

Externalism and Skepticism

Michael Bergmann

Internalists and externalists in epistemology continue to disagree about how best to understand epistemic concepts such as justification or warrant or knowledge.¹ But there has been some movement towards agreement. Two of the most prominent rationales for the internalist position have been subjected to severe criticism by externalists: (1) the idea that justification should be understood deontologically and (2) the thought that justification consists in having a reason in the form of another belief.² It would not be accurate to say that all internalists have responded to such criticism by distancing themselves from these rationales for their position. Nevertheless some have.³ But despite the growing disenchantment

For insightful comments on earlier drafts, my thanks to Rod Bertolet, Martin Curd, Keith DeRose, Daniel Howard-Snyder, Kevin Meeker, Trenton Merricks, Alvin Plantinga, Joel Pust, Michael Rea and an anonymous referee for the *Philosophical Review*. I am also grateful for helpful suggestions from members of the philosophy departments at Purdue University and Western Washington University where I presented earlier versions of this paper during the 1998–99 academic year. Finally, I wish to thank the Purdue University School of Liberal Arts, the Purdue Research Foundation, and the Pew Evangelical Scholars Program for providing financial support that freed me up to work on this paper.

¹Here and throughout this paper I use the term ‘warrant’ to refer to whatever it is that, together with true belief, is necessary and sufficient for knowledge. It is widely assumed that Gettier (1963) showed that justification isn’t sufficient for warrant.

²To understand justification deontologically is to think of it as a matter of duty fulfillment, as something involving obligation, responsibility, and the like. See Ginet 1975, 28–36 for a development of the first rationale for internalism. For critiques of the first rationale, see Alston 1986b and 1988, Goldman 1999, Plantinga 1993 (especially chapters 1 and 2) and Bergmann 2000. For a development of the second rationale, see chapters 2 and 3 of BonJour 1985. Critiques of the second rationale can be found in Alston 1986b and Howard-Snyder 1998. Excellent critiques by *internalists* of the second rationale are cited in note 3.

³Matthias Steup is an example of someone who continues to endorse the first rationale (see his 1999). Fumerton (see his 1995, 8–17) and Moser (see his 1989, 38–43) are internalists who clearly reject the first rationale. And each of them also joins the externalist in identifying problems with the second rationale (see Fumerton 1995, 80–82, and Moser 1989, 173–76). BonJour, who endorsed the second rationale in his 1985 (at least with respect to empirical beliefs), has recently been showing signs of distancing

with these two motivations for internalism, internalists continue to find the externalist position extremely unattractive. One main reason for this persistent resistance to externalism is a third rationale that is, perhaps, the most influential of the driving forces behind internalism.

According to this third rationale, externalists have not correctly analyzed philosophically interesting epistemic properties. They have either changed the subject to focus on properties that haven't traditionally been the focus of epistemological inquiry or they have failed to fully appreciate and understand the philosophical depth and implications of the properties that *have* been the focus of traditional epistemology. That externalists have missed the boat in this way is (according to this third rationale) most evident when one looks at their attitude toward *skepticism*.

Despite the fact that many internalists think this sort of objection provides powerful support for internalism, externalists have not paid much attention to it. It certainly hasn't received the kind of attention given to the other two rationales for internalism mentioned above. In this paper, I hope to rectify this omission on the part of externalists. In sections 1 and 2 I will clarify what this objection to externalism is and how it is defended. Then, in sections 3 and 4, I will raise some worries about this objection and explain why it fails. In a nutshell, the reason the internalist's objection fails is that the sort of reasoning it relies on is, if successful at all, too powerful. For if the internalist is right in saying that the epistemic properties on which externalists focus are philosophically uninteresting, then no epistemic properties at all are philosophically interesting—in which case we've been given no reason to prefer internalism to externalism.

1. The Internalist's Objection

As I said, the third rationale for internalism consists of an objection to externalism. Identifying the precise nature of that objection will prove to be difficult because it is not often developed by internalists. In this section we will be occupied with teasing out a simple

himself from it (see his 1999, where he develops a suggestion he makes at 146 n. 11 of his 1998).

formulation of that objection—one that seems to express succinctly what the internalists have in mind.

Consider a crude sort of externalism according to which a belief that *p* is warranted if and only if it is caused by the fact that *p*. There are difficulties with this particular proposal that make it unacceptable even to many externalists. But what many internalists find most objectionable about it is that it seems to show no appreciation for the difficulties of answering the skeptic. The skeptic challenges the view that our beliefs are warranted. In reply, this crude externalist view says that *if one's belief that p is caused by the fact that p* then the skeptical problem is solved (at least with respect to that belief) because the belief in question is in fact warranted. Furthermore, this externalist view allows that a belief that *p* can be warranted even if the person holding it has no idea how to go about determining whether that belief was caused by the fact that *p*. The internalist objector finds this sort of response exasperating. According to her, a belief isn't warranted unless the person holding it is somehow aware that the conditions necessary for warrant are satisfied. Blithely to say to the skeptic that the belief is warranted *if those conditions are satisfied* is to demonstrate a failure to understand the philosophical significance of the skeptic's complaint. Either that or it is to switch the focus to a kind of epistemic property that isn't philosophically interesting. And the problem isn't solved by patching up the crude externalist proposal with further externalist conditions (for example, by stipulating that the belief that *p* must be caused *in the right way* by the fact that *p*—where "the right way" is spelled out in externalist terms). The only solution, according to the internalist, is to add an internal condition to the analysis of warrant.

This is the sort of reaction to externalism that is expressed in the writings of Laurence Bonjour, Richard Fumerton, and Barry Stroud. Here's a sampling of their thoughts on the matter:

[Externalists] would have been taken [by Descartes and generations of philosophers who followed] either to be hopelessly confused or to be simply changing the subject. . . . My own conviction is that this reaction is in fact correct. (Bonjour 1985, 37)

[T]he externalist has failed to analyze a philosophically interesting concept of justification or knowledge. (Fumerton 1995, 180)

[E]xternalism . . . reflects an inadequate appreciation of the problem at which it is aimed. (Bonjour 1985, 37)

It seems to many of us that the externalist is simply missing the point of the philosophical inquiry. . . . [T]he externalist analysis of epistemic concepts never was adequate to a philosophical understanding of epistemic concepts. (Fumerton 1995, 180)

[T]he philosophical theorist of knowledge cannot . . . expect to find acceptance of an “externalist” account of knowledge fully satisfactory. . . . [We cannot] take up such an “external” observer’s position with respect to ourselves and our knowledge and still gain a satisfactorily general explanation of how we know the things we know. That is where I think the inevitable dissatisfaction comes in. (Stroud 1989, 47–48)

The concern expressed in these passages is that externalist analyses of epistemic concepts or properties are philosophically unsatisfying. They are unsatisfying because they aren’t accurate analyses of philosophically interesting epistemic concepts or properties.

This initial summary of the objection leaves us with two questions: First, is the externalist’s problem an inaccurate analysis or is it a philosophically uninteresting analysis? And second, what exactly is it that makes an epistemic property philosophically interesting (or uninteresting)? Let’s take these questions in order. (For convenience, I will focus on epistemic properties rather than on epistemic concepts. For the same reason, I will also attend only to those epistemic properties entailing *positive* epistemic status for the beliefs that exemplify them. Examples of such epistemic properties include *warrant* as well as various kinds of *justification* and *rationality*.⁴ It would be a relatively simple though tedious task to revise what I say so that it takes into account epistemic concepts, as well as epistemic properties entailing *negative* epistemic status.)

The first question arises because the above quotations seem to identify two different problems with externalism. The first two quotations suggest that the problem with externalism is that it has selected the wrong analysis—that it has changed the subject.⁵ Instead of analyzing philosophically interesting epistemic properties, externalists have opted for giving analyses of properties that,

⁴See note 1 for a definition of warrant. See Plantinga 1993, chapter 7 for a discussion of various kinds of rationality. And see Alston 1985 and 1993a as well as section 3 of Bergmann 1997 for discussions of various kinds of epistemic justification.

⁵For an extensively developed criticism of this charge that externalism represents a recent departure from traditional epistemological concerns (in other words—a change of subject) see Schmitt 1992, 7–10 and chapters 1–3.

upon reflection, we can see are uninteresting. But the remaining quotations suggest that the externalist's problem is that she has given an inaccurate, inadequate and philosophically unsatisfying analysis of the very epistemic properties that the internalist seeks to analyze. In other words, the externalist has focused on the right property but she has failed to understand it correctly. So which is it? Which problem is the externalist's problem? Is it faulty analysis or a wrong focus? This is our first question.

