INFORMATION TO USERS

The most advanced technology has been used to photograph and reproduce this manuscript from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.
The input objection: Bane of coherence theory

Cleveland, Wesley M., M.A.
Rice University, 1990
RICE UNIVERSITY

THE INPUT OBJECTION: BANE OF COHERENCE THEORY

by

WESLEY M. CLEVELAND

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF ARTS

APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

Dr. Richard E. Grandy, Professor
of Philosophy, Chairman

Dr. Mark A. Kulstad, Associate
Professor of Philosophy

Dr. Donald R. Morrison, Assistant
Professor of Philosophy

Dr. Stephen J. Sullivan, Instructor
of Philosophy

Houston, Texas

April, 1990
ABSTRACT

THE INPUT OBJECTION: BANE OF COHERENCE THEORY

by

WESLEY M. CLEVELAND

A pure coherence theory of empirical justification claims that the justification of empirical beliefs is based solely on internal relations. This claim gives rise to the input objection, which states that pure coherentism allows empirical justification to be cut off from the world.

Laurence BonJour and Michael Williams attempt to rebut the input objection. BonJour does so by means of cognitively spontaneous beliefs. The arguments for these beliefs are, however, fraught with too many difficulties for the notion of cognitively spontaneous beliefs to be tenable. Williams challenges the input objection by means of a dilemma, claiming that either the input objection is unintelligible, or epistemic beliefs provide the pure coherentist with a ready answer to the objection. The dilemma is unsuccessful since it fails to take into account all of the plausible conceptions of the world that are available. The input objection therefore remains a problem with which these coherentists must wrestle.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special appreciation must be given to Dr. Stephen Sullivan, under whose direction this thesis was written. Many thanks to Dr. Richard E. Grandy and Dr. Mark A. Kulstad for their helpful and insightful comments. I also would like to thank Dr. Donald R. Morrison for the rather extraordinary role that he played on my committee.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE: COHERENTISM AND THE INPUT OBJECTION</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coherentism</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Input Objection</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO: BONJOUR'S RESPONSE TO THE INPUT OBJECTION</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE: WILLIAMS'S RESPONSE TO THE INPUT OBJECTION</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does Justification Within a Coherence Require Epistemic Beliefs?</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do Epistemic Beliefs Ensure that a Coherence Theory is in Contact with the World?</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION.

Theories of justification are often either coherentist, foundationalist, or some combination of the two. Foundationalism claims that justification ultimately rests on self-validating or foundational propositions. Any belief lacking a self-justificatory status is warranted only through inferential connections with foundational propositions.

Coherence theories assert that justification of empirical beliefs does not require foundations. Rather, justification is a function of the inferential connections that bind beliefs together. A system of beliefs is justified to the extent that its constituents are appropriately inferentially related.

I will criticize and evaluate two coherentist conceptions of empirical justification. I will do so via the so-called input objection.

In the first chapter, I offer a general outline of the coherence theory vis-a-vis foundationalism, and introduce the input objection.

In chapter two, I discuss one of the most thorough and interesting responses to the input objection. This response is that developed by Laurence BonJour in The Structure of Empirical Knowledge. While BonJour's reply is certainly creative, I find it wanting.

In the third chapter, I examine Michael Williams's rejoinder to the objection. I argue that Williams's retort is the wrong tack to take against the objection. Consequently, Williams's rejoinder is an insufficient response to the objection.
take against the objection. Consequently, Williams's rejoinder is an insufficient response to the objection.
CHAPTER I. COHERENTISM AND THE INPUT OBJECTION.

A. COHERENTISM

Coherentism might best be understood in contrast with classical foundationalism. Classical foundationalism's main tenet claims that all empirical justification is rooted in self-justifying beliefs. The classical foundationalist often utilizes the epistemic regress problem to support this claim. Consider the following example.

Suppose that empirical belief P is justified based on the inferential relations that P has with other beliefs Q and R. P is justified since it can be inferred from Q and R. If P is justified, then Q and R must themselves be justified beliefs. For if there is no good reason for holding Q and R, then Q and R alone cannot provide one with adequate reason to believe P.

Q and R, like P, find epistemic warrant via inferential connections. Imagine that inferences from S, T, and V, justify R and Q. S, T, and V also require justification. Now S, T, and V are validated only via connections with another set S1 of beliefs. S1, in turn, is justified only by inferences from set S2. This justificatory process can continue ad infinitum, resulting in an infinite regress of justification. If the regress has no termination, then no belief possesses complete justification. The most that can be hoped for is
so-called conditional justification, since a belief's justification is always conditional on another's validation.¹

Classical foundationalism boasts a solution to the epistemic regress problem. The regress, viewed by the foundationalist, is only a problem if one assumes that justificatory relations are exclusively inferential. However, once one realizes that justification is also non-inferential, the regress is halted. For if belief P were non-inferentially justified, then P could be warranted independently of other beliefs. The classical foundationalist claims that a non-inferentially justified belief is one whose justification is intrinsic.

Consider 1., an example of an intrinsically justified belief:

1. I believe that I know that Indianapolis is the capital of Indiana.²

Why ought we to think that 1 is self-justifying? Of any particular belief one can ask what evidence he/she has for holding that belief. When we pose this question, the result often is that evidence is supplied by other beliefs that one possesses. For example, suppose X thinks she knows a is F. If X is asked what justifies her in believing that she knows a is F, X might answer that she thinks she knows b is G. One could then ask X what justifies her believing that she knows b is G. This process, as we have seen, can progress ad infinitum,

each claim justified by the elicitation of a further. The result is, of course, an infinite regress. A stopping point for justification must therefore be found.\footnote{Chisholm, p. 18.}

A foundationalist finds the termination in self-justifying beliefs. According to Chisholm, 1 is such a belief. Inquiring into the justification of 1 reveals its self-justificatory nature. Suppose X asks herself what reasons she has for believing 1. X’s only response to such self-examination is merely a reiteration of 1. That is, X’s reason for believing that she knows Indianapolis to be the the capital of Indiana is simply the fact that X believes that Indianapolis is the capital of Indiana.

What is true for 1 is, Chisholm writes, true for other first-person propositions about one’s beliefs and thoughts. Any beliefs whose justification is achieved by reiteration is self-justifying or foundational. Inferences from further beliefs is quite unnecessary.\footnote{Chisholm, p. 22}

Foundational beliefs are the ground on the basis of which other non-foundational beliefs are warranted. All beliefs, in the foundational scheme, are justified either non-inferentially or inferentially via foundational beliefs.

Pure coherentism rejects the notion of self-justifying beliefs.\footnote{According to an epistemological theory known as weak foundationalism, there are beliefs that may benefit from partial non-inferential justification. Pure coherentism, however, maintains that all justification is conveyed via inferential relations.} Non-inferential justification is denied. Every belief must, to some degree, be justified via inferential connections with others.
Thus, even the justification of 1 is contingent on its relation to other beliefs in the system to which 1 belongs.

How, then, can the coherence theorist circumvent the regress problem? One solution which has been proposed has been criticized as being unacceptably circular. For example, coherentists have suggested that a belief P could be justified inferentially from Q and R. S, T, and V confer justification on Q and R, and S1 upholds S, T, and V. S1 could then be validated by S2. This process might extend so far that relations with P determine whether or not a set of beliefs Sn (on which the justification of S2 either immediately or indirectly rests) is warranted. In short, the justification of P ultimately depends on P's prior justification, and many critics have found this answer to the regress problem wanting.6

Understandably, many coherentists have wanted to avoid this circularity. The circularity is steered clear of when the linear conception of justification is abandoned. Taking its place is a nonlinear or holistic account of justificatory inference. The inferential relations existing between, and conferring justification on, beliefs are symmetrical and reciprocal. The regress is halted once it is no longer the single belief which is the unit of justification, but the entire system of empirical beliefs. For the justification of a particular belief does not ultimately rest on its

---

6 Not all coherentists, particularly Laurence BonJour, are satisfied with this solution to the regress problem. BonJour's own response to the regress problem is bound up with the notion of cognitively spontaneous beliefs, a topic treated in chapter II.
relation to specific beliefs. Instead, the justification depends "...on the entire system and its coherence."⁷

Having already highlighted some essential elements of coherence, most importantly, that a belief system is justified to the extent which its components "hang together" by inferential connections, a few more comments will suffice for our outline of coherence theory.

Logical consistency is a necessary condition for coherence. Two (or more) beliefs cannot cohere if they are contradictory.⁸ For example, the belief that X is mortal could not be justified in a system containing the belief that X is not mortal.

Logical consistency alone is not sufficient for coherence. Certainly the three sentences,

1. General Galvin is commander-in-chief of all NATO ground forces.
2. Mussolini was a pseudo-Caesar.
3. Starlings possess black plummage.

are logically consistent one with another. Nevertheless, it is difficult to see how such beliefs are suppose to cohere. Thus, "Coherence must involve some sort of positive connection among the beliefs in question, not merely the absence of conflict."⁹

These positive connections are the aforementioned inference relations.

