirer is justified in believing that p if and only if she responsibly believes that p, then an inquirer may not be justified in believing a wide swath of

[116] Laurence BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*. (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), 8.
[117] J. Angelo Corlett, "Epistemic Responsibility," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 16, no. 2 (2008): 187.
[118] Ibid., 187.
[119] Ibid., 3.

her beliefs. BonJour's theory appears to require that inquirers can be justified in believing cognitively spontaneous beliefs because his meta justificatory argument relies on the acceptance of some of these beliefs. For these reasons, the duty interpretation of epistemic responsibility seems to judge that paradigmatic examples of justified true beliefs are not actually examples of justified true beliefs and appears incompatible with BonJour's meta justificatory argument.

Also notice that the duty interpretation may be mistaken because it, coupled with BonJour's theory of justification, may judge that knowledge is impossible in a deterministic universe. Suppose the universe is determined and incompatibilism is true. So, inquirers are not epistemic agents. So, inquirers cannot perform their epistemic duties. So, inquirers cannot responsibly believe empirical propositions. So, inquirers cannot be justified in believing empirical propositions. So, empirical knowledge is impossible. But, inquirers can know some propositions even if the universe is determined and incompatibilism is true. Further, notice that, on the duty interpretation, if determinism and incompatibilism are true, then inquirers cannot know that the universe is determined because knowledge is impossible. However, it seems like an inquirer can possibly know that the universe is determined. In other words, it seems like an open question. For this reason, the duty interpretation of epistemic responsibility may be mistaken.

In "Epistemic Virtue and Doxastic Responsibility," James Montmarquet considers a different conception of epistemic responsibility. He suggests that epistemically irresponsible actions "may ultimately be traced to those negative traits of intellectual character."[120] For

[120] James Montmarquet, "Epistemic Virtue and Doxastic Responsibility," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (1992): 335.

instance, an inquirer may epistemically irresponsibly believe that women are less rational than men because one, or more, of her epistemic vices motivates this belief. For instance, her intellectual close mindedness may contribute to her belief that women are less rational than men. In a similar way, her intellectual laziness may contribute to this belief. On this intellectual virtue interpretation, notice that an inquirer may epistemically responsibly or irresponsibly believe that p even if the universe is determined. A warrior, in a deterministic universe, acts courageously when she enters battle. Likewise, an inquirer, in a deterministic universe, acts epistemically close mindedly when she refuses to consider some reliable evidence.

BonJour's coherence conditions should ensure that an inquirer is epistemically justified in believing that p if and only if she epistemically responsibly believes that p because epistemic responsibility constitutes the core notion of epistemic justification. So, the conditions should ensure that a justified inquirer's epistemic activity tracks, or aligns with, certain intellectual virtues. In "Epistemic Virtue and Justified Belief," Robert Audi distinguishes between intellectual virtues of pursuit and intellectual virtues of response.[121] A virtue of pursuit is one concerned with seeking out evidence and beliefs.[122] A virtue of response is one concerned with responding to evidence or grounds for belief.[123] The doxastic interpretation of the observation requirement sometimes ensures that a justified inquirer acts curiously. This is a virtue of pursuit because it relates to the way that an inquirer seeks evidence. The requirement ensures that a justified inquirer "makes a reasonable effort to seek

[121] Robert Audi, "Epistemic Virtue and Justified Belief." in *Virtue Epistemology: Essays in Epistemic Virtue and Responsibility*. ed. Abrol Fairweather and Linda Zagzebski (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 85.
[122] Ibid., 85.
[123] Ibid., 85.

out relevant, possibly conflicting observations."[124] If an inquirer makes a reasonable effort to seek out conflicting evidence, then she acts epistemically curiously. Remember, the observation requirement also ensures that a justified inquirer's system receives, at least apparent, external world input.[125] If an inquirer's system receives this input, then she acts minimally open mindedly. This is a virtue of response because it relates to the way that an inquirer responds to evidence.

BonJour's contention that "being epistemically responsible in one's believings, is the core notion of epistemic justification" provides his theory with another way to avoid Haack's and Sosa's "consistent fairy story" objection.[126] An inquirer who, while having a headache, believes that she does not have one neither pursues nor responds to evidence in a virtuous way. She does not act curiously because she does not pursue evidence that she has a headache. She does not act open mindedly because she does not respond to her pain. So, she does not responsibly believe that she does not have a headache. If "being epistemically responsible in one's believings, is the core notion of epistemic justification," then she is not justified in believing that she does not have a headache. So, this part of BonJour's theory, coupled with the "tracking virtue" theory of responsibility, protects it from the "consistent fairy story" objection.

Related to this, on Haack's doxastic interpretation of the observation requirement, sometimes an inquirer is justified in believing that p even if her system does not receive actual external world input. Rather, her system receives only apparent input. In Section 2, I

---

[124] Ibid., 142.
[125] Laurence BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*. (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), 141.
[126] Laurence BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*. (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), 8.

suggested that these examples are unlikely. These examples are also less problematic because if an inquirer's system receives continuous apparent external world input, then it is likely that she acts minimally responsibly. For instance, it is likely that she acts curiously and open mindedly because her system receives apparent external world input. Notice that the concern that an inquirer may be epistemically justified in believing that p even if she irresponsibly believes that p partly motivated the "consistent fairy story" objection. However, examples that the doxastic interpretation does not block, however infrequent, likely involve minimally responsible inquirers because they involve inquirers with systems that receive continuous apparent external world input.

In "Epistemic Virtue and Justified Belief," Robert Audi discusses the typical role that moral virtues play in ethical theories to help illuminate the role that intellectual virtues may play in an epistemological account.[127] He writes, "in the common sense in which virtues are admirable traits that above all guide action, I take it that broadly speaking a virtue is a feature of character that has a significant tendency to influence conduct."[128] For BonJour's coherence theory, it is not necessary that an inquirer possesses, and acts from, certain intellectual virtues. Rather, it is necessary that an inquirer's epistemic activity, with regard to p, tracks, or aligns with, intellectual virtues. This is important because, as Audi suggests, an inquirer may be epistemically justified in believing that p even if she does not act, with regard to p from certain intellectual virtues. In "Epistemic Virtue and Justified Belief," Audi writes, "it would seem possible to have a justified belief when no associated trait deserving the name "virtue"

[127] Robert Audi, "Epistemic Virtue and Justified Belief." in *Virtue Epistemology: Essays in Epistemic Virtue and Responsibility*. ed. Abrol Fairweather and Linda Zagzebski (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 82.
[128] Ibid., 83.

is present."[129] Further, Audi writes, "a generally uninsightful person can suddenly see a pattern (in a way we think of as indicating insight) and thereby be justified in a belief about it."[130] Notice that a generally uninsightful inquirer's epistemic activity, with regard to p, may track, or align with, the virtue of insightfulness even if she does not possess this settled intellectual character trait. For this reason, the "tracking virtue" theory of epistemic responsibility can avoid this seeming problem with other "virtue" theories of epistemic responsibility. In Section 5, I will further discuss the "tracking virtue" theory of epistemic responsibility.