I think it is a question we can avoid answering. For we can think of the internalist objector as saying something like this: "Assuming that externalist analyses of epistemic properties are consistent, they will be correct analyses of some property or other, even if they aren't correct analyses of the target property (the intended analysandum). The problem with externalist analyses is that the properties corresponding to them (that is, the properties they are correct analyses of, intentionally or unintentionally) are not philosophically interesting. This may be because the externalist has deliberately selected for analysis an alternative property on which internalists haven't focused—one that, unbeknownst to the externalist, is philosophically uninteresting. Or it may be because, despite the fact that the intended target of the externalist's analysis is the very same philosophically interesting epistemic property on which the internalist is focused, the externalist has failed to analyze it correctly. Either way, the externalist analysis does not correspond to a philosophically interesting epistemic property." I will call the properties that in fact correspond to the externalist's analyses (intentionally or unintentionally) 'externalist epistemic properties'. So, for example, there is an externalist epistemic property corresponding to the crude causal analysis of warrant given at the beginning of this section. It is a property that supervenes on the property of *being a belief that is caused by the fact that makes its content true*. The internalist objector tries to use that analysis to show that the externalist epistemic property corresponding to it is not a philosophically interesting epistemic property.

Notice that, given my definition of 'externalist epistemic properties', the internalist can argue that externalist epistemic properties are not philosophically interesting epistemic properties either by arguing that (i) they are not epistemic properties at all or (ii) if they are, they are not philosophically interesting. Thus, to continue our example, the internalist might argue that no episte-

mic property supervenes on the property of being a belief that is caused by the fact that makes its content true, or, alternatively, she can argue that even if there is such an epistemic property it lacks philosophical interest. I will focus on the second, more cautious strategy since it seems to be the one actually endorsed by internalists and it is initially more plausible.

Let's turn now to the second question. According to the internalist's objection, the externalist's problem is that externalist epistemic properties aren't philosophically interesting. But what makes an epistemic property philosophically interesting? As I suggested above, what bothers those proposing the internalist's objection is that (in their opinion) the externalist position fails to take seriously the concerns of the *skeptic*.⁶ The skeptic challenges the claim that most of our everyday beliefs exemplify a particular epistemic property (for example, warrant). Externalists insist that such beliefs do exemplify the epistemic property in question if they satisfy certain external conditions (such as being formed in a reliable way). But the skeptic finds this response unsatisfactory. According to the skeptic, satisfying externalist epistemic properties just isn't impressive.⁷ If the externalist's analyses offer any guidance as to what the externalist epistemic properties are like, then (according to the internalist) the externalist's epistemic properties aren't the ones the skeptic was speaking of when she challenged the claim that our everyday beliefs exemplified them. According to the skeptic, the externalist's epistemic properties don't entail any *significant* positive epistemic status. The externalist may *claim* to be attributing to our beliefs the very epistemic properties the skeptic thinks our beliefs lack. But the externalist's analyses of the epistemic properties she discusses suggest that this isn't so. Thus, the question of whether our beliefs exemplify the *externalist's* epistemic properties is just not philosophically interesting because it

⁶See Fumerton 1995, 173–80, BonJour 1985, 13, and Stroud 1989, 48–49.

⁷Which isn't to say that the skeptic finds all properties entailing the satisfaction of externalist epistemic properties unimpressive. For example, although the skeptic deems the property of *being produced by a reliable process* unimpressive, she thinks otherwise of the property of *being able to tell on reflection alone that one's belief is produced by a reliable process*—even though the latter interesting property cannot be exemplified without the former uninteresting one. See section 2 for more on this.

is, in an important sense, too easy for our beliefs to exemplify them. This is the internalist's complaint.

Perhaps an analogy will help to make this last point a little clearer. Suppose that there is a disagreement about whether there are any virtuous people. The "virtue skeptics" doubt that there are. Now suppose that some philosophers respond to the virtue skeptics by pointing out that almost everyone is a virtuous person. And suppose that it also becomes clear that these opponents of virtue skepticism understand *being virtuous* in such a way that it is sufficient for being a virtuous person that one has never been rightfully convicted of murder, armed robbery, assault, or other more serious crimes. The virtue skeptics will have a sense that these opponents have failed to appreciate the nature of the disagreement. The virtue skeptic isn't interested in the question of whether anyone has managed to avoid being convicted of a serious crime. She's interested in whether anyone is virtuous in some more robust and interesting sense. The virtue skeptic may concede that her opponents have shown that *some* (extremely unimpressive) sort of virtue is widely exemplified. But being virtuous in that way isn't a philosophically interesting way of being virtuous. For similar reasons, the epistemological skeptic and the internalist objector worry that the externalist has focused on philosophically uninteresting epistemic properties.⁸

I'll proceed, therefore, on the assumption that according to the objection to externalism we are looking at, a necessary condition for being a philosophically interesting epistemic property is

The Skeptical Controversy Condition: being an epistemic property whose exemplification is at issue in the controversy between skeptics and nonskeptics.

Here's how we are supposed to make use of this condition. We take it as obvious that the properties whose exemplifications are at issue in the controversy between skeptics and nonskeptics are philosophically interesting epistemic properties (the presumption, it seems, is that if *anyone* is seriously engaged in a traditional epistemological discussion of some significance, it is those participating

⁸I myself *deny* that externalists are like those in this example who respond to the virtue skeptics. But the example does illustrate how those who endorse the third rationale for internalism view externalism.

in this debate). We also take it as obvious that both the skeptic and the nonskeptic think that the properties whose exemplifications are at issue in the controversy between them are philosophically interesting epistemic properties. Consequently, if a property is considered by the skeptic or by the nonskeptic *not* to be a philosophically interesting epistemic property, that is thought to be good evidence for the conclusion that it does not satisfy the Skeptical Controversy Condition.⁹ I will refer to this approach to determining whether an epistemic property satisfies the Skeptical Controversy Condition as ‘the internalist objector’s line of reasoning’. The internalist uses this line of reasoning in support of what I will call ‘the internalist’s objection’ or ‘the objection to externalism’. That objection (which constitutes the third rationale for internalism) can now be succinctly stated as follows:

The Internalist’s Objection: Since externalist epistemic properties don’t satisfy the Skeptical Controversy Condition, they aren’t philosophically interesting.

This is an objection for which there is widespread sympathy among internalists.

2. A Defense of the Internalist’s Objection

Sympathy for the sort of objection to externalism laid out in section 1 has been around for a while.¹⁰ But internalists have not found it easy to provide convincing *defenses* of it (which might explain why externalists haven’t given much attention to this third rationale for internalism). Bonjour confesses (1985, 37) that he is at a loss as to how to *argue* for this objection without begging the question against the externalist. Stroud too admits (1989, 47) that “it is difficult to say precisely what is inadequate about [the externalist’s] response, especially in terms that would be acceptable to an ‘externalist’.” But Fumerton has recently made a clear and compelling case for the internalist’s objection.¹¹

⁹The internalist objector tends to emphasize the interests of the skeptic rather than those of the nonskeptic. But if the skeptic’s lack of interest in an epistemic property is evidence that its exemplification isn’t at issue in the controversy between skeptics and nonskeptics, the same should be true of the nonskeptic’s lack of interest in proclaiming the exemplification of an epistemic property.

¹⁰At least as far back as 1980. See Bonjour 1980, 56.

¹¹See Fumerton 1995, especially chapter 6. An initial sketch of the argument is given in his 1990.

Fumerton argues that externalist analyses of epistemic properties yield the following unsatisfactory result. The higher-level belief that *my faculty of sense perception is reliable* can come to have the epistemic property being analyzed (for example, justification or warrant) by being the conclusion of an argument that employs as premises beliefs formed on the basis of sense perception. In other words, one can rely on sense perception in order to obtain justification for one's belief that sense perception is reliable. But clearly, says Fumerton, any analysis with this result is an analysis of a philosophically uninteresting epistemic property. The fact that externalism is committed to permitting this sort of thing shows that it is not focusing on philosophically interesting epistemic properties.

Why think externalist analyses of epistemic properties have this disappointing consequence? Well, suppose that according to your externalist theory, a belief has a particular epistemic property, warrant say, if it is reliably formed. Then our sense-perceptual, memory, introspective, and inductive beliefs will be warranted if those ways of forming beliefs are reliable. But then, if those ways are reliable, we can employ their outputs as premises in an argument (since their outputs will be warranted). And given such outputs, we could fairly easily construct the following sort of argument for the reliability of sense perception:

In the past, whenever I was appeared to in this way and formed the belief that there was a tree, I was right—there was a tree there. Something similar applies with respect to my other sense-perceptual beliefs. Therefore, sense perception is reliable.¹²

So it appears to be a consequence of externalism that *if sense perception, memory, induction, and introspection are reliable ways of forming beliefs* then the belief that sense perception is reliable *could* be warranted on the basis of an argument that employed the outputs of sense perception as premises. Following Alston (1993b, chap. 2), I'll call this sort of argument a 'simple track record argument' for the reliability of sense perception.