---

⁹ BonJour, p. 96
Coherentists have disagreed in regard to how strong and complex these relations must be to result in coherence. Brand Blanshard's conception of coherence required very strong and complete relations. Every belief in a particular belief system S had to entail every other belief in S.\textsuperscript{10} A. C. Ewing, on the other hand, disagreed with Blanshard, claiming that mutual entailment was an unnecessarily strong requirement. Instead, a belief P could be justified on the basis of coherence with a belief system S if P were entailed by the conjunction of all the other components of S. Still others, viz., Keith Lehrer, Wilfred Sellars, and to a certain extent, Gilbert Harman, argue that a coherent set of beliefs is one which is "consistent, complete, and mutually explanatory."\textsuperscript{11} As a belief system increases in coherence, each belief will be better explained by other beliefs in the system. The more mutually explanatory the beliefs, the greater the coherence.

The previous discussion illustrates that there are varying ways of developing a coherence theory. It is only important here, however, to highlight coherentism's general characteristics. Coherence is a function of beliefs' "hanging together." The more a system of beliefs coheres, the more justified the system. Coherence is achieved via inferential relations, and justification is possible through these relations. The inferential relations are, contra foundationalism, non-linear. The strength or weakness of coherence can vary by degrees. For example, coherence can be diminished in

\textsuperscript{10} Dancy, p. 143.
\textsuperscript{11} Dancy, p. 111.
proportion to the extent to which a system is "...divided into subsystems of beliefs which are relatively unconnected to each other by inferential relations."\textsuperscript{12} Coherence can also decrease in proportion to the number of unexplained anomalies in a system.\textsuperscript{13} Obviously, explanatory relations can be important contributors to coherence. However, not all justificatory relations need be explanatory. Coherence is more than explanation, and can be "...enhanced by inferential connections of a nonexplanatory sort."\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{12} BonJour, p. 98.
\textsuperscript{13} BonJour, p. 99.
\textsuperscript{14} BonJour, p. 100
B. THE INPUT OBJECTION.

1. BonJour's Formulation.

According to BonJour, for any belief P that belongs to belief system S, P's justification depends solely on internal relations it shares with other members of S. Coherence, and thus justification, depend in no way on anything external to the system.\(^{15}\)

The problem with the kind of coherence theory endorsed by BonJour is that it allows for the justification of an empirical system of beliefs without the system being tied in any way to the empirical world. Since justification depends solely on coherence, and coherence relations are purely internal and thus completely independent of the empirical world, then empirical justification does not require any contact with an independent empirical realm. If empirical justification can be achieved without requiring contact with the empirical world, then such a system cannot qualify as knowledge. Even if the system accurately described the world, the accuracy would be accidental or miraculous. For the truth of the description could neither have been foreseen nor expected, and no

---

\(^{15}\) A word of caution here. I recognize that coherence theory need not require that all justification be achieved via coherence relations. Other less pure versions of coherentism may exist. One might argue that coherence is only partially responsible for empirical justification. If so, then it seems that some justificatory role could be open to the external world of sense.

However, to adopt this notion of partial coherence would take us far afield from BonJour's notion of empirical justification. BonJour is quite clear; justification is purely a matter of internal coherence. This is why the input objection is such a serious problem for his theory of coherence. Since our topic here is indeed BonJour's theory, then theories of partial coherence will not be examined, though their possibility is certainly acknowledged.
one would have any reason to think these so-called "empirical" beliefs likely to be true. Now if there are no reasons to regard these beliefs as probably true, then such beliefs could not be justified.\footnote{BonJour, p. 108.}

It ought to be pointed out that the input objection is not the only crucial difficulty mentioned in connection with coherence theory. BonJour cites two others, viz., the alternative coherent systems objection (from here on referred to as the asc objection), and the problem of truth.

Taking the asc objection first, we start by reminding ourselves that in BonJour's conception of coherence, justification is by internal relations. Nothing outside the system is necessary. But if justification depends solely on these relations, then it would seem impossible to differentiate a system which adequately describes the world from one of pure fantasy. For (presumably) many different belief systems could exist, all possessing the same degree of coherence. If all possessed the same degree of coherence, then all would be equally justified, and if equally justified, then coherence supplies us with no nonarbitrary means of favoring one particular belief system over another.\footnote{BonJour, p. 107.}

BonJour couches this objection in the language of possible worlds. Ours is the actual world. There are, however, many possible worlds differing little from our own. Each can be described with as much coherence as is the actual. Since justification depends solely on internal relations, then it appears that coherence is incapable of
discriminating between all of these "justified" pretenders and the
description of our world.

The other crucial objection is the problem of truth.
Epistemologists generally claim that there is some connection
between justification and truth. That is, epistemologists often
characterize justified beliefs as ones likely to be true. The problem
of truth claims that in order to show that justified beliefs are also
ones likely to be true, coherence theory must adopt a coherence
theory of truth. BonJour finds such a consequence highly
undesirable.\textsuperscript{18}

Why must the coherence theory of justification be coupled
with the coherence theory of truth? BonJour claims that in order to
show that justified beliefs are truth-conducive, truth is identified
with justification-in-the-long-run. Truth amounts to maximal
coherence. Thus a system of beliefs which is as coherent as
possible (at a given time) would be considered justified.

BonJour thinks that equating the coherence theories of truth
and justification is unnecessary and a grave error. The motivation
for identifying justification with truth-in-the-long-run is to show
why the coherence theory of justification leads us to truth.
According to BonJour, it is a theory of truth, independently
conceived, which validates a theory of justification. However, the
converse will not do. In other words, a theory of truth cannot be
adopted so that a theory or standard of justification might be
legitimated. To do so would produce a troubling circularity, viz., our

\textsuperscript{18} BonJour, p. 109.
standard of justification would be correct due to our concept of truth, and our concept of truth would be warranted on the basis of our theory of justification.19

BonJour distinguishes the input, truth, and alternative coherence systems objections. However, the truth and acs objections can be characterized as consequences of the input objection. If the problem of empirical input were solved, solutions to the acs and truth objections would follow.

The acs objection claimed that since justification rested purely on internal relations, no nonarbitrary standard was available by which one could distinguish an accurate description of the actual world from equaiiy coherent pretenders. The problem is compounded by that fact that an unlimited number of equally coherent systems of belief might be possible. However, if the justification of these counterfeit systems necessitated contact with the actual world, then we might, after all, possess a nonarbitrary means of adjudicating between systems possessing the same amount of coherence.

The problem of truth would also find a solution if the input problem were resolved. Since we seek a theory of truth independent of our standard of justification, the coherence theory of truth will not do. In its place, BonJour proposes the commonsensical correspondence theory, in which the truth of a proposition depends on its correspondence with reality. Such correspondence could be explained if empirical input from the extratheoretic world were

19 BonJour, p. 110.
required by coherence theory. If the coherence theory of justification could be squared with the correspondence theory of truth, then we have, it seems, an independent means of legitimating our theory of justification.

The input objection therefore lies at the root of the truth and acs objection. No one understands this better than BonJour, and he takes great pains to solve the input problem. Through the notion of cognitively spontaneous beliefs, BonJour hopes to show how a system of beliefs, justified solely by coherence relations, can be in contact with, and shaped by, the external world.

In the following chapter, I take a close look at the doctrine of cognitively spontaneous beliefs. Though philosophically interesting, I argue that the doctrine in question is largely untenable.
CHAPTER II. BONJOUR'S RESPONSE TO THE INPUT OBJECTION.

We find the notion of cognitively spontaneous beliefs elaborated in chapter five of BonJour's book *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*. Utilizing cognitively spontaneous beliefs, BonJour develops a coherentist account of observation that (he hopes) will rebut the input objection. A cognitively spontaneous belief is characterized by BonJour as one which "...simply occurs to me, 'strikes me' in a manner which is both involuntary and quite coercive."\(^{20}\) While a cognitively spontaneous belief is non-inferential in origin, its justification must, of course, be achieved inferentially.

BonJour suggests the following justificatory argument for a cognitively spontaneous belief, (e.g., that I see a red book in front of me).

1. I have a cognitively spontaneous belief of kind K that there is a red book in front of me.
2. Conditions C obtain.
3. Cognitively spontaneous beliefs of kind K in conditions C are very likely to be true.
4. Therefore, my belief that there is a red book on the desk is very likely to be true.

Therefore, (probably) there is a red book on the desk.\(^{21}\)

\(^{20}\) BonJour. p. 117.
\(^{21}\) BonJour, p. 131.
A great deal of attention is given to the justification of these three premises. I forego discussion of premises two and three, simply granting their justification. The scope of my criticism will be restricted to the justification of the first premise.

BonJour claims that premise 1 is composed of three sub-premises: that I have the belief whose justification is at issue; that the belief is of a certain kind; that the belief is cognitively spontaneous. An examination of all of these subpremises is not possible here. The locus of attention is the third of these subpremises, viz., the claim that a belief of a certain kind is cognitively spontaneous.