In "Epistemic Virtue and Justified Belief," Audi writes, "the notions of epistemic virtue and of justification are so closely related that a full-scale account of either one can be used as a basis for checking on and even extending any account of the other."[131] This aligns with BonJour's contention that epistemic responsibility constitutes the core notion of epistemic justification. In the remainder of this section, I discuss my concerns with some of BonJour's coherence conditions. Sometimes BonJour's coherence conditions do not ensure that a justified inquirer's epistemic activity tracks certain intellectual virtues. Other times, the coherence conditions require that a justified inquirer's epistemic activity tracks certain intellectual vices.

Sometimes the doxastic interpretation of BonJour's observation requirement requires that an inquirer's activity tracks an excess degree of epistemic carefulness. Remember, the doxastic interpretation of the observation requirement requires that, "the subject believes that he has cognitively spontaneous beliefs, and that the subject believes that cognitively

[129] Ibid., 89.
[130] Ibid., 89.
[131] Ibid., 94.

spontaneous beliefs are generally reliable."[132] It also requires that "a user of the system makes a reasonable effort to seek out relevant, possibly conflicting observations, if his beliefs are to be justified."[133] It is unclear what a "reasonable effort" amounts to. However, sometimes an inquirer's epistemic activity tracks intellectual virtues even if she does not make any effort to seek out conflicting observations. In some cases, if she made any effort to seek out conflicting evidence that p, then her activity tracks an excess degree of epistemic carefulness. Suppose Bella believes that all zebras are striped. At a nature preserve, Bella approaches a structure housing zebras. Suppose she skips the zebra exhibit. So, Bella does not make any effort to seek out relevant, and possibly conflicting, observations for her belief that zebras are striped. Yet, it seems like Bella is justified in believing this. Suppose Bella visits the zebra exhibit to seek out conflicting evidence for her belief that all zebras are striped. Now, she acts from an excess degree of epistemic carefulness. So, sometimes an inquirer appears justified in believing that p even if she does not seek out possibly conflicting evidence that not-p.

In other cases, an inquirer acts epistemically responsibly, with regard to p, even if she does not seek out relevant, and possibly conflicting, observations for p. Suppose Bella believes that humans lived in North America before 1900. Bella likely epistemically responsibly believes this even if she does not seek out possibly conflicting data for this belief. If she sought out possibly conflicting evidence for this belief, then her epistemic activity, with regard to this belief, would track an excess degree of epistemic carefulness.

---

[132] Susan Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry: A Pragmatist Reconstruction of Epistemology*. (New York: Prometheus Books, 1993), 99.
[133] Laurence BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*. (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), 142.

Like in the prior "zebra" example, this sort of excessive epistemic activity appears disabling. If Bella makes a continued effort to seek out conflicting observations for her mundane beliefs, like zebras are striped or humans lived in North America before 1900, then Bella cannot take part in richer sorts of inquiry. Like the "zebra" example, this example suggests that an inquirer may act epistemically responsibly even if she does not satisfy BonJour's observation requirement.

BonJour's second coherence condition sometimes suggests that an inquirer is not justified in believing that p even if she epistemically responsibly believes that p. Remember, the second condition is that "the system of beliefs in question must be coherent to a high degree and more coherent than any alternative which would also satisfy the observation requirement."[134] This condition is problematic because an inquirer's epistemic activity, with regard to p, may be epistemically responsible even if she does not possess a system of beliefs that is more coherent than any alternative which would also satisfy the observation requirement. Suppose Bella believes some true proposition about an expanding scientific field. Bella believes a true proposition about DNA that is consistent with, and explanatorily connected to, her system of beliefs. Now, suppose Bella's friend, Charlotte, also believes this proposition. The belief is consistent with, and explanatorily connected to, Charlotte's system of beliefs. However, the belief is explanatorily connected to one more belief in Charlotte's system and her system is more coherent than any alternative system which also satisfies the observation requirement. If Charlotte satisfies BonJour's other coherence conditions, then she is justified in believing this proposition. However, Bella is not epistemically justified

[134] Ibid., 154.

even though she only possesses one less explanatorily connected belief. Notice that if Charlotte epistemically responsibly believes the proposition, then it is likely that Bella does so too. In other words, if Charlotte's epistemic activity tracks certain intellectual virtues, then it is likely that Bella's activity does so too. The difference between their systems, one less explanatorily connected belief, appears trivial. If this is right, then BonJour's second coherence condition may sometimes judge that an epistemically responsible inquirer is not epistemically justified.

There are other problems with BonJour's second coherence condition. Let's adjust the initial example so that Bella, despite possessing a less coherent system of beliefs, appears, due to positional factors, more justified than Charlotte. Let's suppose Bella believes the "DNA" proposition in 1970. On the other hand, Charlotte believes the proposition in 2020. Notice that DNA research has expanded since 1970. For this reason, more possible explanatorily connected beliefs exist in 2020. Remember, Charlotte's system of beliefs includes one more explanatorily connected belief. However, now Bella appears more epistemically responsible because her system includes a greater proportion of possible beliefs because it was formed in 1970. So, the number of beliefs in an inquirer's system, thus the extent to which it is coherent, does not always track the extent to which she is epistemically responsible. So, it seems like an inquirer may be responsible even if she does not satisfy BonJour's second condition.

There are other problems with BonJour's second coherence condition. Let's adjust the initial example so that Bella is an undergraduate chemistry student and Charlotte is a graduate chemistry student. Remember, Charlotte's system of beliefs includes one more

explanatorily connected belief. However, now it seems like Bella is more epistemically responsible because she, as an undergraduate, has likely been introduced to fewer explanatorily connected beliefs. So, again the number of beliefs in an inquirer's system, and thus the extent to which it is coherent, does not always track the extent to which she acts epistemically responsibly. In this way, it seems like an inquirer may act epistemically responsibly, with regard to p, even if she does not, with regard to p, satisfy BonJour's second coherence condition.

The previous three examples suggest that an inquirer may epistemically responsibly believe that p even if she does not possess the most coherent system of beliefs. The latter two examples went further and suggested that an inquirer, with a less coherent system, may be more epistemically responsible than an inquirer with a more coherent system. However, there is a more important issue with BonJour's second necessary condition. Remember, he writes, "the system of beliefs in question must be coherent to a high degree and more coherent than any alternative which would also satisfy the observation requirement."[135] This suggests that an inquirer is justified in believing that p only if she possesses the most coherent belief system. If this is right, then the condition rules out paradigm examples of scientific knowledge. Most scientific fields are expanding. So, the most coherent belief system, with regard to some scientific proposition, likely includes true beliefs that have not yet been discovered. So, an inquirer may not be justified in believing some basic scientific proposition because some significantly more in-depth explanatorily connected proposition has not yet been discovered. Consider the proposition, "an organism's DNA constitutes its genetic

[135] Ibid., 154.

instructions." This is a paradigmatic example of scientific knowledge. An inquirer may not know this because it seems unlikely that she can possess the "most coherent" system of beliefs.

Section 4: Epistemic Responsibility and Lehrer's Theory of Justification

In this section, I consider the theory of epistemic responsibility required by Lehrer's coherence theory. In *Theory of Knowledge*, Lehrer focuses primarily on the justification of an inquirer rather than the justification of an acceptance within an inquirer's evaluation system.[136] Corlett contends that if an inquirer, on Lehrer's theory, is justified in accepting that p, then she responsibly accepts that p so that she possesses a sufficient degree of self-trust to play, and win, the ultra justification game. Again, I suggest that epistemic responsibility is best unpacked in terms of "virtue tracking." Then, I re-examine some parts of Lehrer's theory. I argue that his conditions are sometimes overly restrictive because they judge that paradigm examples of justified true acceptances are not actually examples of justified true acceptances. On the other hand, his coherence conditions sometimes do not ensure that an inquirer is justified in accepting that p only if she epistemically responsibly accepts that p. In Section 5, I will introduce a condition, the idealized system condition, that will solve some of these problems with Lehrer's theory.