Now what exactly is wrong with using a simple track record argument in defense of one's higher-level belief that sense percep-

¹²Fumerton discusses this sort of argument in his 1995, 175–76.

tion is reliable (and thereby justified or warranted)? Here is Fumerton's answer:

[T]here is no philosophically interesting concept of justification or knowledge that would allow us to use a kind of reasoning to justify the legitimacy of using that kind of reasoning. (1995, 180)

The context of this claim makes it clear that he takes this comment to apply to sense perception and memory. And this is a little odd since they don't seem to be kinds of *reasoning*. It seems, therefore, that if this answer of Fumerton's is to explain what is wrong with the track record argument for the reliability of *sense perception*, we have to understand it as saying that we cannot employ a source of belief to justify the legitimacy of using that source of belief.

Let's state the principle to which Fumerton seems to be appealing as follows (letting the term 'EP_n-belief' refer to a belief exemplifying some epistemic property Ep_n):

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

The idea here is that epistemic circularity of a certain sort is unacceptable. And the supposed problem with externalism is that it is committed to saying that NSS is false with respect to the epistemic properties on which it focuses.¹³ According to the internalist objector, this commitment has the consequence that externalist epistemic properties fail to satisfy the Skeptical Controversy Condition and are, therefore, philosophically uninteresting. To show that externalist epistemic properties fail to satisfy the Skeptical Controversy Condition, the internalist uses what, in the previous section, I called 'the internalist objector's line of reasoning'. She first points out that the skeptic doesn't think that epistemic properties with respect to which NSS is false are philosophically interesting: it is too easy for our beliefs to exemplify such epistemic

¹³NSS is true/false with respect to some epistemic property if, when we replace 'EP_n' as it appears in NSS with a term referring to the epistemic property in question, NSS is true/false. So, for example, NSS is true with respect to *epistemic rationality* if it's true that one cannot obtain an *epistemically rational* belief that a belief source S is trustworthy by relying even in part on source S.

properties and, consequently, of little interest that they do. But of course the skeptic does think that the properties whose exemplification is at issue in the controversy between skeptics and non-skeptics are philosophically interesting. Hence, any epistemic property with respect to which NSS is false fails to satisfy the Skeptical Controversy Condition.

3. Worries about the Internalist's Defense

Before explaining in section 4 why this defense of the internalist's objection fails, I want to consider some reasons to worry about its apparent strength. For I do think that, initially at least, the defense described in the previous section has a ring of plausibility to it. It is definitely a step forward for those sympathetic to the third rationale for internalism.

There are two parts to the section 2 defense of the internalist's objection: the argument that NSS is false with respect to externalist epistemic properties and the argument that epistemic properties with respect to which NSS is false fail to satisfy the Skeptical Controversy Condition. The first worry has to do with the first part of the defense—the claim that externalists are *committed* to focusing on epistemic properties with respect to which NSS is false. If we think of externalism as the view that internal conditions aren't necessary for warrant, it is hard to see why externalists are any more committed than internalists are to focusing on such properties. Of course it is *possible* for one to be an externalist and to focus on epistemic properties with respect to which NSS is false (that much at least is shown by the defense considered in section 2). But it is also possible for an *internalist* to focus on such epistemic properties. For an internalist might agree (and some do)¹⁴ that

¹⁴For example, Chisholm. See his 1982, chapter 1, where he explains the sense in which introspective and sense-perceptual beliefs can be justified in the basic way. (It should be noted that the fact that Chisholm thinks the absence of a defeating belief is necessary for the justification of such beliefs doesn't show that those beliefs aren't justified in the basic way. That would follow only if it were necessary for the justification of those beliefs that they be based in part on the subject's *further belief* that there is no defeating belief.) Chisholm's view on memory is essentially the same as his view on sense perception in this regard (see his 1977, chapter 4 and his 1982, chapter 5). On his acceptance of induction as a source of justified nonbasic belief see his 1977, 103.

sense perception, introspection, and memory are sources of warranted *basic* belief and that inductive reasoning is a source of warranted *nonbasic* belief (a belief is basic if it is not based on other beliefs). Such an internalist could then argue inductively, using outputs of sense perception, memory, and introspection as premises (since they are warranted), that sense perception is a reliable way of forming beliefs. Given, this inductive support, the internalist in question should conclude that—despite the fact that this inductive argument relies on the outputs of sense perception for its premises—belief in the reliability of sense perception is thereby warranted.

So it seems that some internalists are also committed to focusing on epistemic properties with respect to which NSS is false.¹⁵ But are all internalists so committed? It seems not. For an internalist might have a view of warrant that sets standards for warrant so high that very few or none of our sense-perceptual (or introspective or memory) beliefs are warranted—at least not in the basic way. In this way, she will avoid being committed to an endorsement of a simple track record argument for the reliability of sense perception. But why can't an externalist do the same thing? Why can't externalism be combined with the claim that very few of our sense-perceptual (or memory or introspective) beliefs are warranted in the basic way? If an externalist could do this, then it would seem that she, like the internalist, could avoid being committed to focusing on epistemic properties with respect to which NSS is false.

I should acknowledge, in support of the claim that externalists (and not internalists) *are* committed to focusing on epistemic properties with respect to which NSS is false, that very few externalists would propose an analysis of warrant according to which few or none of our sense-perceptual (or introspective or memory) beliefs are warranted in the basic way. Part of the appeal of externalism is that it doesn't conflict with the very plausible view that these very beliefs *are* warranted in the basic way. If the externalist denies this view, she has less reason to be an externalist. Still, it is far from

¹⁵Keith Lehrer is an example of an internalist who is quite explicit about his denial of NSS with respect to the epistemic properties in which he is interested; see his 1989, 143–46. See also Van Cleve 1979, especially section 5, for an account of how Descartes—the archinternalist—could be interpreted as focusing on an epistemic property with respect to which NSS is false.

obvious that externalism—even in some appealing form—is committed (in a way internalism is not) to focusing on epistemic properties with respect to which NSS is false. I won't try to push this as a criticism of the defense of the internalist objection. But I'll register it as cause for worry about that defense. At the very least, we'll need some convincing reason for thinking that *all appealing* forms of externalism are committed to focusing on epistemic properties with respect to which NSS is false whereas some plausible versions of internalism are not.

The other worries I want to mention have to do with the second part of the defense—the part that says that epistemic properties with respect to which NSS is false fail to satisfy the Skeptical Controversy Condition and are, therefore, philosophically uninteresting. One worry here is that the defense's premier proponent, Fumerton, is himself committed to denying NSS with respect to the epistemic property on which he focuses. Fumerton thinks that we justifiably believe things by way of what he calls direct acquaintance. He has much to say about this way of coming justifiably to believe things (1995, 73–79). But for the moment, we need only recognize that he thinks direct acquaintance is one source of *non-inferential* justified belief. Now consider what Fumerton says about how it is that we come to justifiably believe (a) that we are directly acquainted with certain facts and (b) that we are thereby noninferentially justified in believing that those facts obtain:

There are two sources of knowledge as to what we are noninferentially justified in believing. . . . [One] is acquaintance itself. One can be directly acquainted with the fact that one is directly acquainted with certain facts. (1995, 162)

[T]he acquaintance theorist will probably acknowledge that acquaintance itself is a source of knowledge as to the character of justification. One can be acquainted with the fact that one is acquainted with a fact. (1995, 185)

Fumerton is explaining the justification of the higher-level belief that one is justified (noninferentially through direct acquaintance) in believing something. But in doing so he endorses the practice of relying on direct acquaintance in order to obtain a justified belief that a belief produced via direct acquaintance is justified. So on Fumerton's own view, it seems that one *can* employ a source of knowledge or justified belief (namely, direct acquaintance) to justify the legitimacy of using that source of knowledge or justified

belief. In other words, it seems that Fumerton is committed to denying NSS with respect to justification. Of course, this doesn't amount to a refutation of the section 2 defense of the objection to externalism. For it may be that Fumerton is *right* when (in giving that defense) he says that rejecting NSS with respect to an epistemic property is evidence that that epistemic property isn't philosophically interesting and *wrong* when he assumes that the sort of justification on which he is focusing *is* philosophically interesting. Nevertheless, it does make one wonder about the supposed strength of the intuition that epistemic properties with respect to which NSS is false are philosophically uninteresting.

Another worry having to do with the claim that epistemic properties with respect to which NSS is false are philosophically uninteresting is that at least part of that claim's initial appeal may be a result of misunderstanding. Consider these two different sorts of challenge one might face in connection with the higher-level belief that a source S of belief is trustworthy:

Challenge One: Tell me the ways one can obtain a justified belief that source S is trustworthy.

Challenge Two: Tell me the ways one can obtain, *without* relying on source S, a justified belief that S is trustworthy.