BonJour proposes two means by which one might argue for the cognitive spontaneity of a belief P. The first way is based on an epistemological procedure referred to as the Doxastic Presumption (hereafter referred to as the DP). The DP claims that a subject's grasp of his beliefs is approximately correct.

The need for the DP arises within the following context. According to BonJour's version of coherence theory, in order for a subject X to justify a belief P, X must recognize P's coherence with X's system of belief. The justification of P depends, of course, on whether or not X's belief system is coherent. For X to know that his belief system is coherent, X must have a conception of what his beliefs actually are. That is, X must possess accurate empirical metabeliefs regarding the empirical beliefs he actually holds.
A problem however arises. How can X justify these lately noted metabeliefs? One possible answer - metabeliefs are justified by means of coherence with the beliefs to which these metabeliefs refer. Such a response however runs aground on the rocks of vicious circularity. How can X's metabelief P1, that X holds a belief P, be justified by coherence with the system of beliefs to which P belongs, if X's grasp of the coherence of his belief system depends on the justification of X's metabeliefs, including P1?

The DP is designed to solve the problem of this metajustification. Raising the issue of a system's justification alone presupposes that that system of beliefs exists and is approximately correct. Rather than justifying the metabeliefs in question, we presume that our system of beliefs is nearly that described by our metabeliefs.22

The qualifier "approximately" is important. X could call into question the existence and justificatory status of a particular belief. This inquiry is possible however only against the assumption that the remainder of X's belief system exists. One cannot question the existence of the entire belief system, since raising the question presupposes that very existence.

Two further points regarding the DP deserve comment. First, the self-representation of one's belief system is "...a basic and

---
22 BonJour, p. 103.
unavoidable feature of cognitive practice."\textsuperscript{23} It is simply something we do so that justification can begin. Though the precise origin of this self-representation is uncertain, BonJour suggests that it is the result of the "psychological process of introspection."\textsuperscript{24}

The second issue concerns the DP's susceptibility to skepticism, viz., that \( X \) could doubt the accuracy of his self-representation. Clearly, this self-representation cannot be justified. Thus BonJour admits the impossibility of \( X \)'s responding to the skeptic.\textsuperscript{25} Nonetheless, BonJour seems rather unconcerned. Such a skepticism, BonJour writes, would be both "peculiar and uninteresting"\textsuperscript{26} though BonJour never really makes clear his reasons for such a claim.

\textbf{A certain belief P is cognitively spontaneous.} (From now on I will refer to this underlined subpremise as SP1).

BonJour proposes two different justificatory strategies.

The first asserts that, by employing the DP, P's cognitive spontaneity is defended if \( X \) (the subject holding P) can appeal to:

1. The absence of beliefs (in \( X \)'s belief system \( S \) to which P belongs) which could serve as plausible premises for a discursive derivation of the belief in question.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{23} BonJour, p. 104. I credit Dr. Sullivan for the realization that this doxastic self-representation is a feature of the DP, but not the DP itself. The DP is a metabelief about the representation of our own belief system.

\textsuperscript{24} BonJour, p. 117.

\textsuperscript{25} BonJour, p. 117.

\textsuperscript{26} BonJour, p. 128

\textsuperscript{27} BonJour, p. 130
1. alone will not do. X's introspective activity (regarding P) must reveal "the absence of any positive belief that P was discursively" derived.\textsuperscript{28} It should come as no surprise that this means of defending SP1 is primarily negative:

...the essentially negative character of the claim of cognitive spontaneity is important; as in other contexts the burden of proof is legitimately on the positive claim, so that insofar as there is no positive reason to think that the belief was discursively arrived at, it is reasonable to conclude that it was spontaneous.\textsuperscript{29}

Bonjour's second strategy avoids the DP. The cognitive spontaneity of certain beliefs can be recognized on the basis of the content that some of these beliefs possess. Admittedly,

Such a generalization (that there are many beliefs identifiable as cognitively spontaneous simply because of their content) would of course have to be justified, possibly by appeal to the classification of prior beliefs...\textsuperscript{30}

Once the foregoing justification was accomplished however,

the generalization) would provide a way to justify classifying a new belief of the specific sort in question as cognitively spontaneous simply by appeal to the belief and its content...\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{31} Bonjour, p. 131.
A further element, "crucial" to both strategies, is the fact that observational beliefs enjoy a highly detailed content.\textsuperscript{32} For example, suppose I see a red book on a desk. Upon perceiving this book, I sense much more than the sentence, "I see a red book on a desk" suggests. I observe the book's shape, pattern of coloration, texture, etc. It is the specificity of such observational beliefs which earmarks their cognitive spontaneity:

... it is this very specific and detailed content—easily lost sight of when appeal is made to a merely verbal formulation of the belief—which would have to be discursively derived in order for the belief to fail to be cognitively spontaneous. It is this extreme specificity of content which makes it difficult to find premises in one's cognitive system for a ...derivation of such a belief... and also which marks a belief as being of a kind that is usually or always cognitively spontaneous...\textsuperscript{33} (my underlining).

According to BonJour, the two suggested lines of justification, combined with this third element,

...are sufficient...to justify the claims of cognitive spontaneity that are needed as subpremises in a coherentist account of observational knowledge. While the complexity of the issues makes it difficult to be absolutely sure that this is indeed

\begin{itemize}
\item[32] Ibid.
\item[33] Ibid
\end{itemize}
so, I can see no compelling reasons to the contrary.

Claims that certain beliefs are cognitively spontaneous, (i.e., SP1), can be justified by one or both of the BonJourian suggestions in alliance with the specificity of observational beliefs. I will argue, contra BonJour, that there are strong if not compelling reasons to think the justification of SP1 is highly problematic. I begin with an attack on BonJour's second strategy.

The second proposal claims that many "...specific sorts of beliefs with distinctive sorts of content are almost always cognitively spontaneous when they occur." This assertion immediately raises suspicion. Just how is it that beliefs of certain kinds and content are identified as cognitively spontaneous? It seems to me that the cognitive spontaneity of observational beliefs can be recognized only if the cognitive spontaneity of these beliefs has previously been justified. The claim that certain beliefs are cognitively spontaneous requires justification before beliefs can be identified as such. BonJour provides no such justification.

One might question whether my so-called attack is not one in name only. No arguments oppose BonJour. Inquiries alone amount to little by way of philosophical counterargumentation. What I have tried to emphasize is that BonJour offers no reason as to why we ought to categorize certain beliefs as cognitively spontaneous on the basis of content. Supporting this claim rests solely on BonJour's

---

34 Ibid
35 BonJour, p. 130.
shoulders. BonJour might have some proof in the offering, but I am certainly not holding my breath.

Next for consideration is BonJour's claim concerning the extremely specific content of observational beliefs. This content renders the possibility of observational beliefs having been derived from premises already present in one's cognitive system highly unlikely. There seem to be at least two assumptions at work here. One is that if observational beliefs were discursively generated, the needed premises would be so detailed that they could not be adequately retained in human memory. A second possible assumption might stipulate that each observational belief is unique, since it depends on ever-changing conditions (relative to both the perceiving subject and the perceived object or event). Because every observational belief is unique, none could be derived from previously existing premises. One might deny the specificity of observational beliefs by attacking one or both of the preceding assumptions. I however opt for a more direct challenge; observational beliefs simply do not possess an extremely specific content.

Consider the following belief:

B1. X was wearing a colored dress shirt at time t.

Suppose Y believes B1. We now query Y about the content of B1., perhaps asking questions regarding e.g., the texture and color of the shirt, its design, size, etc. In general, how would one expect Y to respond to our interrogations? Unless Y were a particularly astute
observer, an inability to respond even to a single query is a reasonable expectation. Perhaps Y could make some replies, e.g., pertaining to the color of the shirt. Nevertheless, expecting an accurate answer to the majority of our questions is unrealistic.

My hesitations about the reliability of Y's memory is rooted in a common-sense construal of perceptual belief and belief formation. We attend to few of the details actually presented to us in our perceptual field. When Y perceives X's shirt, an enormous amount of perceptual information is communicated to Y's senses; certainly enough for Y's answering any and all of the preceding questions. This perceptual data is undoubtedly complex. The content of B1. however is not a conglomerate of complex perceptual information. The content of any observational belief is comprised only of that perceptual data actually attended to. This being the case, it is hardly surprising that B1. is not detailed. The most that Y probably notices about X's shirt is its color, and this in spite of the fact that Y's eyes were bombarded by a multitude of information. In general, then, while we are confronted by a myriad of details issuing from the external world, those actually incorporated into observational beliefs are few. Regarding observational beliefs as the possessors of detailed content is a mistaken conception. If anything, the content is elementary.