In "Epistemic Responsibility," Corlett contends that Lehrer's coherence theory requires that an inquirer is justified only if she is, in the duty sense, epistemically responsible. Remember, for Lehrer, an inquirer is epistemically justified in accepting that p only if she can respond to all objections to p with her ultra system.[137] In other words, her ultra system

[136] Ibid., 15.
[137] Keith Lehrer, *Theory of Knowledge*. (Colorado: Westview Press, 2000) 130.

must suggest that it is more reasonable for her to accept that p rather than any objection to p. In this way, S's justification for accepting that p hinges on the contents of her ultra system. For this reason, Corlett contends that, if an inquirer, on Lehrer's coherence theory, is epistemically justified in accepting that p, then she sufficiently, and worthily, trusts her ultra system.[138] From here, Corlett suggests that an inquirer is worthy of this trust only if she acts "epistemically responsible in maintaining her acceptance [ultra] system."[139] So, an inquirer is ultrally justified in accepting that p only if she epistemically responsibly maintains her acceptance, reasoning, and preference systems. In other words, Corlett suggests that Lehrer's theory "must be grounded in a conception of epistemic responsibility that forms the basis of self-trust."[140]

Corlett contends that, in the duty sense of epistemic responsibility, "*S* is epistemically responsible for believing or accepting that *p* at *t* to the extent that *S* believes or accepts freely that *p* at *t*."[141] Corlett suggests a Frankfurtian interpretation of "accepts freely" so that the formulation is partly compatibilist. He writes that this interpretation of epistemic responsibility "holds that there can be compatibility between a certain degree of involuntariness of belief or acceptance, on the one hand, and an epistemic agent's being responsible, on the other."[142] On this interpretation, an inquirer "accepts freely" that p at t if and only if she has "a higher-order volitional acceptance" that p at t.[143] In other words, an

[138] J. Angelo Corlett, "Epistemic Responsibility," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 16, no. 2 (2008): 190.
[139] J. Angelo Corlett, "Epistemic Responsibility," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 16, no. 2 (2008): 190.
[140] Ibid., 190.
[141] Ibid., 192.
[142] Ibid., 193.
[143] Ibid., 192.

inquirer accepts freely that p at t if and only if she "really wants" to accept that p at t.[144] Recall Bella's belief that the Nationals won the World Series. If she has a second-order volitional acceptance of this belief, then she epistemically responsibly accepts that the Nationals won the World Series.

There are issues with this interpretation of epistemic responsibility because an inquirer may epistemically responsibly accept that p even if she does not "accept freely" that p. Suppose a lazy inquirer accepts that she should exercise daily because she read about this in multiple credible health magazines. In this way, she pursues and responds to evidence in a virtuous way. Notice that the lazy inquirer may "really want" to believe that she should not exercise daily both because she is lazy and she does not want to feel ashamed of her poor exercise habits. In this case, this formulation of epistemic responsibility suggests that the lazy inquirer does not epistemically responsibly accept that she should exercise daily. But, the inquirer likely knows that she should exercise daily even if she does not really want to accept that she should exercise. For this reason, if an inquirer knows that p only if she epistemically responsibly accepts that p, then it seems like a lazy inquirer may epistemically responsibly accept that she should exercise daily even if she does not possess a corresponding higher-order volition to accept this. Therefore, this formulation of epistemic responsibility may be mistaken.

This issue with the duty interpretation of epistemic responsibility motivates the consideration of a different interpretation of epistemic responsibility. Remember, an inquirer is epistemically justified in accepting that p only if she epistemically responsibly accepts that

[144] Ibid., 192.

p because she can respond to objections to p only if she epistemically responsibly accepts that p.[145] In Section 3, I suggested that epistemic responsibility is best unpacked in terms of "virtue tracking." In this section, I also work with the "tracking virtue" interpretation of epistemic responsibility.

Sometimes Lehrer's coherence conditions suggest that S is justified in accepting that p only if S epistemically responsibly accepts that p. In other words, sometimes Lehrer's coherence conditions suggest that a justified inquirer's epistemic activity tracks intellectual virtues of response and pursuit. If an inquirer can respond to all objections to p with her evaluation system, then she likely possesses a large evaluation system. This is because a small evaluation system cannot defeat all possible objections to p. If an inquirer possesses a large evaluation system, then it is likely that she is, to some minimal extent, epistemically curious. Epistemic curiosity is an Audian virtue of pursuit. In a similar way, a justified inquirer's epistemic activity is likely, to some minimal degree, epistemically open minded because her evaluation system must contain enough true acceptances to win every round of the justification game. Epistemic open mindedness is an Audian virtue of response. In these ways, Lehrer's coherence conditions sometimes suggest that a justified inquirer's epistemic activity, with regard to some proposition, tracks certain intellectual virtues of pursuit and response.

In "Epistemic Virtue and Justified Belief," Audi discusses the typical role that moral virtues play in ethical theories to illuminate the role that intellectual virtues may play in an epistemological account.[146] Recall, he writes, "in the common sense in which virtues are

[145] Keith Lehrer, *Theory of Knowledge*. (Colorado: Westview Press, 2000) 130.
[146] Robert Audi, "Epistemic Virtue and Justified Belief." in *Virtue Epistemology: Essays in Epistemic Virtue and Responsibility*. ed. Abrol Fairweather and Linda Zagzebski (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 82.

admirable traits that above all guide action, I take it that broadly speaking a virtue is a feature of character that has a significant tendency to influence conduct."[147] On Lehrer's coherence theory, intellectual virtues may influence conduct. However, this is not necessary. Rather, a justified inquirer must satisfy Lehrer's coherence conditions. Remember, Audi points out that an inquirer may be justified in accepting that p even if she does not act from certain intellectual virtues.[148] Notice that an inquirer may reflect on her epistemic activity and realize that it aligns with certain intellectual virtues even if she does not possess these settled character traits. This theory of epistemic responsibility only requires that a justified inquirer's epistemic activity, with regard to p, tracks, or aligns with, certain intellectual virtues. An inquirer's acceptance that p may track certain intellectual virtues even if she does not act from these virtues with regard to p. In other words, an uninsightful inquirer's epistemic activity may track, or align with, the virtue of insightfulness even if she does not possess this settled character trait. In Section 5, I will further discuss the "tracking virtue" theory of epistemic responsibility. For now, notice that the "tracking virtue" theory of epistemic responsibility can avoid this seeming problem with other "virtue" theories of epistemic responsibility.

I have some concerns with some features of Lehrer's coherence theory. If epistemic responsibility constitutes the core notion of epistemic justification, as Audi and BonJour contend, then sometimes Lehrer's coherence theory does not adequately ascribe justification to inquirers. I will suggest that sometimes his theory judges that paradigm examples of justified true acceptances are not actually examples of justified true acceptances. Other times,

[147]Ibid., 83.
[148] Ibid., 89.

his coherence theory suggests that paradigm classes of justified true acceptances are not actually justified true acceptances. Further, Lehrer's coherence theory sometimes suggests that an inquirer is epistemically justified in accepting that p even if she does not epistemically responsibly accept that p.