The reason it is important to recognize the distinction between these two types of challenge is that a philosophically unsatisfying response to one might not be a philosophically unsatisfying response to the other. It is obvious that an epistemically circular argument (like the simple track record argument) is philosophically unsatisfying when proposed in response to challenge two. But it is not obvious that such an argument is philosophically unsatisfying when offered in response to challenge one. My suggestion is that the defense of the internalist's objection relies on our failure to distinguish these two types of challenge. We readily agree that it is philosophically unsatisfying to respond to the second challenge using an epistemically circular argument. The internalist objector takes this as a concession that the use of an epistemically circular argument is also philosophically unsatisfying as a response to the first challenge. But this last move is suspect. The internalist hasn't shown that the externalist is committed to offering such a response to the *second* challenge. As far as I can see, the externalist is com-

mitted *at most* to allowing for the epistemically circular response to the first challenge.¹⁶

I think the above comments allow us to explain the intuitive appeal of NSS without endorsing it. It's appealing because we agree that if we *mistrust* belief source S, then the challenge we are posing is challenge two (if we are in doubt about S's trustworthiness, we won't be satisfied merely by S's *own* testimony concerning its trustworthiness). And, as I said, an epistemically circular argument is obviously unacceptable in response to challenge two. But it's important to recognize that if we have no qualms about source S, we can sensibly pose and address challenge one *without* posing or addressing challenge two. Our reasons for denying the acceptability of an epistemically circular response to challenge two don't support (or at least not obviously) the view that an epistemically circular response to challenge one is unacceptable. So although there is strong intuitive support for the idea that epistemic circularity is sometimes unacceptable, there isn't strong intuitive support for the more general proscription against it that we find in NSS.¹⁷

4. Why the Internalist's Objection Fails

In the previous section, I tried to weaken the initial appeal of the internalist's defense of her objection. In this section I will argue that the section 2 defense of the objection to externalism doesn't work. That defense went like this: "Externalists are committed to saying that NSS is false with respect to their epistemic properties (those corresponding to their analyses). But any epistemic property with respect to which NSS is false fails to satisfy the Skeptical Controversy Condition. Satisfying the Skeptical Controversy Condition is a necessary condition of being a philosophically interesting epistemic property. Hence, externalist epistemic properties are

¹⁶I say "at most" because, as I mentioned above when I explained the first worry, the externalist may not—qua externalist—be committed even to this much.

¹⁷See Alston 1986a and Van Cleve 1979 and 1984 for impressive defenses of the acceptability in certain contexts of what I here call 'epistemic circularity'. It appears as if the internalist objector (in relying on the claim that NSS is true with respect to every philosophically interesting epistemic property) is simply not appreciating the strength of the points raised in these papers by Alston and Van Cleve.

not philosophically interesting.” I want to focus on the crucial second premise of that defense:

The internalist objector’s crucial premise. Any epistemic property with respect to which NSS is false fails to satisfy the Skeptical Controversy Condition.

Recall the sort of reasoning that was meant to convince us of this premise:

The internalist objector’s line of reasoning: The skeptic (or non-skeptic) doesn’t think that epistemic properties with respect to which NSS is false are philosophically interesting. But she does think that the properties whose exemplification is at issue in the controversy between skeptics and nonskeptics are philosophically interesting. Hence, any epistemic property with respect to which NSS is false fails to satisfy the Skeptical Controversy Condition.

I will argue that if the internalist objector’s line of reasoning is legitimate, we can use it to show that *no* epistemic properties satisfy the Skeptical Controversy Condition. Thus, if we grant to the internalist objector that the only philosophically interesting epistemic properties are those that satisfy the Skeptical Controversy Condition, we must conclude either that the internalist objector’s line of reasoning is to be rejected or that there are no philosophically interesting epistemic properties. Either way, we are left without a reason for preferring internalism to externalism.

4.1 *Setting Up the Argument*

Here is an intuitive way of stating the idea behind the internalist objector’s crucial premise: Epistemic properties with respect to which NSS is false are philosophically uninteresting because they allow for an unacceptable sort of epistemic circularity. Here is an intuitive way of stating the parallel argument of this section: *No* epistemic property is philosophically interesting because each one either (1) allows for epistemic circularity, or (2) is easily shown to be unexemplifiable, or (3) can, at best, be conditionally attributed to one’s own beliefs,¹⁸ or (4) fails to give us warranted¹⁹ beliefs

¹⁸That is, the most we can say of it is that our beliefs have it *if* some condition is satisfied.

¹⁹Recall that warrant is whatever, in addition to true belief, is necessary and sufficient for knowledge.

about the external world (or even confidence that the source of our beliefs about the external world is trustworthy). Each of (1) through (4) is such that if it is true of an epistemic property, that property seems—due to the sorts of consideration mentioned in the internalist objector’s line of reasoning—to be philosophically uninteresting. For the skeptic isn’t interested in epistemic properties of which either (1), (3), or (4) is true; and the nonskeptic isn’t interested in proclaiming the exemplification of epistemic properties of which (2) is true (these points are developed below).

In order to lay out the argument of section 4 more precisely, I will need to identify (without endorsing or rejecting) two other principles in addition to NSS:

The Higher Level Requirement Principle (HLR): A person’s belief B can exemplify EP_n only if she or he has an EP_n -belief that B’s source is trustworthy.²⁰

The Trustworthy Source Requirement Principle (TSR): A person’s belief B can exemplify EP_n only if B’s source is trustworthy.

The first of these is called ‘The Higher Level Requirement Principle’ because it says that a necessary condition of EP_n for a belief B is a further belief at the next level up—the level of beliefs that are about the epistemic credentials of belief B. The latter is more or less a reliability constraint on epistemic properties. With these principles before us, we can identify four mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive types of epistemic property:

Type One: Epistemic properties with respect to which \sim NSS is true.

Type Two: Epistemic properties with respect to which (NSS & HLR) is true.

Type Three: Epistemic properties with respect to which (NSS & \sim HLR & TSR) is true.

Type Four: Epistemic properties with respect to which (NSS & \sim HLR & \sim TSR) is true.

²⁰Notice the similarity between the second rationale for internalism (mentioned in the introduction) and the claim that HLR is true with respect to justification. Both say that justification requires a reason in the form of another belief.

The internalist objector's line of reasoning was used in section 2 to argue that the first type of epistemic property is philosophically uninteresting in virtue of the fact that (1)—from the previous paragraph—is true of it. I will argue here that the same reasoning enables us to show that all four types of epistemic property are philosophically uninteresting. The rough idea is that (1) is true of type one epistemic properties, (2) is true of type two epistemic properties, either (1) or (2) or (3) is true of type three epistemic properties, and (4) is true of type four epistemic properties.

Here is a more formal statement of the main argument of section 4:

- (I) If the internalist objector's line of reasoning is legitimate, we can use it to show that epistemic properties with respect to which \sim NSS is true fail to satisfy the Skeptical Controversy Condition.
- (II) If the internalist objector's line of reasoning is legitimate, we can use it to show that epistemic properties with respect to which (NSS & HLR) is true fail to satisfy the Skeptical Controversy Condition.
- (III) If the internalist objector's line of reasoning is legitimate, we can use it to show that epistemic properties with respect to which (NSS & \sim HLR & TSR) is true fail to satisfy the Skeptical Controversy Condition.
- (IV) If the internalist objector's line of reasoning is legitimate, we can use it to show that epistemic properties with respect to which (NSS & \sim HLR & \sim TSR) is true fail to satisfy the Skeptical Controversy Condition.

Therefore, if the internalist objector's line of reasoning is legitimate, we can use it to show that *no* epistemic property satisfies the Skeptical Controversy Condition.

We have already seen from the section 2 defense of the internalist's objection that premise (I) is true.²¹ Premise (II) will be defended in section 4.2, premise (III) in section 4.3, and premise (IV) in section 4.4.

²¹This isn't to endorse the section 2 defense of the internalist's objection. For premise (I) doesn't say that that defense succeeds. Rather, it says that that defense (or a crucial part of it) succeeds *if* the internalist objector's line of reasoning is legitimate. And I do think that the section 2 defense establishes that conditional claim.

4.2 *Epistemic Properties with Respect to Which (NSS & HLR) Is True*

In this subsection I will use the internalist objector's line of reasoning to argue that nonskeptics aren't interested in epistemic properties with respect to which (NSS & HLR) is true. The basic idea is that if both NSS and HLR are true with respect to an epistemic property, then it is pretty obviously not exemplifiable by any of our beliefs. Consequently, it isn't a property whose exemplification the nonskeptic is interested in proclaiming in her controversy with the skeptic.

To see this, let's focus on a single epistemic property—warrant—and consider what would be the case if both NSS and HLR were true of it.²² HLR (applied to warrant) says that a belief B cannot be warranted unless the person holding it has a warranted belief in the trustworthiness of B's source. NSS (applied to warrant) says that I cannot employ a belief source S in coming to have a warranted belief in S's own trustworthiness. Thus, if NSS and HLR are both true with respect to warrant, I must have an *infinite* number of belief sources if any belief of mine is to be warranted. Consider, for example, one of my sense-perceptual beliefs. That belief is warranted, according to the conjunction of NSS and HLR, only if, using some *other* source S2, I have a warranted belief in the trustworthiness of sense perception.²³ But this S2-produced belief in the trustworthiness of sense perception is warranted only if, using some source *other than* sense perception or S2—say S3—I come to have a warranted belief in the trustworthiness of S2. And so on.²⁴

²²The argument could be stated in terms of any arbitrarily selected epistemic property EP_n, but it will be easier to follow if I use a familiar epistemic property such as warrant.