It has been suggested that while the content of an observational belief appears simple when expressed, it is actually quite
complex. This is most likely what Bonjour is getting at when he writes that the detailed content of observational beliefs can be lost sight of in "merely verbal formulations." Apparently, the reasoning behind this claim is that the formation of our observational beliefs involves a large number of subconscious mechanisms and components. A great deal of perceptual data is presented to our senses. It is also true that we attend to a very small percentage of that which is made available to us. However, the fact that we overlook the vast majority of sensory information does not necessarily imply that the information is not included in the content of observational beliefs. The inclusion might take place on a subconscious level. If so, then it could be argued that the content of observational beliefs is highly detailed, though the specific constitution and formation of such beliefs might not be accessible to the conscious mind.

I do not doubt that an adequate treatment of this suggestion would take us far afield and into the depths of cognitive science. At this point, I would only comment that this rebuttal seems no more plausible (at least intuitively) than my own position on the content of observational beliefs. Of course, a thorough examination of the issue might result in a change of opinion. However, the very least that my objection does is place a burden of proof on BonJour. That is, I think BonJour ought to be able to show why observational beliefs, though simple in conscious expression, are subconsciously intricate. I might be sympathetic to such argumentation, given my

---

36 This suggestion was initially made by Dr. Richard Grandy.
skepticism concerning the lucidity of introspection. Still, an argument is needed.

Briefly summarizing, BonJour's second suggested line of justification requires much more exposition before it can be taken seriously. Further, arguing for cognitive spontaneity via detailed belief content is, as yet, incomplete. Since the specific nature of observational beliefs was vital to both justificatory strategies, one might regard the first suggestion as a failure. However more direct reasons cast doubt on the first justificatory strategy.

According to the first strategy, a claim asserting the cognitive spontaneity of a belief is justified if it satisfies two conditions. Determining this satisfaction is the task of introspection. Introspection must fail to locate any discursive process from which the belief might have been derived. Further, no belief asserting that the belief is question was discursively derived can be found. The strategy is obviously negative. BonJour argues that a belief satisfying the two aforementioned conditions would possess justified cognitive spontaneity. This conclusion is far too hastily drawn. There are two arguments I field in support of my counterclaim.

First, justifying a claim that a belief of a certain kind possesses cognitive spontaneity procedes on the following assumption:
A1. If there is no reason not to believe that belief P is of a certain kind K, then one is justified in believing that P is of a certain kind K.

I suspect that purely negative criteria are insufficient for establishing a belief as a certain kind. Positive evidence is also required. For example, suppose that I have a belief W that some perceptual belief of mine, W1, is of a particular kind. For instance, let W be the perceptual belief:

B2. I seem to see a red book in front of me.

Let W1 be the metabelief:

B3. W is a belief of kind K.

K is the set of all beliefs which could not be formed unless physical objects existed. Assume that X believes B2. and B3., and that another person, Y, accepts B2. but not B3. Y believes W but rejects W's belonging to set K. In other words, Y believes W, but is not convinced that W is a belief belonging to set K. (For the sake of argument, imagine that X and Y are standing adjacent to one another, are both perceiving some red book facing them, and that such perception occurs at the same time t). Imagine a situation where X comments to Y that W is of kind K, whereupon Y disagrees. X is astonished by Y's denial. Since no one can show that independent and permanent physical objects do not render statements like 5. possible, X tries to convince Y, that W must be of kind K. According
to A1., Y ought to conclude that $W$ is of kind $K$.

I doubt if Y would find X's argument compelling. That is, I suspect that Y would not infer the truth of B3 merely because he finds no reason to think it not true. Instead, Y could respond by arguing that negative reasons are not sufficient to warrant belief; positive evidence for belief is also required. The trouble with X's reasoning is that it does not elicit any support for B3. There are perhaps a great number of propositions which we have no reason not to believe. But this does no justify our assenting to such propositions.

I definitely think that this last point is correct. Justified belief entails reasons for belief, not merely the absence of negative reasons. BonJour himself recognizes this fact. Epistemologists have long tried to establish firm and specific criteria for justification. Justifying beliefs on the basis of A1 alone would confer justification on all sorts of beliefs we have no reason to affirm. Adopting A1 would prostitute the concept of justification, making for every poor epistemology.

However, BonJour might challenge the construal of A1. A1 might be interpreted in two ways:

A1.1. If there is no reason not to believe that P is of a certain kind $K$, then one cannot justifiably deny or withhold assent from the belief that P is of a certain kind $K$.

---

37 BonJour, p. 8.
A1.2. If there is no reason not to believe that \( P \) is of a certain kind \( K \), then one is justified in believing that \( P \) is of a kind \( K \), and can also be justified in denying or

The difference between A1.1 and A1.2 might best be highlighted by distinguishing between epistemic requirements and permissions. If we take a particular belief as satisfying A1.1, we find that we are required to view the belief as justified. If a particular belief satisfies A1.2, then we are permitted to regard it as justified.

I could imagine BonJour replying to my argument claiming that its reasoning seems plausible only because I have interpreted A1. in terms of A1.1. But such a reading of A1. might, in BonJour’s eyes, be much too strong, at least for the purposes of the justificatory strategy employing A1. BonJour might state that this negative strategy only shows that, if \( X \) finds that a belief \( P \) satisfies certain negative criteria, then \( X \) is, epistemologically speaking, allowed to regard the belief that \( P \) is of a kind of belief that is cognitively spontaneous. The negative strategy is only intended to show that, given certain circumstances, permission is granted to one who wishes to claim that the belief, that \( P \) is cognitively spontaneous, is justified. But permission is also given to him who wishes to be justified in withholding assent from this metabelief.

Though this weaker construal of A1. might open the door to the possibility of justifying certain beliefs as cognitively spontaneous, such a reading of A1 renders the conception of justification too
weak. I think that, in regard to our intuitions concerning justification, we want a concept of justification more demanding than one amounting to no more than mere epistemic permission. If the most that could be settled in any inquiry regarding the justification of a belief were that the belief could be justifiably denied as well as held, then this is very meager justification indeed. No belief, even those possessing a justified status would rest on secure ground. For any justified belief could be given up as readily as it was accepted. There must be good reasons not only for holding a belief, but also for thinking that the rejection of a belief would be an epistemically unwarranted move. I therefore believe that good reasons for a regarding a belief as cognitively spontaneous must amount to more than the mere allowance of justification permitted by A1.2.

So one could, I suppose, grant that BonJour’s argument opens up the possibility for the justification of cognitively spontaneous beliefs. But why should one regard a belief as cognitively spontaneous if cognitive spontaneity can just as readily be denied? BonJour’s argument is weak because it cannot provide any impetus for believing in cognitively spontaneous beliefs.

In summary, the main point of my counterarguments has been this: that while there may be some criteria used to defend claims regarding the existence and justification of assertions to the effect that certain beliefs are cognitively spontaneous, no real argument
for the existence of cognitively spontaneous beliefs is ever provided.

There remains at least one other difficulty with SP1 and its justification. The problem involves a skepticism about the power and scope of introspection. Our introspective abilities make the DP possible. According to BonJour, if one could not reflect on her belief system, representing her belief system to herself, justification would never get off the ground. I do believe that the DP is a philosophically acceptable and plausible venture.

To justify the claim that a certain belief is of a kind that is cognitively spontaneous, BonJour must assume that introspection possesses a clear grasp of the details of the belief system. This assumption about the power of introspection is stronger than that required for the DP. Consider the following example. Suppose X, by means of his power of introspection, realizes that he has a perceptual belief P. I have admitted BonJou'r's claim that generally our beliefs are what we think they are. But in order to bring about the justification of SP1, X must also have a lucid apprehension of the relations that influence the formation of P. It is one thing to assume that our general conception of our belief system is correct. It is another to claim that we perceive the specific relations and influences between the beliefs in the system exactly as they are, or even approximately so. Belief formation is a complex process, and it is certainly possible that in our internal examination of the components of this process, we make errors. The veridicality of my
introspection might be hampered by any number of influences, e.g., my mood, what I have thought prior to my introspective act, my attitude in regard to my cognitive powers, my external environment, etc. And if such errors can be and are made, then BonJour’s confidence in the power of introspection, viz., that it can effectively determine when a belief satisfies his negative criteria for cognitive spontaneity, seems questionable, at the very least. The general representation of X’s belief system can be by and large correct while X’s introspective grasp of the specific relations obtaining between the beliefs comprising this system can certainly be erroneous.

Closely allied to misgivings about the clarity of introspection is skepticism concerning introspection’s scope. Suppose that introspection were a perfectly lucid faculty, isolated from any inhibitory influences. Even so, what reason would there be for believing that introspection could take into account all of the factors that led to the formation of a belief? Consider the following example. Let X be a person and P be a belief held by X. P is a candidate for cognitive spontaneity. Let a, b, c, d, e, and f be all of the elements that X thinks were involved in the formation of P. Suppose that these preceding constituents clearly have nothing to do with a discursive process. X therefore concludes that P is a cognitively spontaneous belief. However, unknown to X, there is an element g which contributed to the formation of X. And g is a discursive process. If g is a discursive process, then it turns out that P is not a cognitively spontaneous belief, a fact unknown, of course, to X.
I see no compelling reason for thinking that introspection is any more perfect in its scope than it is in its veridicality. For we often fail to take into account information relevant to the genesis of our beliefs and opinions. Thus the first strategy for justifying SP1 demands more powerful assumptions concerning the power of introspection than those exacted by the DP. Such assumptions are themselves in need of justification.38

CHAPTER III. WILLIAMS'S RESPONSE TO THE INPUT OBJECTION.