Remember, Lehrer contends that an inquirer is ultrally justified in accepting that p if and only if it is more reasonable for her to accept that p, rather than any objection to p, with her ultra system.[149] However, sometimes an inquirer may be epistemically justified in accepting that p even if it is not more reasonable for her to accept that p rather than any objection. An inquirer's ultra system may not imply that it is more reasonable for her to accept that p, rather than any objection to p, because an infinite number of objections to p may exist. In this case, the ultra justification game cannot end. It seems possible that a critic may posit an infinite number of augmentations to the external world when she contends that not-p. For instance, a critic may contend that not all zebras are striped due to a seemingly infinite number of external world augmentations. If a critic can do this, then an inquirer may never be justified in accepting that p because she cannot win the endless justification game. However, inquirers are sometimes justified in accepting mundane empirical propositions. This suggests that an inquirer may sometimes be justified in accepting that p even if she cannot respond to all objections to p.

Other examples suggest that an inquirer may be justified in accepting that p even if she cannot respond to all possible objections to p. Suppose Bella accepts some true proposition about DNA. Suppose she accepts that an organism's DNA constitutes its genetic

[149] Ibid., 171.

instructions. Genetics is an expanding scientific field. So, there are some true "DNA" propositions that are undiscovered. Notice that some true "DNA" propositions may, at first glance, appear to pose a threat to Bella's "DNA" acceptance. A critic may mention these undiscovered propositions during the justification game. If Bella is justified in accepting that an organism's DNA constitutes its genetic instructions, then Bella can respond to all objections to this acceptance. However, it is likely not more reasonable for Bella to accept this proposition rather than any objection to it because it is unlikely that Bella understands all of the critic's objections. This is because some objections include undiscovered "DNA" propositions. Bella cannot understand these propositions because she does not understand the concepts constituting them. So, Bella cannot be justified in accepting the "DNA" proposition. But, Bella's epistemic activity, with regard to this proposition, may track certain intellectual virtues. So, she may epistemically responsibly accept this. If epistemic responsibility constitutes the core notion of epistemic justification, then Lehrer's coherence theory appears overly restrictive.

Other examples suggest that an inquirer may be justified in accepting that p even if she cannot respond to all possible objections to p. This condition suggests that children and older adults are not justified in accepting many propositions. Children and older adults cannot respond to every objection to most of their acceptances. Suppose a child accepts that Saturn has 62 moons because she read it in a textbook. The child does not possess a large number of other acceptances about Saturn. So, she cannot win every round of the justification game because it is not more reasonable for her to accept that Saturn has 62 moons, rather than every objection to this proposition. This is because she lacks certain "Saturn related"

acceptances, preferences, and reasonings in her ultra system. If this is right, then she is not justified in believing that Saturn has 62 moons. Therefore, this coherence condition may be too restrictive.

Let's return to a child's acceptance that Saturn has 62 moons. A young child, Bella, likely cannot imagine her entire evaluation system. It is unclear whether she, for this reason, possesses a diminished evaluation system. If her system is diminished, then it is even more unlikely that she can defeat every objection to her acceptance. On the other hand, suppose her system is not diminished. In this case, she will likely win a few more rounds of the justification game. Still, notice that it is unlikely that she can respond to every objection to her acceptance.

This example suggests that Lehrer's theory may face a more significant problem. In *Theory of Knowledge*, Lehrer argues convincingly against externalist theories of epistemic justification.[150] In considering the "opacity" objection, he writes, "the external relationship might be opaque to the subject, who has no idea that her beliefs are produced, caused, or causally sustained by a reliable belief-forming process or properly functioning cognitive faculty."[151] If an inquirer is ignorant of some epistemically relevant condition, then this condition cannot confer justification. In the last example, Bella's entire system likely cannot confer justification because her entire evaluation system is likely unavailable to her. In developing his theory, Lehrer writes, "It is not necessary that a person has reflected on the objection for the objection to be answered, but it is necessary that the evaluation system of the person implies that it is more reasonable to accept the claim than the objection."[152] This is

[150] Ibid., 177.
[151] Ibid., 185.
[152] Ibid., 132.

important because a justification game involves an extremely large, if not infinite, number of rounds. However, if an inquirer may be justified in accepting that p even if she does not play any rounds of the game, then she may be justified even if she does not grasp her evaluation system. In this case, Lehrer's theory appears susceptible to the "opacity" objection. Suppose an inquirer recklessly accepts that p. Here, she may be justified because her evaluation system, unbeknownst to her, can defeat a critic's objections. If this is right, then sometimes Lehrer's theory suggests that an inquirer can be justified in accepting that p even if she irresponsibly accepts that p.

Section 5: The Idealized System Condition

In Section 3 and 4, I raised some objections to BonJour's and Lehrer's coherence theories. First, I suggested that BonJour's observation requirement is too restrictive because sometimes an inquirer may epistemically responsibly believe that p even if she does not make a "reasonable" effort to seek out potentially conflicting evidence that not-p. Second, I suggested that his contention that an inquirer is justified in believing that p only if her system is more coherent than any other system is too restrictive because it judges that paradigm examples of justified true beliefs are not actually examples of justified true beliefs. Notice that this condition does not take into account an inquirer's position. It judges that if a child and an adult are epistemically justified in believing that p, then they have the same systems. Lehrer's theory is susceptible to a similar problem because it suggests that an inquirer is justified in accepting that p only if she can respond to every objection to p. Now, I develop a BonJourian and Lehrerian formulation of the idealized system condition to avoid these problems with their coherence theories. The condition will connect epistemic responsibility

to epistemic justification because an inquirer's justification will depend on her position. In addition, the condition will ensure that an inquirer is justified in believing that p only if her system likely corresponds to reality.

The idealized system condition, on the BonJourian formulation, contends that S is epistemically justified in believing that p only if (1) the Ideal Inquirer's system, the idealized system, includes p in S's epistemic position and (2) S's system of beliefs, in the p neighborhood, sufficiently overlaps the idealized system of beliefs, in the p neighborhood. The Ideal Inquirer's system, the idealized system, for S is that system of beliefs that the Ideal Inquirer holds in S's epistemic position. The idealized system includes p in S's epistemic position if the Ideal Inquirer believes that p in S's epistemic position. A belief is in the p neighborhood if it is justificatorily connected to p. A belief is justificatorily connected to p if it supports or explains p. In other words, the p neighborhood, of a system, is the part of the system that is integrated, perhaps through explanatory or other rich connections, with p. Notice that the second part of the idealized system condition compares an inquirer's system of beliefs, in the p neighborhood, to an idealized system of beliefs, in the p neighborhood. An inquirer's system sufficiently overlaps the idealized system if a number of beliefs in the inquirer's system, in the p neighborhood, are also in the idealized system, in the p neighborhood. If an inquirer satisfies both parts of the condition, then she may be more or less justified in believing that p.