²³I'm relying here on the assumption that a belief B is warranted only if the person holding it has a *distinct* belief B* in the trustworthiness of B's source. But, you might object, that assumption isn't supported by the truth of HLR with respect to warrant. For B could be a belief in, among other things, the trustworthiness of its own source (for example, it could be a belief like *the source of every belief of mine is trustworthy*). Then B *on its own* (without a distinct belief B*) could satisfy the higher level requirement imposed by HLR. The problem with this objection is that the state of affairs it describes (a belief satisfying on its own the HLR requirement) couldn't obtain if *both* NSS and HLR were true with respect to warrant. For if B did satisfy on its own the HLR requirement, it would be a warranted belief, produced by a source S, to the effect that S itself is trustworthy. And this isn't possible if NSS is true with respect to warrant.

²⁴For the sake of simplifying the discussion, I'll talk here (and through-

It won't do to return at some point in the series to using sense perception as a source of warranted belief. For if I did, I would (ultimately) be relying on sense perception in coming to have a warranted belief in the trustworthiness of sense perception. We can see this as follows. Let's say that the initial sense-perceptual belief is at level 1, the belief via S2 that sense perception is trustworthy is at level 2, the belief via S3 that S2 is trustworthy is at level 3, and so on. Now suppose, for reductio, that NSS and HLR are true with respect to warrant and that the warranted level 4 belief that S3 is trustworthy is produced by sense perception. Given HLR with respect to warrant, a necessary condition for having a warranted level 2 belief (that sense perception is trustworthy) is having a warranted belief at level 3. Likewise, a necessary condition for having a warranted level 3 belief is having a warranted level 4 belief. And since *necessary for* is a transitive relation, a necessary condition for having a warranted level 2 belief (that sense perception is trustworthy) is having a warranted level 4 belief (that S3 is trustworthy). But the level 4 belief is produced by sense perception. So the level 2 belief in the trustworthiness of sense perception depends for its warrant on a belief produced by sense perception. And this contradicts the claim that NSS is true with respect to warrant, which was part of what we assumed for reductio.

Given that we have only a finite number of belief sources,²⁵ the truth of (NSS & HLR) with respect to some epistemic property is unacceptable to the nonskeptic. For the truth of (NSS & HLR) with respect to an epistemic property together with the finite number of our belief sources entails *fairly obviously* that none of our beliefs exemplifies the epistemic property in question.²⁶ But this gives us a reason to think that any epistemic property with respect

out the paper) as if we need to rely on only *one* belief source to form the belief that sense perception (or some other belief source) is trustworthy. My conclusions do not depend on this simplifying assumption's being the sober truth.

²⁵This assumption should not be confused with the assumption that we have only a finite number of *beliefs*.

²⁶It's interesting to note that this sort of problem does not plague one who, like Keith Lehrer, focuses on epistemic properties with respect to which (\sim NSS & HLR) is true. (For evidence that he thinks HLR is true with respect to the epistemic properties on which he focuses, see Lehrer 1989, 142. For evidence that he thinks NSS is false with respect to these properties, see his 1989, 143–46.)

to which both NSS and HLR are true fails to satisfy the Skeptical Controversy Condition. After all, one would think that the epistemic properties on which epistemologists have traditionally focused when engaging the skeptic are not *easily shown* to be unexemplifiable. For if they were, only the philosophically incompetent could disagree with the skeptic. A canny nonskeptic will have no interest in attributing to our beliefs an epistemic property that is fairly obviously unexemplifiable by our beliefs. This suggests that the nonskeptic does not think that epistemic properties with respect to which (NSS & HLR) is true are philosophically interesting. But then we can use the internalist objector's line of reasoning as follows:

The nonskeptic doesn't think that epistemic properties with respect to which (NSS & HLR) is true are philosophically interesting. But she does think that the properties whose exemplification is at issue in the controversy between skeptics and nonskeptics are philosophically interesting. Hence, any epistemic property with respect to which (NSS & HLR) is true fails to satisfy the Skeptical Controversy Condition.

This gives us premise (II) of the main argument of section 4: If the internalist objector's line of reasoning is legitimate, we can use it to show that epistemic properties with respect to which (NSS & HLR) is true fail to satisfy the Skeptical Controversy Condition.

4.3 *Epistemic Properties with Respect to Which (NSS & ~HLR & TSR) Is True*

To defend premise (III), I'll need to identify several different kinds of belief. And to do that, it will be helpful to introduce a few key notions. Let's say that a belief source S is *verified* with respect to an epistemic property EP_n (or $verified_{EP_n}$) just in case the person who has source S has an EP_n -belief (that is, a belief exemplifying EP_n) to the effect that S is trustworthy. If a belief source is not verified with respect to EP_n , then we can say it is *unverified* $_{EP_n}$. $Verified_{EP_n}$ sources are verified by *verification chains* that will look something like this: belief source S1 is verified by an EP_n -belief B1 in the trustworthiness of S1; B1 is produced by a source S2 that is verified by an EP_n -belief B2 in the trustworthiness of S2; B2 is produced by a source S3 that is verified by an EP_n -belief B3 in the trustworthi-

ness of S3 (and so on). With these notions in mind, we can define an EP_n -belief with an ultimately verified $_{EP_n}$ source as follows:

An EP_n -belief B has an *ultimately verified $_{EP_n}$ source* if and only if it has a verification chain that includes no beliefs produced by a source that is unverified $_{EP_n}$.

There are two ways in which an EP_n -belief can have an ultimately verified $_{EP_n}$ source: either (i) the source of the EP_n -belief B has a verification chain terminating in an EP_n -belief B* in the trustworthiness of B*'s own source²⁷ or (ii) the source of the EP_n -belief B has an *endless* verification chain. And there are two ways in which (ii) can occur: either (a) the person holding the belief has an infinite number of belief sources or (b) she has a finite number of belief sources at least some of which show up at the "end" of the endless verification chain in a repeating cycle of sources.²⁸

From the above, we can conclude that every EP_n -belief will be of one of the following four kinds:

A *self-supporting-source* belief: a belief that has an ultimately verified $_{EP_n}$ source and whose source has a verification chain terminating in a belief B* in the trustworthiness of B*'s own source.²⁹

An *infinite-source* belief: a belief that has an ultimately verified $_{EP_n}$ source and whose source has a verification chain involving an infinite number of belief sources.

A *circular-source* belief: a belief that has an ultimately verified $_{EP_n}$ source and whose source has a verification chain involving a

²⁷The simplest case of this sort will be where B just is B* and the verification "chain" for B's source consists only of B itself (for example, where B is the belief that *the source of every belief of mine is trustworthy*).

²⁸An example of a chain of this last sort is one that goes on as follows without end: belief source S1 is verified by a justified belief B1 in the trustworthiness of S1; B1 is produced by source S2, which is verified by a justified belief B2 in the trustworthiness of S2; B2 is produced by S1, which is verified by a justified belief B3 in the trustworthiness of S1; B3 is produced by S2, which is verified by a justified belief B4 in the trustworthiness of S2; (and so on). In this example, S1 and S2 are the sources that make up the repeating cycle of sources at the "end" of the endless verification chain.

²⁹Note that the self-supporting-source belief described in the definition could be B* itself (in which case the verification "chain" would contain only B* whose source is verified by B* itself). See note 27.

finite number of belief sources that repeat in an endless cycle at the “end” of the chain.

An *unverified-source* belief: a belief that has an ultimately unverified_{EP_n} source (that is, a belief that is produced either by an unverified_{EP_n} source or by a source whose verification chain terminates in a belief produced by an unverified_{EP_n} source).³⁰

Thus, every belief exemplifying an epistemic property *with respect to which* ($NSS \ \& \ \sim HLR \ \& \ TSR$) *is true* will be of one of these four kinds.³¹

But we can say more. For a self-supporting-source belief cannot exemplify an epistemic property with respect to which NSS is true. To see this, suppose the contrary—that is, suppose that there is a self-supporting-source belief that exemplifies an epistemic property EP_n with respect to which NSS is true. The verification chain for such a belief will terminate in an EP_n-belief B* in the trustworthiness of B*'s own source. But since NSS is true with respect to EP_n, this is not possible. For it would be a case of relying on a source S to obtain an EP_n-belief in S's own trustworthiness.³² So no self-supporting-source belief can exemplify an EP_n with respect to which NSS is true. From this we can conclude that the only beliefs that can exemplify an epistemic property with respect to which (NSS & ~HLR & TSR) is true are infinite-source beliefs, circular-source beliefs, or unverified-source beliefs.