Williams's response to the input objection hinges on epistemic beliefs; beliefs about beliefs. Two issues can be separated in this reply, viz., why justification requires epistemic beliefs, and why epistemic beliefs afford an answer to the input problem.

A. DOES JUSTIFICATION WITHIN A COHERENCE THEORY REQUIRE EPISTEMIC BELIEFS?

There is no explicit demonstration of the necessity of epistemic beliefs. Passages exist however which suggest one. To get a better grasp of Williams's position, I will offer a reconstruction based on one of these passages.

Justification is established by "the test of coherence." This test is a determination of whether or not a particular belief coheres with some system S of empirical beliefs. The degree to which a belief coheres with S depends on the extent to which other beliefs would have to be revised if that belief were rejected. Williams argues that, in the case of beliefs about particular facts, such revisions are not possible without epistemic beliefs:

A crucial condition for applying the test of coherence comes to light if we ask how it is possible for rejection of a candidate belief to have widespread systematic implications, if

---

that belief concerns only a particular fact, logically independent of the rest of what I believe, or most of it. The answer is that the set of accepted beliefs constituting the context of justification cannot be thought to contain only "first-order" beliefs, but must contain epistemic beliefs as well...Our epistemic beliefs include beliefs about techniques for acquiring and rejecting beliefs, beliefs about the conditions under which beliefs of certain kinds are likely to be true, and so on.40

So belief P coheres with S if the rejection of P requires the credibility of other beliefs in S to be challenged. That is, P is justified in S only if its rejection would bring about revisions in S. Williams wonders how these revisions are possible if a great many of our beliefs are particular, separate from one another. The answer lies in epistemic beliefs. These beliefs relate first-order beliefs in such a way that makes the necessary revisions possible.

An example of how epistemic beliefs relate first-order beliefs would be instructive. Consider the following first-order perceptual beliefs that X might hold:

1. I see that this U.S. currency is green.

2. I see that this yield sign is black and yellow.

3. I see that this flag of the U.S.S. R is red.

4. I see that my wife's jewelry is gold-colored.

---

40 Williams, p. 247.
Lacking comprehensiveness, these beliefs alone could not constitute a coherent system. Many more beliefs are necessary. The point of my illustration is, however, to point out how an epistemic belief can relate 1-4 in a manner that makes the test of coherence possible.

It seems enigmatic how the test of coherence could be applied to one of these beliefs, if the other three comprised the relevant belief system. For it is not entirely clear how the rejection of 1. would require revisions in 2-4.

EBI. Beliefs about the color of medium sized objects encountered in the visual field are reliable because they are generated by a belief forming process which, upon encountering medium-sized objects in this field, almost always forms true beliefs representing the color of these

If EBI is adopted, then the rejection of 1 could affect 2-4. Each belief concerns the color of a medium-sized object. These beliefs are produced because our belief generating processes function in a certain manner, given specific kinds of data. Suppose X doubts 1 when he discovers that he is partially color blind - he frequently misrepresents greens as shades of brown. Whenever X perceives a green object, he cannot be certain that his corresponding belief is true. X's concern increases as he questions whether all his beliefs about the color of medium sized objects are inaccurate. In questioning the credibility of EBI, X also challenges the credibility of 2. - 4. Provided that an epistemic belief like EBI is supplied, testing their coherence could have positive results.41

41 Williams, p. 248.
Not everyone, however, finds the conception of epistemic beliefs so promising.

Consider Paul Moser's comments:

...the basic issue here (with regard for the need of epistemic beliefs for justification) is whether a coherence theory of justification actually makes the requirement proposed by Williams. To put the question straightforwardly: What is the argument showing that a belief system is...coherent for a person only if it contains certain epistemic beliefs? Unfortunately Williams has not provided the needed argument. Nor has he explained how epistemic beliefs are themselves justified. Moreover, he has overlooked the problem arising from the fact that many people have no epistemic beliefs.\(^{42}\)

Moser is raising three apparently troublesome issues: that Williams offers no argument for why justification requires epistemic beliefs; Williams fails to explain how epistemic beliefs are justified; Williams overlooks the fact that many persons do not possess epistemic beliefs. These criticisms are a good starting point from which we can begin an evaluation of epistemic beliefs, i.e., of Williams's epistemic-belief rebuttal to the input objection.

Moser Objection I. That Williams fails to show why epistemic beliefs are required for justification.

The main question here is whether Williams demonstrates that the coherence theory of justification actually necessitates epistemic beliefs.

The answer is, I think, "Yes." Even if Williams does not have a specific argument in mind, I believe that the following argument can be reconstructed from the passage cited on pages 33-34:

1. Belief p is justified in system of empirical beliefs S only if the rejection of p would require revision of some r, s, and t.

2. Such revision of r, s, and t (on the basis of -p) is possible only if p is evidentially related to r, s, and t.

3. p is evidentially related to r, s, and t only if there exists a justified epistemic belief B implying that p, r, s, and t are evidentially related.

Therefore, p is justified in S only if there is a justified epistemic belief which can evidentially relate p to r, s, and t.

Premises 1 and 2 are unproblematic. 3 is however, a different matter. One might immediately challenge it by arguing that it only states that epistemic beliefs are required. It fails to demonstrate their necessity. Why is it that an epistemic belief must exist in order for the appropriate beliefs to be evidentially related?
One might try to disprove the requirement of epistemic beliefs in the following manner. Let p, q, r, s, represent 1, 2, 3, and 4 of the example on pages 7 and 8. 1-4 are perceptual beliefs produced by the same reliable belief generating mechanism. 1-4 are evidentially related because they originate from this reliable belief forming process. Is an epistemic belief really necessary for the test of coherence?

Williams might argue in reply that an epistemic belief is required for the subject holding 1-4 to know that 1-4 are evidentially related. This move fails. All that would follow from such a claim is that an epistemic belief is necessary for revealing that first-order beliefs are evidentially related. The possibility of such beliefs being justified presupposes that the first-order beliefs are already evidentially related.

Fortunately other responses are available. The objection under consideration is not entirely fair to Williams's program. For it utilizes implicit "externalist"-foundationalist assumptions. If one already assumes that perceptual beliefs can be justified via their relation to actual states of affairs, there seems little wonder why the requirement of epistemic beliefs is found wanting.

Evaluating the reconstruction fairly means we must do so on the basis of coherentist assumptions. The crucial assumption here is that beliefs, not facts, are that which justify other beliefs. The coherentist cannot claim that first-order perceptual beliefs are justified due to relations with the facts in the world. The needed

---

43 Dr. Stephen Sullivan made this point clear to me.
justification must come from other beliefs. According to Williams, this justification is provided by an epistemic belief. The issue then is not whether epistemic beliefs are required for justification per se. Rather, it is whether or not epistemic beliefs are necessary for justification within the context of Williams's theory. I will now argue that such beliefs are in fact demanded by the test of coherence.

I do not think that epistemic beliefs must be presupposed for all belief revision to occur. Consider the following example. Suppose X has a number of beliefs, each regarding the location of a single 7-11 convenience store. Call these beliefs p, q, r, s, and t. Let p be the belief that the 7-11 is located on the corner of Smith and Jones streets. Let q be the belief that Wong's dry cleaners is on the corner of Smith and Jones, since Mr. Wong's lies next to the 7-11. Let r state that the 7-11 is a fifteen minute drive from X's home. Let s claim that a Mexican restaurant is located next to Mr. Wong's and t be the belief that an army surplus store is adjacent to this restaurant. S and t, in conjunction with p and q, enable X to draw the inference that the restaurant and surplus store are all situated near the intersection of Smith and Jones. One day X realizes that he needs some particular item and, instead of traveling to the local supermarket, visits the 7-11. X drives to the intersection of Smith and Jones. To X's dismay, he finds that he was wrong, the 7-11 is not located at Smith and Jones. Rather, it is at the junction of Dunn and Brad Streets, an intersection twenty minutes in the opposite direction.
Due to empirical evidence, X is forced to reject p. If X rejects p, then r, q, s, and t are altered. It is not clear to me how these revisions require an epistemic belief. If no epistemic belief is necessary, the premise that all belief revision requires an epistemic beliefs seems wrong.

However, the moral of the example must be viewed from the proper perspective. It only shows that not all revision requires epistemic beliefs. If we are to prove that such beliefs are not required, then we would need to demonstrate that all revision is akin to that in the example.