Recall Bella's beliefs that the Nationals won the World Series, that the Nationals won the Championship Series, that the Nationals won more games than they lost, and that the Nationals won the final game of the season. Bella is likely justified in believing that the

Nationals won the World Series because the Ideal Inquirer believes this in Bella's position and because her system, in the p neighborhood, sufficiently overlaps the idealized system of beliefs, in the p neighborhood. Bella's beliefs exist in the idealized system because the Ideal Inquirer holds them in Bella's position. They are in the p neighborhood because they are justificatorily connected to the belief that the Nationals won the World Series. They are justificatorily connected to this belief because they support or explain Bella's belief. The idealized system, relative to p, contains beliefs, in the p neighborhood, that the Ideal Inquirer holds in S's epistemic position. The belief that the Nationals made the playoffs likely exists in the idealized system because the Ideal Inquirer likely holds it in S's position. If Bella adds this belief to her system, then she is increasingly justified because her system increasingly overlaps the idealized system. So, an inquirer is more or less justified in believing that p to the extent that her system, in the p neighborhood, overlaps the idealized system of beliefs, in the p neighborhood.

The idealized system condition, on the BonJourian formulation, contends that S is epistemically justified in believing that p only if (1) the Ideal Inquirer's system, the idealized system, includes p in S's epistemic position and (2) S's system of beliefs, in the p neighborhood, sufficiently overlaps the idealized system of beliefs, in the p neighborhood. The Ideal Inquirer determines the level of overlap sufficient to confer justification. In both parts of the idealized system condition, the Ideal Inquirer takes S's epistemic position. But, the Ideal Inquirer is disinterested when she determines the level of overlap sufficient to confer justification. At this time, the Ideal Inquirer is an intellectually virtuous inquirer who judges what it is reasonable for S, given her epistemic position, to achieve with regard to p. If

she judges that one inquirer has had richer exposure to a series of beliefs in the idealized system, then this inquirer may require a greater degree of overlap with the idealized system, in the p neighborhood. So, two inquirers can have the same system of beliefs while one is epistemically justified in believing that p and the other is not. This connects with my earlier contention that the extent to which an inquirer's system of beliefs is coherent does not necessarily track the extent to which she acts epistemically responsibly. Recall the two undergraduate students that believe the same "DNA" proposition. If they have the same belief systems, then the undergraduate in 1970 is likely more epistemically responsible than the one in 2020 because she has had less rich exposure to the idealized system. If epistemic responsibility constitutes the core notion of epistemic justification, then a theory of epistemic justification should track this. The idealized system condition tracks this because the degree of overlap sufficient to confer justification depends on what it is reasonable for S to achieve with regard to p. It is reasonable to expect the inquirer in 1970 to achieve less than the inquirer in 2020.

In Section 3 and 4, I suggested that epistemic responsibility is best unpacked in terms of "virtue tracking." An inquirer's epistemic activity, with regard to p, tracks certain intellectual virtues when her epistemic activity aligns with these intellectual virtues. The Ideal Inquirer's epistemic activity, with regard to p, tracks certain intellectual virtues because she is an epistemically responsible inquirer. She pursues evidence, relevant to p, in a virtuous way. And, she responds to evidence, relevant to p, in a virtuous way. For this reason, an inquirer tracks certain intellectual virtues when she acts, with regard to p, in a similar way that the Ideal Inquirer does with regard to p. In other words, to say that S tracks certain

intellectual virtues is to say that S pursues and responds to evidence in the way that the Ideal Inquirer pursues and responds to evidence. But, the Ideal Inquirer acts from intellectual virtues when she pursues and responds to evidence because she possesses settled intellectual virtues. On the other hand, remember that an inquirer's epistemic activity may track, or align with, a certain intellectual virtue even if she does not possess, and thus act from, the corresponding intellectual virtue.

The idealized system of beliefs for S, relative to p, contains beliefs, in the p neighborhood, that the Ideal Inquirer holds in S's epistemic position. If S satisfies the first part of the idealized system condition, then S's system is judged against this idealized system. From here, S is more or less justified in believing that p to the extent that her system, in the p neighborhood, overlaps the idealized system of beliefs, in the p neighborhood. If the Ideal Inquirer believes that p in S's position, then she epistemically responsibly believes that p. In other words, her epistemic activity, with regard to p, tracks certain intellectual virtues. Now, if S satisfies the first part of the idealized system condition and her system, in the p neighborhood, sufficiently overlaps the idealized system, in the p neighborhood, then she epistemically responsibly believes that p because her system resembles the Ideal Inquirer's system. In other words, if she is justified in believing that p, then her epistemic activity, with regard to p, tracks certain intellectual virtues. Recall Bella's belief that the Nationals won the World Series. Her system, in the p neighborhood, sufficiently overlapped the idealized system, in the p neighborhood, because her system included a series of beliefs justificatorily connected to her belief that the Nationals won. So, her epistemic activity, with regard to this belief, tracks certain intellectual virtues. For instance, her system suggests that she acts

minimally careful, curious, and open minded. So, the idealized system condition ensures that if an inquirer is justified in believing that p, then her epistemic activity, with regard to p, tracks certain intellectual virtues.

The idealized system condition, on the BonJourian formulation, can be further illuminated through a comparison with Lehrer's theory of an inquirer's ultra system. Recall, Lehrer contends that an inquirer's ultra system is "a new system that retains only what is true in the person's evaluation system."[153] The idealized system typically includes only true epistemically relevant data because it is the Ideal Inquirer's system in S's epistemic position. However, the system, on rare occasions, includes false data. S's system of beliefs, in the p neighborhood, is judged against this idealized system, in the p neighborhood. In this way, the idealized system condition focuses on a narrower amount, that is a specific neighborhood, of an inquirer's epistemic data. But, the idealized system typically contains more data, relevant to p, than an inquirer's ultra system because the Ideal Inquirer is typically more virtuous than other inquirers. But, it could possibly contain less data in the p neighborhood. This happens when an inquirer acts in alignment with an excess degree of an intellectual virtue. Recall, Bella, in the "zebra" example, seeks out an excess amount of evidence for her belief that all zebras are striped. In this case, her system is larger than the Ideal Inquirer's system because she pursues evidence excessively.

Remember, BonJour, in *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*, contends that S is epistemically justified in believing that p only if S has "a reflective grasp of the fact that her system of beliefs is coherent."[154] In addition, S must believe that p because of this reflective

[153] Keith Lehrer, *Theory of Knowledge*. (Colorado: Westview Press, 2000) 154.
[154] Laurence BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*. (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), 154.

grasp.[155] This condition ensures that BonJour's theory is internalist because it requires that an inquirer is aware of the condition that confers justification. A similar condition must accompany the idealized system condition so that an inquirer is epistemically justified in believing that p only if she epistemically responsibly believes that p. Recall Bella's belief that the Nationals won the World Series. She seemed justified because the Ideal Inquirer believes that p in Bella's epistemic position and Bella's system, in this neighborhood, includes beliefs justificatorily connected to her belief that the Nationals won. In other words, her system appeared to sufficiently overlap the idealized system. However, her epistemic activity, with regard to this proposition, does not track certain intellectual virtues if she does not have "a reflective grasp of the fact that her system of beliefs is coherent."[156] This is because she may recklessly believe that p without acknowledging that her system of beliefs is coherent. This condition appears necessary to connect epistemic justification to epistemic responsibility. However, notice that it does not appear necessary that Bella has a reflective grasp of her entire system. Rather, she must have a reflective grasp of a sufficient number of beliefs that overlap the idealized system. In this way, this condition may be more realistic than a theory that suggests that an inquirer is justified in believing that p only if she grasps her entire belief system.