Now that we have these three belief kinds clearly in mind, the remainder of section 4.3 will be devoted to arguing for the three-

³⁰There is a kind of relativity here that, for ease of exposition, I haven't made explicit. The truth of the matter is that a belief is a self-supporting-source belief (or an infinite-source belief or a circular-source belief or an unverified-source belief) *with respect to some epistemic property*. Since the definitions I've given include EP_n subscripts in the definiens the beliefs are only of the definiendum type *relative to* EP_n. So, strictly speaking, what I've called a 'self-supporting-source belief' is in fact a *self-supporting-source (with respect to EP_n) belief*.

³¹The reader will notice a similarity between these four kinds of belief and the four options typically considered in the regress argument for foundationalism. However, there are some important differences (I won't take the time here to explore them) that should keep us from basing hasty conclusions about the topic under discussion in this paper on familiar observations concerning the regress argument for foundationalism.

³²Compare this with the argument in note 23.

fold conclusion that: (i) either the skeptic or the nonskeptic finds philosophically uninteresting the question of whether *infinite-source* beliefs exemplify epistemic properties with respect to which (NSS & \sim HLR & TSR) is true and (ii) either the skeptic or the nonskeptic finds philosophically uninteresting the question of whether *circular-source* beliefs exemplify such properties and (iii) either the skeptic or the nonskeptic finds philosophically uninteresting the question of whether *unverified-source* beliefs exemplify such properties. The reason I will be arguing for this threefold conclusion is that, when it is conjoined with the conclusion mentioned at the end of the previous paragraph, it yields the result that *every* belief that can exemplify an epistemic property with respect to which (NSS & \sim HLR & TSR) is true is such that either the skeptic or the nonskeptic finds the question of whether it exemplifies such a property philosophically uninteresting. And with that result we can employ the internalist objector's reasoning as follows:

Every belief that can exemplify an epistemic property with respect to which (NSS & \sim HLR & TSR) is true is such that either the skeptic or the nonskeptic finds the question of whether it exemplifies such a property philosophically uninteresting. But this isn't true of the epistemic properties whose exemplification is at issue in the controversy between skeptics and nonskeptics (since *both* skeptics and nonskeptics find the question of whether our beliefs exemplify *those* properties philosophically interesting). Hence, any epistemic property with respect to which (NSS & \sim HLR & TSR) is true fails to satisfy the Skeptical Controversy Condition.

But this is just to say that if the internalist objector's line of reasoning is legitimate, we can use it to show that epistemic properties with respect to which (NSS & \sim HLR & TSR) is true fail to satisfy the Skeptical Controversy Condition. And that is premise (III) of the main argument of section 4. Thus, if I can offer a satisfactory defense of the threefold conclusion mentioned above, I will, thereby, have established premise (III). Let's turn then to a defense of that threefold conclusion.

Consider first *infinite-source* beliefs. The *nonskeptic* finds the question of whether they exemplify epistemic properties with respect to which (NSS & \sim HLR & TSR) is true philosophically uninteresting. The reason for this is that she is interested in the skeptical

controversy as it applies to *our* beliefs. And none of our beliefs are infinite-source beliefs. If the epistemic properties in question could be exemplified only by infinite-source beliefs then they would fairly obviously be unexemplifiable by our beliefs. This gives us the first part of our threefold conclusion.

Consider next *circular-source* beliefs. The *skeptic* finds the question of whether they exemplify epistemic properties with respect to which (NSS & \sim HLR & TSR) is true philosophically uninteresting. The reason the skeptic finds it uninteresting is very much like the reason (identified earlier by the internalist objector) that the skeptic finds the question of whether our beliefs exemplify epistemic properties with respect to which NSS is false philosophically uninteresting. The internalist objector's complaint about these latter properties was that the skeptic had no interest in discussing some epistemic property EP_n if one could rely on a source S in order to come to have an EP_n -belief that S is trustworthy. Such an epistemic property was simply not philosophically interesting to the skeptic because it enabled a source to be verified (via an EP_n -belief in its trustworthiness) by *itself*—it allowed for a kind of epistemic circularity. But that is the very same sort of thing that happens with circular-source beliefs. Their sources are ultimately verified by a repeating cycle of sources. If a source S1 cannot be verified by itself, it won't improve matters to have it verified by another source S2 that in turn is verified by S1. And if a small circle of two mutually verifying sources is unimpressive, it won't help to increase the size of the circle.³³ Thus, the internalist objector's dismissal of epistemic properties with respect to which NSS is false carries over to epistemic properties with respect to which (NSS & \sim HLR & TSR) is true—or at least it does in cases where the latter sort of epistemic property is exemplified by circular-source beliefs. This gives us the second part of our threefold conclusion.

Finally, consider *unverified-source* beliefs. The skeptic finds the question of whether they exemplify epistemic properties with respect to which (NSS & \sim HLR & TSR) is true philosophically uninteresting. The explanation for why this is so cannot be stated so briefly.

Suppose (NSS & \sim HLR & TSR) is true with respect to an epistemic property—for example, justification. This will probably

³³Alston makes a similar point in his 1993b, 118–19.

make the skeptic (and those sympathetic to the viewpoint of the skeptic or the internalist objector) uneasy. For they tend to be dissatisfied with a merely *conditional* epistemic sanction. Let me explain. Given that HLR is false with respect to justification, a level 1 belief (that is, a belief that is not about the epistemic credentials of some other belief) can be justified *even if* the person holding it does not have a justified level 2 belief about the trustworthiness of the source of the level 1 belief. For example, if HLR is false with respect to justification, then a sense-perceptual belief can be justified even if the person holding it doesn't have a justified higher-level belief that her sense perception is trustworthy. But suppose TSR is true with respect to justification (that is, suppose a belief can be justified only if its source is trustworthy). Then the *most* the person holding the level 1 belief (without the level 2 belief) could reasonably say if she were asked about whether that level 1 belief is justified is something like, "It is *if* its source is trustworthy."³⁴ So she doesn't need the justified level 2 belief in order for the level 1 belief to *be* justified. But she does need a justified level 2 belief in order justifiably to *attribute* justification to her level 1 belief unconditionally.³⁵ To put the same point in terms of the above example: if HLR is false with respect to justification, the person holding the sense-perceptual belief doesn't need a justified belief in the trustworthiness of her sense perception in order for her sense perceptual belief to *be* justified. But, if TSR is true with respect to justification she does need that higher-level belief in order justifiably to *attribute* justification to her sense-perceptual belief. More generally, a person needs a justified level $n+1$ belief in order unconditionally and justifiably to attribute justification to a level n belief—otherwise she can (at most) make only the conditional claim that her level n belief is justified *if* its source is trustworthy. Let's see where this leads us.

Suppose a person has a belief at some level i . Given that HLR is false with respect to justification, that belief can be justified even if the person doesn't have a justified belief at level $i+1$. But, for the reasons given in the previous paragraph, in order for the per-

³⁴This is the *most* she could say. If it turned out that there were other necessary conditions for justification (or whatever the epistemic property in question is) besides the one mentioned in TSR, then she couldn't say even this much.

³⁵And she may need more besides.

son unconditionally and justifiably to attribute justification to her level i belief, she must have a justified belief at level $i+1$. And, given the truth of TSR with respect to justification, she has a justified belief at level $i+1$ only if the source of that level $i+1$ belief is trustworthy. *So she can unconditionally and justifiably attribute justification to her level i belief only if the source of her level $i+1$ belief is trustworthy.* Notice that this sets a condition on her unconditional attribution of justification to her level i belief (namely, the condition that the source of her level $i+1$ belief is trustworthy). Thus, she can get beyond that merely conditional claim (in italics) only if she has a justified level $i+2$ belief that the source of her level $i+1$ belief is trustworthy. In other words, her attribution of justification to her level i belief can be *genuinely* unconditional only if she has a justified belief at level $i+2$. And, given TSR, she has a justified belief at level $i+2$ only if the source of that belief is trustworthy. *Thus, she can unconditionally and justifiably attribute justification to her level i belief only if the source of her level $i+2$ belief is trustworthy.* By continuing with this sort of reasoning we can show that, for every n , she can unconditionally and justifiably attribute justification to her level i belief only if the source of her level $i+n$ belief is trustworthy.