The requisite demonstration is not forthcoming. To see this, I would draw the distinction between horizontal and vertical revision. The type of revision found in the example is of the horizontal variety, i.e., revision on a small scale.

Cognitive practice however also suggests vertical revision. By vertical revision I mean large-scale revision, only explainable by epistemic beliefs, e.g., revision of beliefs which possess a common origin.

Another example might be helpful here, one not unlike that involving 1-4. Let X have beliefs p, q, r, s, and t. Each of these claims that a certain medium sized object is green colored. Now suppose X doubts p - he finds that the object he took to be green colored is actually a shade of brown. X does not doubt p because of the objects involved. That is, he does not reason that q, s, r, and t will be accurate because they concern different external subject matter. Instead, X calls q, r, s, and t into question because beliefs
concerning the color of objects are generated by a process that produces beliefs about all different kinds of objects. If this epistemic belief is challenged, then all beliefs about green objects might have to be revised. I contend that this large-scale revision is possible only by assuming epistemic beliefs.

I have no doubt that the kind of revision embodied in the aforementioned example (i.e., that having to do with the color of medium sized objects) actually occurs. Being that this is so, the issue becomes one of explaining how such revision can take place. Epistemic beliefs seem to be the best, or at least a highly plausible, explanation for such large-scale revision. Thus, I conclude that epistemic beliefs are required for coherence theory, or at least for the justificatory test of the kind that Williams proposes (with regard to empirical beliefs about particular facts).

Moser Objection II: That Williams does not explain the justification of epistemic beliefs.

Moser is certainly correct; Williams fails to explain how epistemic beliefs are justified. The failure itself need not be a powerful indictment against Williams. The fact that no explanation is given hardly means that one is not available. There is, in fact, an explanation for the justification of epistemic beliefs. This explanation is that first-order beliefs justify epistemic beliefs.

The critic might find the aforementioned explanation wanting, reeking of circularity. Still, this circularity does not necessitate rejection. We may concede the circularity, as long as the
consequences of our concession are not unacceptable. I do not think that they are.

One might argue against the critic by pointing out that a theory of justification, or any philosophical theory for that matter, requires unjustified assumptions from which it can proceed. For example, BonJour's theory demanded that the DP simply be granted in order that the process of justification might begin. In spite of the need for assumptions, however, there is still nothing to stop our skeptic from questioning the assumptions that we presuppose. Further, allowing assumptions to go unchallenged would be controversial philosophical methodology; certainly not all coherentists would find it acceptable. Perhaps the best that we can do here is recognize that perhaps all consistent and thoroughgoing coherence theories must admit the kind of circularity under present consideration. However, this circularity must be proven vicious in order to count against coherence theory, which Moser has not done.

These cursory comments concerning the circularity problem must suffice for this thesis. The circularity and input problems are two different issues, and only the latter is treated in this thesis.

Moser Objection III. That Williams does not address the problem arising from the fact that many persons do not have any epistemic beliefs.

The test of coherence for belief $p$ is possible only if the rejection of $p$ requires revisions among beliefs. We also know that
some of these revisions can only occur if epistemic beliefs exist. Moser however claims that many persons do not possess epistemic beliefs.

It certainly seems plausible that a human subject ("X"), could possess an ever-changing justified system of beliefs without consciously holding beliefs such as "P is a belief of the kind which is produced by a reliable process" or "P is the kind of belief that ought to be revised if Q is rejected." But if X has no such beliefs, then it is not clear why epistemic beliefs are necessary for the test of coherence.

Drawing a distinction between conscious and unconscious beliefs is one way to counter this objection. X might possess and employ epistemic beliefs, though not be conscious of the fact that he does so. Support for this distinction might be provided via an examination of X's cognitive practice. Observing X in ordinary circumstances, we discover his tendency to act as if he believes that most, if not all, of his perceptual beliefs are reliable. Since X does act consistently, we impute an unconscious epistemic belief to him, viz., that first-order perceptual beliefs are produced by means of a reliable process.

It is worth pointing out that the reconstruction on page 37 takes the distinction between conscious and unconscious belief into account. The only premise making use of epistemic beliefs is 3., and 3 permits X to remain unconscious of such beliefs. For instance, let X hold beliefs 1 - 4. Premise 3 states that 1 is evidentially related to 2 - 4 only if an epistemic belief implying that 1 - 4 are so related
exists and can be justified. X need not consciously justify the epistemic belief that he employs. Nor must X be conscious of the fact that the epistemic belief exists. 3 only asserts that in order for 1 - 4 to be evidentially related, a justified epistemic belief must exist. Whether or not X is conscious of these conditions is irrelevant.

Lehrer and Cohen develop a response similar to the one that I have just outlined. Central to their argument is the notion of personal justification. Roughly speaking, a belief P enjoys personal justification when it coheres with the rest of the beliefs that a subject X actually possesses. More specifically,

One is personally justified in a belief only if it is probable on one’s acceptance system that one is reliable when one believes what one does in conditions of the sort in question.44

Lehrer and Cohen admit that the notion of personal justification seems to overly intellectualize actual psychological practice.45 Consider X once again. X could perceive an object Y before him and form a true belief about Y without his consciously having any inkling as to whether or not this belief is produced by a reliable process. Apparently, beliefs about the mechanisms that X employs in the rejection and acceptance of beliefs are necessary for

personal justification. Yet, many persons appear to form justified perceptual beliefs without such beliefs.

A defense of personal justification is constructed by positing two types of cognitive mechanisms.\textsuperscript{46} The first is the Input System. The input system automatically forms perceptual beliefs when presented with perceptual data. The perceptual belief then provides the input of the Central Processing System. This second system is the seat of deliberation and reflection. It is here that perceptual beliefs are justified.

Most human agents do not automatically grasp the principles by which the CPS operates, or even that it exists. Nevertheless, the evaluatory processes of the CPS, so necessary for justification, can operate in X without X's being cognizant of their activity or structure.

Lehrer and Cohen claim that common sense reveals that we actually ascribe the CPS's higher order mechanisms to X.\textsuperscript{47} We often ask persons like X how they judge the justificatory status of their beliefs. Such a question however presupposes that X and persons like him are capable of evaluating their beliefs. Thus, by regarding our inquiry as a fruitful endeavor, we exhibit the expectation that X's response will disclose some of these upper level principles X has available for evaluating the beliefs that are presented to him by his senses.

\textsuperscript{46} Lehrer, p. 197
\textsuperscript{47} Lehrer, p. 199.
The conscious/unconscious belief defense is not without its problems. It attributes an epistemic belief to X in light of X's consistent behavior. Still, the fact that X seems to act as if he thinks his perceptual beliefs to be reliably produced does not demonstrate the necessity for this epistemic belief. The failure of the demonstration lies in the fact that animals certainly behave as if they regard their perceptual beliefs to be justified. (Indeed, how could animals survive if they acted in a contrary manner?). Yet I am hesitant to attribute such beliefs to animals. The habitual behavior does, I suppose, permit such belief ascription to animals. Yet there is no compelling reason for this ascription. One might merely conclude, for example, that animals have developed the instinct to act in accordance with perceptual data.

An analogous assertion might be made concerning X. Instead of imputing an epistemic belief, one might simply say that X has an instinctive tendency to act as if he considers his perceptual beliefs to be justified. This instinct, like that of animals, could then be explained as a product of evolutionary development. Epistemic beliefs are not required for the consistency of X's behavior to be explained.

However, it might be that the preceding interpretation of Lehrer and Cohen is off the mark. Suppose a conscious/unconscious distinction is not what is advocated. Instead, the distinction might be between beings to which it makes sense to ascribe justified or unjustified beliefs and beings to which it does not.48

48 Dr. Sullivan suggested this interpretation to me.
Suppose that our fear of attributing beliefs to animals is unfounded. Animals' behavior can be interpreted in a way that suggests their having first-order perceptual beliefs. Nevertheless, we need not claim that any such beliefs are justified. The reason for this lies in the fact that animals are cognitively unsophisticated. Animals simply do not command the higher level cognitive powers that confer justification on perceptual beliefs. Human agents do possess the advanced cognitive faculties required for justification, even if persons like our unreflective X seldom, if ever, realize this.

This second line of defense has promise. One might wonder, of course, how we know that animals are cognitive simpletons. One response is to argue that verbal testimony is necessary for cognitive sophistication to be evinced. Only language users can supply such testimony. Animals are not language users. Therefore, they do not, unlike humans, give us reason to consider them cognitively sophisticated.

The aforementioned argument is unnecessary. I fail to see why the claim that humans are more cognitively sophisticated than animals needs to be demonstrated. It is fact that humans construct and continue to develop civilizations, culture, science, and epistemology. We may not be capable of accessing the minds of animals and determining their "thoughts." But why think this fact alone enables us to attribute justified beliefs to animals in the face of a plethora of contrary evidence?
In summary, throughout this section I have tried to support Williams's assertion that epistemic beliefs play a necessary role in a coherence theory of justification. Paul Moser's criticisms were employed as a backdrop for my explorations as to how the adherent of the epistemic belief position might want to mount a defense. Notwithstanding the admission of epistemic beliefs, a substantial obstacle remains to be hurdled, viz., whether or not epistemic beliefs ensure that justification is not cut off from the world. To this issue we now turn our attention.