BonJour also contends that an inquirer is justified in believing that p only if her system of beliefs satisfies his observation requirement. I argued that the observation requirement is problematic because sometimes an inquirer may be justified in believing that p even if she does not seek out any evidence that not-p.[157] Before concluding, I will argue,

[155] Ibid., 154.
[156] Ibid., 154.
[157] Ibid., 152.

more fully, that both formulations of the idealized system condition can block Haack's and Sosa's "consistent fairy story" objection. For now, notice that the idealized system condition appears to avoid problems with the observation requirement while ensuring that a justified system is, to some significant extent, connected to reality. Recall Bella's belief that the Nationals won the World Series. She appeared justified because the Ideal Inquirer believes that p in Bella's epistemic position and her system of beliefs, in the p neighborhood, sufficiently overlaps the idealized system, in the p neighborhood. Beliefs in the idealized system typically correspond to reality because the Ideal Inquirer holds these beliefs. So, if an inquirer's system sufficiently overlaps the idealized system of beliefs, then her system of beliefs likely corresponds to reality. In this way, the idealized system condition does the work of BonJour's observation requirement. Importantly, notice that the condition does this without contending that an inquirer is epistemically justified in believing that p only if she seeks out evidence that not-p.

In Section 4, I raised some objections to BonJour's contention that an inquirer is justified only if her "system of beliefs in question must be coherent to a high degree and more coherent than any alternative which would also satisfy the observation requirement."[158] Remember, it seemed epistemically unfair to require that a child and an adult possess the same system of beliefs if they are justified in believing that p. This would likely suggest that children are rarely epistemically justified. It also seemed epistemically unfair to require that a scientist in 1970 and one in 2020 possess the same system of beliefs if they are justified in believing that p. This would likely suggest that scientists are rarely epistemically justified.

[158] Ibid., 154.

The idealized system condition avoids these problems. It contends that all inquirers are epistemically justified in believing that p only if (1) the Ideal Inquirer believes that p in their epistemic position and (2) their system of beliefs, in the p neighborhood, sufficiently overlaps the idealized system, in the p neighborhood. The degree of overlap sufficient to confer justification depends on what it is reasonable to expect S to achieve. It is often reasonable to expect a child to achieve less than an adult. In this way, the idealized system condition avoids other seeming problems with BonJour's fourth condition. In Section 3, I suggested that some beliefs in the "most coherent" system are currently undiscovered. For this reason, if an inquirer is epistemically justified in believing that p only if her system of beliefs is the "most coherent," then inquirers are rarely epistemically justified. However, the idealized system condition avoids this because it does not require that an inquirer's system of beliefs is the "most coherent."

Now, let's consider the Lehrerian formulation of the idealized system condition. It connects epistemic responsibility to epistemic justification because an inquirer's epistemic justification depends, partly, on her position. It also ensures that an inquirer is epistemically justified in accepting that p only if her system of responses likely corresponds to reality. The idealized system condition, on the Lehrerian formulation, contends that S is epistemically justified in accepting that p only if (1) the Ideal Inquirer accepts that p in S's epistemic position and (2) S's system of responses to objections to p sufficiently overlap the idealized system of responses to objections to p. An acceptance, preference, or reasoning is a response to an objection to p if it can defeat at least one objection to p. In other words, a response is integrated, perhaps through explanatorily connections, with p. It is justificatorily connected

to p because it supports or explains p. The idealized system of responses to objections to p contains the responses to objections to p that the Ideal Inquirer holds in S's epistemic position. The second part of the Lehrerian formulation of the idealized system condition compares an inquirer's system of responses to objections to p to an idealized system of responses to objections to p. The condition ensures that an inquirer is epistemically justified in accepting that p only if she can respond to some objections to p utilizing true acceptances, preferences, or reasonings. An inquirer's responses to objections to p sufficiently overlaps the idealized system of responses if a number of responses in the inquirer's system are also in the idealized system.

Recall Bella's acceptances that the Nationals won the World Series, that the Nationals won the Championship Series, that the Nationals won more games than they lost, and that the Nationals won the final game of the season. Bella is justified in accepting that the Nationals won the World Series because the Ideal Inquirer accepts that the Nationals won the World Series in Bella's position and her system of responses, in the p neighborhood, sufficiently overlaps the idealized system of responses to objections to p. Bella's acceptances likely exist in the idealized system because the Ideal Inquirer likely holds them in Bella's epistemic position. The acceptances are responses to objections to p because they can defeat at least one objection to the acceptance that the Nationals won the World Series. In other words, these acceptances are responses to objections to p because they support or explain p. The idealized system of responses to objections to p contains responses that the Ideal Inquirer holds in S's epistemic position. One response in an inquirer's system can possibly defeat multiple objections to p. Each response makes it more reasonable for Bella to accept that the

Nationals won. The acceptance that the Nationals made the playoffs likely exists in the idealized system of responses because the Ideal Inquirer likely accepts this in S's epistemic position. If Bella adds this acceptance to her system of responses, then she is increasingly justified because her system of responses increasingly overlaps the idealized system of responses. Therefore, an inquirer is more or less justified in accepting that p to the extent that her system of responses to objections to p overlaps the idealized system of responses to objections to p.

The idealized system condition, on the Lehrerian formulation, contends that S is epistemically justified in accepting that p only if (1) the Ideal Inquirer accepts that p in S's epistemic position and (2) S's system of responses to objections to p sufficiently overlaps the idealized system of responses to objections to p. The Ideal Inquirer determines the level of overlap sufficient to confer justification. In both parts of the idealized system condition, the Ideal Inquirer takes S's epistemic position. But, the Ideal Inquirer is disinterested when she determines the level of overlap sufficient to confer justification. At this time, the Ideal Inquirer is an intellectually virtuous inquirer who judges what it is reasonable for S, given her epistemic position, to achieve with regard to p. If she judges that one inquirer has had richer exposure to a series of responses in the idealized system, then this inquirer may require a greater degree of overlap with the idealized system of responses. So, two inquirers can have the same system of responses while one is epistemically justified in accepting that p and the other inquirer is not. This connects with my earlier contention that the extent to which an inquirer's system of responses is coherent does not necessarily track the extent to which she acts epistemically responsibly. Recall the two undergraduate students that accept the same

"DNA" proposition. If they have the same response systems, then the undergraduate in 1970 is likely more responsible than the undergraduate in 2020 because she has had less rich exposure to the idealized system of responses to objections to the "DNA" proposition. If epistemic responsibility constitutes the core notion of epistemic justification, then a theory of epistemic justification should track this. The idealized system condition tracks this because the degree of overlap sufficient to confer epistemic justification depends on what it is reasonable for S to achieve with regard to p. It is reasonable for an inquirer in 1970 to achieve less than one in 2020.