The point made above in terms of justification can be generalized to all epistemic properties as follows. Given that (NSS & \sim HLR & TSR) is true with respect to an epistemic property EP_n , a person can unconditionally (and with EP_n) attribute EP_n to her level i belief only if, for *every* level higher than i , the source of her belief at that level is trustworthy. Now suppose that an unverified-source belief exemplifies such an epistemic property. From this it follows that the person holding such a belief has an unverified $_{EP_n}$ source—one such that she doesn't have an EP_n -belief in its trustworthiness.³⁶ But this implies that there is one condition on the unconditional attribution of EP_n to her unverified-source belief—namely, that her unverified $_{EP_n}$ source is trustworthy—in whose satisfaction she does not have an EP_n -belief. And this means that the *most* she can say of her unverified-source belief is that she can

³⁶Nothing I've said rules out the possibility of there being more than one unverified $_{EP_n}$ source. I'll consider only the case of there being one unverified $_{EP_n}$ source since the problems I mention are only exacerbated if there is more than one such source.

unconditionally (and with EP_n) attribute EP_n to it *if* her unverified_{EP_n} source is trustworthy. Since she cannot have an EP_n -belief in the trustworthiness of her unverified_{EP_n} source (without it ceasing to be such a source), this is a conditional conclusion that she cannot make unconditional. Thus, any epistemic property with respect to which (NSS & \sim HLR & TSR) is true will be one that a person can unconditionally (and with EP_n) attribute to her unverified-source beliefs *only if* her unverified_{EP_n} source, whose trustworthiness she cannot verify, is trustworthy.³⁷

But then the skeptic has no interest in the exemplification by an unverified-source belief of an epistemic property with respect to which (NSS & \sim HLR & TSR) is true. For suppose an unverified-source belief exemplified such an epistemic property. Would the skeptic be impressed? No. The skeptic would think that the exemplification of that sort of epistemic property by an unverified-source belief is rather unimpressive (and therefore not philosophically interesting) given that its unconditional attribution depends on the trustworthiness of a belief source whose trustworthiness can't be verified.³⁸ This gives us the third and final part of our

³⁷And even if her unverified_{EP_n} source *is* trustworthy, she can't unconditionally and with EP_n attribute EP_n to beliefs produced by *it*. For she can't have an EP_n belief in the trustworthiness of her unverified_{EP_n} source (without it ceasing to be an unverified_{EP_n} source). The best that can be said for beliefs produced by her unverified_{EP_n} source is that if that source is trustworthy, the beliefs it produces will exemplify EP_n .

³⁸Stroud seems to have this very problem in mind (the problem of a merely conditional epistemic sanction) when he explains his reasons for dissatisfaction with externalism. See his 1989, 47 and also his 1994, 302 where he says:

I think anyone who can get into only that position with respect to his alleged knowledge of the world [that is, the externalist's position of saying, at best, that her beliefs are warranted *if they satisfy the external conditions necessary for warrant*] has not achieved the kind of satisfaction which the traditional epistemological project aspires to.

Fumerton too seems to be dissatisfied with an epistemic sanction that is merely conditional. See his discussion of Alston in his 1995, 178–79. One could look at this sort of complaint as an alternative attempt to give a defense of the internalist's objection (that is, the externalist epistemic properties fail to satisfy the Skeptical Controversy Condition because they make possible only a conditional epistemic sanction). My response to that alternative defense of the internalist's objection is basically the same as my response given in section 4 of this paper to the defense given in section 2.

threefold conclusion discussed earlier. And, as I explained above, that threefold conclusion gives us premise (III) of the main argument of section 4.

4.4 Epistemic Properties with Respect to Which (NSS & ~HLR & ~TSR) Is True

The conclusion of my argument so far is this: anyone who wants to take the side of the internalist objector and insist that the epistemic properties on which she focuses satisfy the Skeptical Controversy Condition will have to say that the *only* epistemic properties on which she focuses are ones with respect to which TSR is *false*. For the only epistemic properties with respect to which TSR is *true* are those with respect to which either (\sim NSS & TSR) is true or (NSS & HLR & TSR) is true or (NSS & \sim HLR & TSR) is true. The internalist objector has argued that those with respect to which NSS is false do not satisfy the Skeptical Controversy Condition. And I've argued above that we can use the internalist objector's line of reasoning to show that those epistemic properties with respect to which either (NSS & HLR) or (NSS & \sim HLR & TSR) is true fail to satisfy the Skeptical Controversy Condition. So the friend of the internalist objector (who has accepted my arguments to this point) is forced to focus only on epistemic properties with respect to which TSR is false. Will this satisfy the skeptic? Do such epistemic properties satisfy the Skeptical Controversy Condition?

Well, what sort of epistemic property is such that TSR is false with respect to it? One possible example is deontological justification—the property of being held in an epistemically responsible manner. You might think that a belief could be held in an epistemically responsible manner even if its source is not trustworthy. The person holding the belief may have been epistemically responsible in forming it despite her failure to recognize that its source is *untrustworthy*. Perhaps, after careful reflection, investigation, and reasoning, she felt absolutely certain that the source in question was trustworthy; and perhaps she adhered to the policy of being careful to retract any beliefs produced in her by sources in whose trustworthiness she did not have extreme confidence. We could say that a belief formed in this epistemically responsible manner is justified in a deontological sense, despite the fact that its source is not trustworthy.

Do such epistemic properties satisfy the Skeptical Controversy Condition? Are they philosophically interesting? *I* have some sympathy for the claim that they are (but then again, I have sympathy for the claim that epistemic properties with respect to which NSS is false are philosophically interesting). But what would a skeptic say? I think a skeptic would say something like this to those who focus only on epistemic properties with respect to which TSR is false: “You are careful to refrain from claiming that any of our beliefs exemplify an epistemic property requiring the trustworthiness of a belief’s source. But that is the sort of epistemic property in which I’m most interested. Perhaps it is *mildly* interesting to consider whether our beliefs exemplify epistemic properties that don’t require the trustworthiness of the belief’s source. But if that is the only sort of epistemic property our beliefs exemplify, then our beliefs are in sad shape. It just isn’t very impressive for a belief to exemplify an epistemic property with respect to which TSR is false. For in claiming that your external world beliefs have such epistemic properties, you haven’t claimed to *know* or have a *warranted belief* that there is an external world³⁹ or even that your belief that there is an external world has a trustworthy source. All you’ve claimed is that it has something else going for it (such as that it is responsibly formed). But that isn’t enough. If you ignore epistemic properties with respect to which TSR is true and claim only that our beliefs exemplify epistemic properties with respect to which TSR is false, you are ignoring the most interesting epistemic properties.”

If we accept the internalist objector’s line of reasoning, this suggests that epistemic properties with respect to which TSR is false do not satisfy the Skeptical Controversy Condition. I’ve conceded that the skeptic might not think the question of whether our beliefs exemplify such epistemic properties is totally without interest. But the skeptic will be inclined to think that if that is the only sort of epistemic property on which a person focuses, that person has missed the *main* point of philosophical inquiry concerning epistemic properties (in which case those *aren’t* the epistemic properties

³⁹I’m relying here on the widely held assumption that warrant (that which, together with true belief, is sufficient for knowledge) includes a reliability constraint—a constraint requiring the trustworthiness of the belief’s source.

whose exemplification is at issue in the controversy between skeptics and nonskeptics).⁴⁰ Bonjour and Fumerton (two of the main proponents of the internalist's objection to externalism) seem to agree with this assessment. Bonjour argues (1985, 7–8) that an epistemic property is of dubious worth unless its exemplification by our beliefs increases the likelihood of their being true. And Fumerton argues (1995, 18) that for a belief's justification to be *epistemic* (versus merely moral or prudential), it must make the truth of the belief probable.⁴¹ Thus, we have premise (IV) of the main argument of section 4: if the internalist objector's line of reasoning is legitimate, we can use it to show that any epistemic property with respect to which TSR is false—and, therefore, any epistemic property with respect to which (NSS & ~HLR & ~TSR) is true—fails to satisfy the Skeptical Controversy Condition. Together with premise (I), defended in section 2, and premises (II) and (III), defended in subsections 4.2 and 4.3, this gives us the conclusion that if the internalist objector's line of reasoning is legitimate, we can use it to show that *no* epistemic property satisfies the Skeptical Controversy Condition.

4.5 *The Failure of the Internalist's Objection*

Given the conclusion mentioned at the close of the previous subsection and that the Skeptical Controversy Condition is a necessary condition of being a philosophically interesting epistemic property, the most that can be shown (following up on the internalist's objection) is that *all* epistemic properties are philosophically uninteresting. But that hardly counts as a defense of internalism.⁴² For

⁴⁰How does the claim here that (i) the skeptic isn't interested in epistemic properties with respect to which TSR is *false* fit with the claim (attributed by me earlier to the internalist objector—see note 7 and section 2) that (ii) the skeptic isn't interested in an externalist epistemic property like *being reliably formed*—a property with respect to which TSR is *true*? Very easily. According to (i), TSR's being true with respect to an epistemic property is a *necessary* condition of the skeptic's being interested in that property. But this involves no conflict with (ii), according to which TSR's being true with respect to an epistemic property isn't a *sufficient* condition of the skeptic's being interested in it.

⁴¹There he says only that epistemic justification must make the truth of the belief probable *for the person holding the belief*. But later, when he considers exactly what sort of probability is involved, he concludes that it is the sort that holds between two propositions in a way that is not relativized to the person holding the belief (see chapter 7 of Fumerton 1995).