B. DO EPISTEMIC BELIEFS ENSURE THAT A COHERENCE THEORY IS IN CONTACT WITH THE EMPIRICAL WORLD?

Williams's argument for the assertion that epistemic beliefs necessitate contact with the world is found in the following passage:

Once we admit the need for epistemic beliefs, the claim that a coherence theory of justification "cuts justification off from the world" looks a good deal less plausible. Far from cutting justification off from the world, such a theory will require that any reasonable system of beliefs contains explanations of how our encounters with objects in the world lead us to form beliefs about them. Only in the context of such explanations will otherwise disparate beliefs hang together in a way that makes possible the application of the test of coherence.49

49 Williams, p. 249.
While the passage concerns justification, and whether or not it is "cut off from the world," the issue here remains the same, viz., do epistemic beliefs show that coherence theory must be in contact with and shaped by the empirical world? Williams obviously thinks so, and tries to argue this by showing how epistemic beliefs play a role in justification.

I now offer a reconstruction based largely on the preceding passage:

1. Justification of a perceptual belief is possible only by the test of coherence.

2. The test of coherence is possible only if perceptual beliefs are evidentially related to one another by explanations of how such perceptual beliefs were reliably formed.

3. Epistemic beliefs show some set \( S \) of perceptual beliefs to be evidentially related by explaining how such perceptual beliefs were reliably formed.

4. An explanation of how perceptual beliefs are reliably formed requires a) beliefs about the empirical world, b) beliefs about our belief forming mechanisms and c) beliefs about the relation between the world and these mechanisms.
5. c . (of premise 4.), requires a conception of the world as being related to and shaping our beliefs about the world.

Therefore, 6. justification of a perceptual belief requires a conception of a world which shapes such beliefs about the world.

7. If justification of a perceptual belief requires such a conception of the world, then justification cannot be "cut off from the world."

Therefore, 8. the requirement of epistemic beliefs shows that the justification of a perceptual belief cannot be "cut off from the world."

Prior to the evaluation of this argument, I will offer a brief exposition of its content.

1 and 2 are taken from another passage already cited so I forego their examination. 3 comes directly from the text presently under consideration. The constituents of 4 are implicit, I think, in the passage. A perceptual belief is a belief about some object encountered by our sense organs in a perceptual field. Since the epistemic beliefs explain how our perceptual beliefs are reliably formed, such explanations would presumably utilize beliefs regarding our belief-forming processes. Finally, since the formation of perceptual beliefs requires interaction between the world and belief forming processes, the explanations in question need to make
some assumptions about the interaction itself, i.e., about the relation between ourselves and the external world.

The remainder of the argument is straightforward. If the explanation of belief formation requires a conception of a world shaping our beliefs about it, then justification, as conceived by the coherence theory, must be in contact with that world. Epistemic beliefs and their function in the process of justification show that coherence theory demands contact with the actual empirical world.

The argument as reconstructed is seriously flawed. The greatest difficulty is manifest in the passage from 6 to 7. To be sure, empirical justification requires a conception of a world which shapes empirical beliefs. This fact, however, does not imply that this conception be true. If justification depends on a conception of the world, and if there is nothing to assure us that this conception is true, then why not think that justification is, after all, isolated from the world, or at the very least, that contact with the empirical world is not required by a coherence theory of justification?

Williams seems to anticipate the preceding objection:

A determined critic of the coherence theory will still not be satisfied. From his point of view, our epistemic beliefs about our relations with the world are just further elements in our total system of belief and his worry is that this entire system might fail to have the right relations to the way things really are. But this gives the game away. The claim that the coherence theory cuts justification off from the world involves a notion of "the world" that is completely empty; a thing-in-itself in fact. If we try to think of the world in this way, there is no possibility of saying what it would be like to be in contact and hence no possibility of saying
what it would be like to be cut off....If we think of the world as our familiar world of people and things, it is just not true that a coherence theory cuts justification off from the world. On the other hand, if we are allowed no way of saying what it is we are cut off from, or what it would be like to be or not to be cut off, the charge that justification gets cut off from the world is unintelligible.  

In the aforementioned passage, Williams presents the input critic with the following dilemma. Suppose this critic attacks the coherence theory, charging that it cuts justification off from the world. Of course, the accusation that coherence theory actually does this depends on what is meant by "the world." According to Williams, "the world" can have either one of two meanings. "The world" might be taken to mean some sort of extra-theoretic thing-in-itself, or, more precisely, world-in-itself. This world-in-itself according to Williams, stands completely outside of any theory. As such, this world-in-itself is unspecified, indeed, totally unspecifiable, since objects can be defined only within a particular theory. Now if the world is undefined, we cannot possess a conception of it that has significance or meaning, since we have no idea of what any of the characteristics of this world are. If no meaningful conception of the world is available, then assertions regarding its particular nature or characteristics must also lack meaning. Indeed, according to Williams, such assertions would be unintelligible. Consequently, if, when the input objector charges that coherence theory "cuts justification off from the world," "the

50 Williams, p. 250.
world" here refers to the world-in-itself, then the charge turns out to be unintelligible. For to understand the claim that "justification is cut off from the world" we must have an idea of what it is that justification is supposed to be isolated from. And it is just this idea which we do not have.

Suppose, on the other hand, that instead of referring to an unspecifiable world-in-itself, "the world" is understood to mean the ordinary world of people and objects. If we interpret "the world" in this sense, then, according to Williams, the claim that coherence cuts justification off from the world lossee a great deal of its force. The argument for Williams's contention here seems similar to the following line of reasoning. We are in possession of first-order perceptual beliefs. These beliefs are in need of justification. We can justify first-order perceptual beliefs by showing that they are reliably produced. It is here that epistemic beliefs play a crucial role. Epistemic beliefs explain how first-order perceptual beliefs about the world are reliably produced. Part of this explanation includes the fact that first-order perceptual beliefs are shaped and influenced by the world. That a perceptual belief is justified depends then, on the explanation (via epistemic beliefs) of how it is reliably produced, and such an explanation requires perceptual beliefs being in contact with the world. Thus, Williams concludes that if what is meant by "the world" is the one in which we are so familiar, then the input objection can be answered by the coherence theorist. For the coherentist's explanation of how perceptual beliefs
are justified has built into it the notion that these beliefs are in contact with, and shaped by, the world.

To facilitate future discussion, let me make the dilemma a bit more concise. The claim under attack is that coherence theory cuts justification off from the world. The first premise of the dilemma is a conjunction of two conditionals. The first conditional states that if, by "the world," the critic means the unspecifiable world-in-itself, then the claim that the coherence theory cuts justification off from the world is unintelligible. The second conditional says that if "the world" refers to the realm of familiar objects and persons, then the coherentist has every reason to believe (via epistemic beliefs) that his perceptual beliefs are shaped by the world. The second premise is, of course, a disjunction asserting that either "the world" refers to the world-in-itself, or to the objects and persons of everyday existence. The conclusion is obvious; either the critic's claim is unintelligible, or it has little force against coherence theory.

How might the defender of the input objection reply? Our input objector might challenge the first or second premises, or both. I believe that the most effective strategy involves attacking the second premise.

One means of taking premise two to task is to argue that it is a false dichotomy, i.e., that the two conceptions of the world represented by the disjunction are not the only conceptions of the world available. The disjunction, (premise two), is comprised of two disjuncts which represent two very extreme and mutually
exclusive conceptions of the world. On one hand, we have the completely unspecifiable world-in-itself. On the other, there is the very specific and familiar world of medium-sized physical objects and people. There is no middle ground.

Alan Goldman however seems to provide us with a third possible conception of the world. Responding to Williams's dilemma, Goldman states that:

Williams's alternative conflicts with our most fundamental philosophical intuitions. We do have a concept of a world of objects that remains unchanging through changes in our theories, although of course whenever we try to specify how the world is, we will do so in terms of our current theory. Appeal to this concept of objects unaffected by our theories helps to explain theory change...Given justified belief in objects whose properties remain constant through changes in theories, it becomes intelligible to question how well our theories at a particular time represent the real properties of things.51

Goldman's line seems to be the following. Suppose that talk of an extra-theoretic world is intelligible only within the context of a theory. This supposition alone does not compel us to accept Williams's dichotomy. For it seems quite plausible that one could believe in the objectivity of the empirical world and leave the particulars of this extra-theoretic realm unspecified, though, unlike Williams's world-in-itself, these particulars need not be taken as

unspecifiable.⁵² Now if Goldman's alternative conception of the world is adopted, then it seems that the input objection remains a problem for coherence theory. For though the world is still unspecifed in regard to its particular characteristics, there would still be a sense in inquiring whether or not justification was isolated from it.