I mentioned that the idealized system of responses to objections to p contains responses that the Ideal Inquirer holds in S's epistemic position. If S satisfies the first part of the idealized system condition, then S's system of responses, relative to p, is judged against the idealized system of responses, relative to p. From here, S is more or less justified in accepting that p to the extent that her system of responses, relative to p, overlaps the idealized system of responses, relative to p. If the Ideal Inquirer accepts that p in S's position, then she responsibly accepts that p. In other words, her epistemic activity, with regard to p, tracks certain intellectual virtues. If S satisfies the first part of the condition and her system of responses to objections to p sufficiently overlaps the idealized system of responses to objections to p, then she epistemically responsibly accepts that p because her system resembles the Ideal Inquirer's system. In other words, if she is justified in accepting that p, then her epistemic activity, with regard to p, tracks certain intellectual virtues. Recall Bella's acceptance that the Nationals won the World Series. Her system of responses to objections sufficiently overlapped the idealized system of responses because her system included a

series of acceptances justificatorily connected to her acceptance that the Nationals won. For this reason, her epistemic activity, with regard to this acceptance, tracks certain intellectual virtues. For instance, her system suggests that she acts minimally careful, curious, and open minded. In this way, the idealized system condition suggests that if an inquirer is epistemically justified in accepting that p, then her epistemic activity, with regard to p, tracks certain intellectual virtues.

In *Theory of Knowledge*, Lehrer writes, "It is not necessary that a person has reflected on the objection for the objection to be answered."[159] In Section 4, I suggested that this suggests that an inquirer may be justified in accepting that p even if she does not responsibly accept that p. This is problematic because other parts of Lehrer's coherence theory require that an inquirer epistemically responsibly accepts that p if she is epistemically justified in accepting that p. An internalist condition must supplement the Lehrerian formulation of the idealized system condition to connect epistemic responsibility to Lehrer's theory of epistemic justification. Recall Bella's acceptance that the Nationals won the World Series. She appeared justified because the Ideal Inquirer accepts this in Bella's epistemic position and her system of responses, relative to this proposition, sufficiently overlaps the idealized system of responses, relative to this proposition. However, her epistemic activity will not track certain intellectual virtues if she does not have a reflective grasp of the fact that she can respond to a critic's objections because she may recklessly accept this even if her system of responses sufficiently overlaps the idealized system. A "reflective grasp" condition appears necessary to ensure that an inquirer is epistemically justified in accepting that p only if she

[159] Keith Lehrer, *Theory of Knowledge*. (Colorado: Westview Press, 2000) 132.

epistemically responsibly accepts that p. Bella is justified in accepting that p only if she has a reflective grasp of a sufficient number of responses that overlap the idealized system. The condition is more realistic than a condition that suggests that an inquirer is justified only if she grasps her entire system.

In Section 4, I raised some objections to Lehrer's contention that "S is justified in accepting that p at t on system X of S at t if and only if all objections to p are answered or neutralized for S on X at t."[160] Remember, it seemed epistemically unfair to require that a child and an adult answer the same number of objections if they are justified in accepting that p. This would likely suggest that children are rarely justified. It also seemed unfair to require that a scientist in 1970 and one in 2020 respond to the same number of objections if they are epistemically justified. This would likely suggest that scientists are rarely justified. The idealized system condition avoids these problems. It contends that all inquirers are epistemically justified in accepting that p only if the Ideal Inquirer accepts that p in their epistemic position and their system of responses, relative to p, sufficiently overlaps the idealized system, relative to p. The level of overlap sufficient to confer justification depends on what it is reasonable to expect S to achieve. It is often reasonable to expect a child to achieve less than an adult. In this way, the idealized system condition avoids other problems with Lehrer's theory. In Section 5, I suggested that some objections to empirical propositions may be incomprehensible because the concepts constituting these objections are unavailable to S. Further, an infinite number of objections to basic empirical propositions may exist. For this reason, if an inquirer is epistemically justified in accepting that p only if she can respond

[160] Ibid., 170.

to every objection to p, then inquirers are rarely epistemically justified. However, the idealized system condition avoids this because it does not require that an inquirer responds to every objection to p.

In Section 2, I considered Haack's and Sosa's "consistent fairy story" objection to coherence theories of epistemic justification. Remember, Haack writes, "the fundamental problem with coherentism, according to this objection, lies precisely in the fact that it tries to make justification depend solely on relations among beliefs."[161] Here, Haack contends that coherence theories of justification are not truth conducive because they do not give a role to non-belief input. Sosa reaches a similar conclusion in a slightly different way. Remember, he writes "the view that justification is a matter of relations among beliefs is open to an objection from alternative coherent systems or detachment from reality."[162] From the alternative coherent systems perspective, the world may remain constant while an inquirer's system of beliefs changes. From the detachment from reality perspective, an inquirer's system of beliefs may remain constant while the external world changes. From both perspectives, Sosa contends that, for a coherentist, "there could be no effect on the justification of any belief."[163] For these reasons, coherence theories of epistemic justification may not be truth conducive.

Both formulations of the idealized system condition suggest that if an inquirer is epistemically justified in accepting/believing that p, then her system likely sufficiently corresponds to reality. For this reason, both formulations of the condition appear to connect

---

[161] Susan Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry: A Pragmatist Reconstruction of Epistemology*. (New York: Prometheus Books, 1993), 105.
[162] Ernest Sosa, "The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence Versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (1980): 18.
[163] Ibid., 18.

justification to truth. Remember, the BonJourian formulation of the idealized system condition contends that S is epistemically justified in believing that p only if (1) the Ideal Inquirer's system, the idealized system, contains p in S's epistemic position and (2) S's system of beliefs, in the p neighborhood, sufficiently overlaps the idealized system of beliefs, in the p neighborhood. If S satisfies the first part of the condition and her system, in the p neighborhood, sufficiently overlaps the idealized system, in the p neighborhood, then her system of beliefs, relative to p, likely corresponds to reality because the idealized system, in the p neighborhood, is the system that the Ideal Inquirer holds in S's epistemic position. So, the idealized system, in the p neighborhood, likely corresponds to reality. For this reason, if S's system, in the p neighborhood, overlaps the idealized system, in the p neighborhood, then her system likely corresponds to reality. In this way, the idealized system condition appears truth conducive.

Remember, the Lehrerian formulation of the idealized system condition contends that S is epistemically justified in accepting that p only if (1) the Ideal Inquirer accepts that p in S's epistemic position and (2) S's system of responses to objections to p sufficiently overlaps the idealized system of responses to objections to p. If S satisfies the first part of the idealized system condition and her system of responses sufficiently overlaps the Lehrerian formulation of the idealized system condition, then her system of responses to objections to p likely corresponds to reality because the idealized system of responses to objections to p is the one that the Ideal Inquirer holds in S's epistemic position. For this reason, the idealized system, relative to some p, likely corresponds to reality. For this reason, if S's system overlaps the idealized system of responses, then her system of responses, relative to p, likely corresponds

to reality. In this way, the idealized system condition appears truth conducive. So, both formulations of the idealized system condition may protect against Haack's and Sosa's "consistent fairy story" objection.

Remember, BonJour's observation requirement seeks to ensure that if an inquirer is justified in believing that p, then she epistemically responsibly believes that p.[164] In other words, the requirement seeks to ensure that if an inquirer is justified in believing that p, then her epistemic activity, with regard to p, tracks certain intellectual virtues of pursuit and response. Earlier, I discussed the way that the idealized system condition avoids the problems that I identified with the observation requirement. Now, notice that the condition also suggests that if an inquirer is justified in accepting/believing that p, then her epistemic activity, with regard to p, tracks certain intellectual virtues of pursuit and response. On both formulations of the idealized system condition, the idealized system is the Ideal Inquirer's system in S's epistemic position. The Ideal Inquirer's epistemic activity tracks certain intellectual virtues of pursuit and response. For this reason, if an inquirer's system of beliefs sufficiently overlaps the idealized system of beliefs, then she pursues and responds to evidence in a virtuous way. For this reason, the idealized system condition achieves the intended purpose of the observation requirement while avoiding the seeming issues with the observation requirement.