⁴²Stroud, at least in his 1994, seems to recognize this. There he empha-

according to that conclusion, internalists are in the same boat as externalists; the internalist objector hasn't given us any reason to prefer internalism to externalism.

But it is doubtful that the internalist objector can show even that much. For her crucial premise—that any epistemic property with respect to which NSS is false fails to satisfy the Skeptical Controversy Condition—should now be viewed with suspicion. Initially, it seemed plausible to think that an epistemic property that allowed for epistemic circularity was not philosophically interesting. But, as I pointed out in section 4.1, it turns out that *every* epistemic property either (1) allows for epistemic circularity or (2) is easily shown to be unexemplifiable or (3) can, at best, be conditionally attributed to one's own beliefs or (4) fails to give us warranted beliefs about the external world (or even confidence that the source of our beliefs about the external world is trustworthy). This is a surprising result. We had thought that the epistemic properties on which traditional epistemology focused were philosophically interesting. And we had thought that epistemic properties with respect to which one of (1) to (4) is true were *not* philosophically interesting. But we were mistaken in thinking at least one of these two things. We might have been mistaken in thinking that there are some philosophically interesting epistemic properties.⁴³ But why not conclude that we were mistaken in thinking that an epistemic property with respect to which one of (1) to (4) is true is philosophically uninteresting?

Let's suppose we *were* mistaken in this latter way. Then we can offer the following critique of the internalist's defense of the objection to externalism.⁴⁴ That defense relies on an unmotivated premise. I won't question the premise that the Skeptical Controversy Condition is a necessary condition of being a philosophically interesting epistemic property. For to question that would suggest

sizes that he is not offering a critique of externalism designed to show that internalism is true. His point seems to be more like the conclusion that no epistemic property is philosophically interesting (though he seems reluctant to come right out and say this). See his 1994, 296–97.

⁴³As I mentioned in note 42, this seems to be Stroud's view.

⁴⁴If we were mistaken in the former way, then we can offer the critique of the defense of the internalist's objection given in the first paragraph of section 4.5. For a reason to think we were mistaken in the latter way, see Sosa's 1994 response to the line of reasoning presented in Stroud's 1989.

that I am shifting my focus to an epistemic property other than one in which the skeptic is interested. And I'll even grant that the skeptic doesn't *think* she is interested in questioning whether our beliefs exemplify epistemic properties with respect to which NSS is false. What I question is the unmotivated assumption that the skeptic is not *in fact* interested in epistemic properties with respect to which NSS is false. For we've been given no good reason to join the internalist objector in rejecting the conclusion that

C: *Unbeknownst to the skeptic*, NSS is false with respect to the epistemic properties in which she is interested.

The reason the internalist objector rejects C is that there is prima facie reason for thinking that the epistemic properties in which the skeptic is interested are philosophically interesting and there is prima facie reason for thinking that epistemic properties with respect to which NSS is false are not philosophically interesting. But once we recognize that our reasons for thinking that epistemic properties with respect to which NSS is false are philosophically uninteresting are no better than our reasons for thinking that epistemic properties with respect to which NSS is true are philosophically uninteresting, we've overridden at least one of these prima facie reasons. The internalist objector is forced to concede either that the skeptic's epistemic properties aren't philosophically interesting (because none are) or that epistemic properties with respect to which NSS is false are philosophically interesting.

Furthermore, if we *accept* C, we have reason to think that what I called 'the internalist objector's line of reasoning' is not to be trusted. The internalist objector's line of reasoning, you will recall, went like this: "The skeptic doesn't think that epistemic properties with respect to which NSS is false are philosophically interesting. But she does think that the properties whose exemplification is at issue in the controversy between skeptics and nonskeptics are philosophically interesting. Hence, any epistemic property with respect to which NSS is false fails to satisfy the Skeptical Controversy Condition." If *unbeknownst to the skeptic*, NSS is false with respect to the epistemic properties in which she is interested this line of reasoning is undermined.

To sum up: the internalist objector's crucial premise is that

X. Epistemic properties with respect to which NSS is false fail

to satisfy the Skeptical Controversy Condition and are, therefore, philosophically uninteresting.

I grant the prima facie plausibility of that premise. But it is also extremely plausible to think that

Y. There are some philosophically interesting epistemic properties.

So if (as I've argued) the very reasoning which makes X seem plausible also makes it plausible to hold

Z. Epistemic properties with respect to which NSS is true fail to satisfy the Skeptical Controversy Condition and are, therefore, philosophically uninteresting

then we have to rethink matters. For X, Y, and Z form an inconsistent triad. The prima facie plausibility of X is no longer an adequate motivation for holding it. These considerations, together with the worries about X discussed in section 3, leave X—the internalist objector's crucial premise—unmotivated. Moreover, if we believe, as I do, that Y is the most plausible member of the triad we must reject either X or Z. I've argued that we have just as much reason to endorse Z as we have to endorse X. This makes it arbitrary to endorse X and reject Z. So the sensible response is to refrain from endorsing X, the internalist objector's crucial premise. Unfortunately, without that premise, the third rationale for internalism fails.

Purdue University

References

- Alston, William. 1985. "Concepts of Epistemic Justification." *Monist* 68:57–89. Reprinted in Alston 1989, 81–114. Page references are to reprint.
- . 1986a. "Epistemic Circularity." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 47:1–30. Reprinted in Alston 1989, 319–49. Page references are to reprint.
- . 1986b. "Internalism and Externalism in Epistemology." *Philosophical Topics* 14:179–221. Reprinted in Alston 1989, 185–226. Page references are to reprint.
- . 1988. "The Deontological Conception of Epistemic Justification." In *Philosophical Perspectives*, vol. 2: *Epistemology*, ed. James Tomberlin, 257–

300. Atascadero, Calif.: Ridgeview. Reprinted in Alston 1989, 115–52. Page references are to reprint.
- . 1989. *Epistemic Justification: Essays in the Theory of Knowledge*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- . 1993a. “Epistemic Desiderata.” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 53:527–51.
- . 1993b. *The Reliability of Sense Perception*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Bergmann, Michael. 1997. “Internalism, Externalism and the No-Defeater Condition.” *Synthese* 110:399–417.
- . 2000. “Deontology and Defeat.” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 60:87–102.
- BonJour, Laurence. 1980. “Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge.” In *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 5: *Studies in Epistemology*, ed. P. A. French, T. E. Uehling, and H. K. Wettstein, 53–73. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- . 1985. *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- . 1998. *In Defense of Pure Reason*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- . 1999. “The Dialectic of Foundationalism and Coherentism.” In *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*, ed. John Greco and Ernest Sosa, 117–42. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers.
- Chisholm, Roderick. 1977. *Theory of Knowledge*. 2d ed. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
- . 1982. *The Foundations of Knowing*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Fumerton, Richard. 1990. “Metaepistemology and Skepticism.” In *Doubting: Contemporary Perspectives on Skepticism*, ed. Michael Roth and Glen Ross, 57–68. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- . 1995. *Metaepistemology and Skepticism*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Gettier, Edmund. 1963. “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?” *Analysis* 23: 121–23.
- Ginet, Carl. 1975. *Knowledge, Perception and Memory*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel.
- Goldman, Alvin. 1999. “Internalism Exposed.” *Journal of Philosophy* 96:271–93.
- Howard-Snyder, Daniel. 1998. “BonJour’s ‘Antifoundationalist Argument’ and the Doctrine of the Given.” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 36:163–77.
- Lehrer, Keith. 1989. “Knowledge Reconsidered.” In *Knowledge and Skepticism*, ed. Marjorie Clay and Keith Lehrer, 131–54. Boulder: Westview Press.

- Moser, Paul. 1989. *Knowledge and Evidence*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Plantinga, Alvin. 1993. *Warrant: The Current Debate*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Quine, W.V. 1969. "Epistemology Naturalized." In *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*, 69–90. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Schmitt, Frederick. 1992. *Knowledge and Belief*. New York: Routledge.
- Sosa, Ernest. 1994. "Philosophical Scepticism and Epistemic Circularity." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, supp. vol. 68:263–90.
- Steup, Matthias. 1999. "A Defense of Internalism." In *The Theory of Knowledge: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Louis Pojman, 373–84. Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth.
- Stroud, Barry. 1989. "Understanding Human Knowledge in General." In *Knowledge and Skepticism*, ed. Marjorie Clay and Keith Lehrer, 31–49. Boulder: Westview Press.
- . 1994. "Scepticism, 'Externalism,' and the Goal of Epistemology." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, supp. vol. 68:291–307.
- Van Cleve, James. 1979. "Foundationalism, Epistemic Principles, and the Cartesian Circle." *Philosophical Review* 88:55–91.
- . 1984. "Reliability, Justification, and the Problem of Induction." In *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 9: *Causation and Causal Theories*, ed. P.A. French, T. E. Uehling, and H. K. Wettstein, 555–67. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.