I imagine that Williams would counter Goldman's argument by denying the legitimacy of Goldman's alternative conception of the world. Williams's denial could begin by re-emphasizing the claim that all intelligible talk regarding the world must occur within the context of a theory, a theory which specifies what the world is like. Now it does seem that Goldman's alternative allows one to say something intelligible about the unspecified world, viz., that it is extra-theoretic. Nevertheless, it is not clear that Goldman's conception enables a person to state anything else of import concerning the world. For in all other characteristics, (save its objectivity), the world remains undefined. Hence, statements that one might make regarding Goldman's world would appear to be, by and large, as unintelligible as those concerning a world that is completely unspecifiable. Now if Goldman's world is as unintelligible as it seems, then it is not clear what force remains for the input objection. We still have no clear idea of what it is that justification is allegedly cut off from.

The aforementioned response is insufficient to reject not only Goldman's alternative conception of the world, but an input

⁵² Dr. Stephen Sullivan suggested this third alternative to me.
objection based on this conception. Consider how the input objection would run if Goldman's conception were presupposed. We begin, of course, with a realistic conception of the world. That is, the world is objective or theory-independent. Suppose that the world is specified only in regard to this objectivity. Every other characteristic about the extra-theoretic world remains undefined. However, though the specific details of the world are left unspecified, they need not be unspecifiable. We merely abstain from describing the world in any of its particularities. Given this conception of the world, we now raise the input objection by asking Williams what it is that ensures that our perceptual beliefs are in contact with the world. The answer is that contact is assured by our adding details to the world, i.e., by our specifying what the particular characteristics of the world are. This specification is performed by the first-order perceptual beliefs that we possess. But here an obvious question emerges, viz., how does one know that these perceptual beliefs specify the world correctly? In other words, how can one know that these first-order perceptual beliefs are justified? Williams could not respond by claiming that the facts of the world justify perceptual beliefs, since justification on the basis of empirical fact is not an option available to the coherentist. Perhaps the most plausible coherentist response here is one that has already been encountered, viz., that epistemic beliefs justify first-order perceptual beliefs about the world. So in order to legitimize the contact between our perceptual beliefs and the world, we need to invoke epistemic beliefs. These epistemic beliefs must, in turn,
be justified. And the most plausible means of accomplishing this justification might be to claim that epistemic beliefs are justified on the basis of first-order perceptual beliefs. Thus, Williams's most effective response to a Goldmanian formulation of the input objection could very well lie in a circular argument, namely, that epistemic beliefs justify first-order beliefs, and vice versa.

The point here is that Williams's dilemma is an inadequate response to an input objection based on Goldman's conception of the world. For Goldman's conception is an alternative not taken into account by the dilemma. The real issue here is not whether or not Goldman effectively refutes Williams's theory. Instead, the issue is whether or not Williams takes the right tack against the input objection. I think that there are good reasons for thinking that Williams does not.

In conclusion, I believe that the input objection remains a problem for Williams's theory. The reason for this lies not so much in that the objection cannot be rebutted, but that Williams takes the wrong line against it.54

54 Special thanks to Dr. Stephen Sullivan for helping to clarify the central issues in the debate between Goldman and Williams.
CONCLUSION: GENERAL COMMENTS REGARDING THE THEORIES OF BONJOUR AND WILLIAMS.

It is time to draw some broad strokes concerning the two coherence theories examined in this thesis. Superficially, the programs may appear unrelated. On a closer inspection, both coherence theories share much. The particular similarity that I want to highlight involves the role that epistemic beliefs play in each theory.

Having already noted Williams's use of epistemic beliefs, we now focus on BonJour. Epistemic beliefs figure prominently in BonJour's account of observation.

Recall BonJour's argument for the justification of a cognitively spontaneous belief (e.g., that there is a red book on the desk):

1. I have a cognitively spontaneous belief of kind \( K \) that there is a red book in front of me.
2. Conditions \( C \) obtain.
3. Cognitively spontaneous beliefs of kind \( K \) in conditions \( C \) are very likely to be true.
4. Therefore, my belief that there is a red book on the desk is very likely to be true.

Therefore, (probably) there is a red book on the desk.

The first three premises are necessary for the justification of a cognitively spontaneous belief.
Focusing on premise 3 first, we find it rather similar to EBI. According to 3, a subject X has a belief that certain kinds of beliefs under specific conditions are likely to be true. It is, therefore, a belief about the reliability of certain kinds of X's beliefs. Premise three clearly qualifies as an epistemic belief.

BonJour calls this premise "a putative empirical law concerning the behavior of human observers under certain conditions."

It asserts what will generally be the case regarding particular beliefs formed under specific conditions. BonJour claims that although coherence theory is under no special obligation to provide a defense of such a law, this law, or epistemic belief, might simply be justified and/or rejected by means of "...enumerative, inductive, and other, more theoretical kinds of argument."

The second premise likewise relies on epistemic beliefs. A large number of specific subpremises about diverse conditions of observation make up premise two. These subclaims, concerning the observation conditions under which reliable perceptual beliefs are formed, are themselves justified by first-order perceptual beliefs. Thus, we accept many perceptual beliefs just because they are formed under specific conditions. For instance, X accepts the visual belief that there is a red book on the desk in front of him because he believes that the lighting on the desk is adequate, that his eyes are functioning normally, that his powers of vision are sufficient, and that the medium through which X perceives does not adversely alter

---

51 BonJour, p. 124.
52 BonJour, p. 125.
perceptual data. The reason why epistemic beliefs concerning the conditions of observation are accepted lies in the fact that these beliefs are true and cohere with other beliefs in our theory.

The first premise may not utilize epistemic beliefs. As we have seen, BonJour divides premise one into three subpremises, viz., that X does have the belief in question, that the belief is of a certain specific kind K, and that the belief is cognitively spontaneous. The justification of each of these subpremises is contingent on the DP. The justification therefore involves metabeliefs. Whether or not these metabeliefs must themselves be epistemic is, however, a different issue.

Yet, even if all of these premises do not employ epistemic beliefs, the success of the argument leans heavily on the justification of certain epistemic beliefs. How are these beliefs justified?

The justification of premise two is provided by perceptual beliefs formed under certain conditions. The second premise however justifies perceptual beliefs. The result is a circle of justification. The question is then whether or not the circularity is vicious, and I am not convinced that it is.

Examining the justification of premise 3 brings us close to a path already trod. The "putative law" asserting that cognitively spontaneous beliefs, formed under conditions C1, are reliable is presumably justified via induction. We examine a number of cognitively spontaneous beliefs. If the majority are true, i.e., then the epistemic belief in question is justified.
How do we justify individual perceptual beliefs? Since we are working within the context of a coherence theory of justification, such beliefs can only be justified by means of other beliefs. That which effects the requisite justification are the "putative laws" like the one currently under consideration. But this law itself is justified only via induction from individual perceptual beliefs. Thus, in the process of justifying $3$, we encounter a circularity much like that charged to Williams's account.

The preceding circularity does not escape BonJour's notice. "Obviously there is a kind of circularity in this general picture, but whether it is an objectionable kind of circularity remains to be decided."⁵³ Earlier, I developed some cursory reasons why I think that the circularity, while unavoidable, may not be objectionable.

Williams's theory is, I think, no stranger to the kind of justificatory circles that we find in BonJour's theory of knowledge. According to Williams, our first-order perceptual beliefs are justified due to the presence of epistemic beliefs which explain how perceptual beliefs are reliably produced. Obviously, these epistemic beliefs must be justified by some means. Williams never really addresses the issue of epistemic belief justification. Williams only claims that an epistemic belief must explain how first-order beliefs are reliably produced, not that the epistemic belief must also be justified. Nevertheless, Williams admits that epistemic beliefs must be justified. Whether or not this justification arises in the context of perceptual belief validation, one wonders whether there

---
⁵³ Ibid.
is any better basis for justifying epistemic beliefs than that of justified first-order perceptual beliefs. While Williams might temporarily postpone commitment to the justificatory circle, so prevalent in BonJour's theory, such a commitment might be inevitable.

In respect to the input objection, what final judgment can we pass on these two theories? BonJour's response was acknowledge as creative as it was complex. However, as it stands, I find his account of observation untenable. The arguments he fields in support of cognitively spontaneous beliefs and their justification are simply fraught with too many difficulties. Much more work needs to be done before his theory of observational knowledge is philosophically acceptable.

The input objection still remains a problem for Williams's theory. The dilemma with which Williams hoped to refute the objection is inadequate, since it fails to take into account Goldman's alternative conception of the world. I have tried to show that Williams's best response might take the form of a circular justificatory argument. Whether or not this circular argument is successful is another issue, and no doubt part of its fate depends on whether we judge its circularity to be vicious. Such a judgment is, however, certainly not a foregone conclusion.54

54 Special thanks to Dr. Sullivan for helping me clarify the central issues in the epistemological debate between Goldman and Williams.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