A reasonable person may raise a general objection to the BonJourian and Lehrerian formulations of the idealized system condition. She may suggest that an inquirer cannot determine whether her system sufficiently overlaps the idealized system. For now, we can

[164] Laurence BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*. (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), 142.

suppose that an inquirer can determine whether she satisfies the first part of the idealized system condition. If an inquirer cannot determine whether her system sufficiently overlaps the idealized system, then she cannot determine whether she is epistemically justified in believing that p. For this reason, an inquirer cannot know that she knows that p. It may seem difficult for an inquirer to determine whether her system sufficiently overlaps the idealized system because an inquirer's specific position particularizes her level of sufficient overlap with the idealized system. In other words, it appears difficult for an individual inquirer to determine whether she is epistemically justified in believing that p because individual inquirers have varying levels of sufficient overlap. For this reason, an individual inquirer cannot appeal to another inquirer to determine whether her system sufficiently overlaps the idealized system.

Remember, the degree of overlap sufficient to confer justification depends on what it is reasonable to expect S to achieve. S may not be in a good position to unbiasedly grasp what it is reasonable for her to achieve. Further, I agree with the objector that an inquirer cannot directly appeal to others to determine whether her system sufficiently overlaps the idealized system. However, an inquirer's indirect comparison to other inquirers can help her determine whether her system does this. Bella may wonder whether she is epistemically justified in believing some "DNA" proposition. Here, Bella can compare her epistemic position to the epistemic position of other inquirers. She can likely identify inquirers with richer exposure to the idealized system. In addition, she can likely identify inquirers with less rich exposure to the idealized system. In other words, she can likely identify inquirers that require greater and lesser levels of sufficient overlap with the idealized system. From this

indirect comparison, Bella can approximate what is reasonable to expect her to achieve. In other words, Bella can approximate the level of overlap sufficient for her to be epistemically justified in believing that p.

An inquirer may also utilize a heuristic to determine whether she likely satisfies the idealized system condition. An inquirer can ask herself, "What would the Ideal Inquirer do in my position?" It may be helpful for some inquirers to imagine an epistemic saint when thinking about the Ideal Inquirer. This may help an inquirer imagine the intellectual virtues that the Ideal Inquirer acts in alignment with. An inquirer must think carefully about her exposure to evidence relevant to p. In addition, she must think carefully about missed opportunities for exposure to evidence relevant to p. These topics will motivate her to fairly consider her epistemic position. Remember, if the Ideal Inquirer accepts/believes that p in the inquirer's epistemic position, then the inquirer satisfies the first part of the idealized system condition. If the inquirer does not satisfy the first part of the idealized system condition, then she can disregard the second part of the condition. But, if she satisfies the first part, then the heuristic should also help her confront the second part of the condition because it helps her imagine the idealized system, in the p neighborhood, because the idealized system, in the p neighborhood, is just the Ideal Inquirer's system in S's epistemic position. In these ways, it may be helpful for an inquirer to carefully ask herself, "What would the Ideal Inquirer do in my position."

I suggested that an inquirer can consider the epistemic positions of other inquirers to approximate the level of overlap sufficient for her to be epistemically justified in accepting/believing that p. Notice that this comparison will likely only provide an inquirer

with an estimate of the overlap sufficient to confer justification. Further, notice that it is unlikely that an inquirer can determine the precise overlap sufficient to confer some minimal degree of justification. Remember, if the Ideal Inquirer accepts/believes that p in S's epistemic position, then she is more or less justified in accepting/believing that p to the extent that her system, relative to p, overlaps the idealized system, relative to p. There may not be a precise overlap sufficient to confer justification. Instead, an indeterminate, or vague, degree of overlap may be sufficient to confer some minimal degree of justification. Recall Bella's belief that the Nationals won the World Series. In some cases, it may seem clear that Bella's system sufficiently overlaps the idealized system. In other cases, it may seem clear that Bella's system does not sufficiently overlap the idealized system. It seems clear that the extent to which her system overlaps the idealized system will increase or decrease the extent to which she is justified in believing that p. Still, there may not be an exact degree of overlap sufficient to confer justification. In other words, sometimes it may be indeterminate whether an inquirer is minimally justified in believing that p. If this is correct, then the severity of the objection appears diminished. Still, a comparison of the epistemic position of other inquirers can help an inquirer approximate the level of overlap sufficient to confer justification. In addition, the heuristic technique may help some inquirers think about whether they satisfy the idealized system condition.

Conclusion

The goal of this paper was to defend a coherence theory of epistemic justification by way of showing defects and suggesting refinements to BonJour's and Lehrer's coherence theories of epistemic justification. In Section 1, I briefly discussed some features of

BonJour's and Lehrer's coherence theories. In Section 2, I defended BonJour's and Lehrer's theories against a general objection to coherence theories of justification raised in Susan Haack's *Evidence and Inquiry: A Pragmatist Reconstruction of Epistemology* and Ernest Sosa's "The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence Versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge." In Section 3, I considered some seeming issues with BonJour's coherence conditions and some ways that they diverge from a "tracking virtue" theory of epistemic responsibility. In Section 4, I considered some seeming issues with Lehrer's coherence conditions and some ways that they diverge from a "tracking virtue" theory of epistemic responsibility. In Section 5, I introduced two formulations of an idealized system condition that can avoid some of the issues, and divergence, that I identify with BonJour's and Lehrer's coherence theories.

References

Audi, Robert. "Epistemic Virtue and Justified Belief." In *Virtue Epistemology: Essays in Epistemic Virtue and Responsibility*. Edited by Abrol Fairweather and Linda Zagzebski, 82-97. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

BonJour, Laurence. *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985.

Corlett, J. Angelo. "Epistemic Responsibility." *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 16, no. 2 (2008): 179-200.

Descartes, Rene. *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Translated by Jonathan Bennett. Early Modern Texts, 2007.

Haack, Susan. *Evidence and Inquiry: A Pragmatist Reconstruction of Epistemology*. New York: Prometheus Books, 1993.

Hetherington, Stephen. "The Redundancy Problem: From Knowledge-Infallibilism to Knowledge-Minimalism." *Synthese* 195, no. 1 (2018): 4683-4702.

Lehrer, Keith. *Theory of Knowledge*. Colorado: Westview Press, 2000.

Montmarquet, James. "Epistemic Virtue and Doxastic Responsibility." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (1992): 331-341.

Sartwell, Crispin. "Knowledge Is Merely True Belief." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1991): 157-165.

Sartwell, Crispin. "Why Knowledge Is Merely True Belief." *The Journal of Philosophy* 89, no. 4 (1992): 167-180.

Sosa, Ernest. “The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence Versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge.” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (1980): 3-26.

Williams, Michael. *Problems of Knowledge: A Critical Introduction to Epistemology.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Williams, Michael. “Responsibility and Reliability.” *Philosophical Papers* 37, no. 1 (2008): 1-26.