



OXFORD JOURNALS
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS



How Not to Be a Coherentist

Author(s): Paul K. Moser

Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Analysis*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (Oct., 1988), pp. 166-167

Published by: [Oxford University Press](#) on behalf of [The Analysis Committee](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3328492>

Accessed: 07/12/2011 10:10

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Oxford University Press and *The Analysis Committee* are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Analysis*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

HOW NOT TO BE A COHERENTIST

By PAUL K. MOSER

LET us overlook the drab interpretive issue whether Bonjour, in *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*, somehow anticipated my anti-coherentist dilemma. I find that he did not, but this is uninteresting history. The philosophically important issue is whether internalist coherentism of Bonjour's stripe can escape my dilemma. I find that it cannot.

Recall the gist of my dilemma. Internalist coherentism states that one's overall belief-system is one's *only* source of justifying reasons, and that one must have *access* to one's justifying reasons. The dilemma's first horn is: If the required access is cognitive in Bonjour's sense (i.e., essentially a belief-like judgement) and requires justification, then we get a vicious endless regress of required justified beliefs. The second horn of my dilemma is: If the required access is cognitive but does not itself require justification (or even if it is noncognitive), then Bonjour's coherentism loses its main motivation as an alternative to foundationalism. Bonjour's key anti-foundationalist stricture (*SEK*, p. 69) is that a belief-like judgement must itself be justified to play an essential role in epistemic justification. Bonjour also holds that the access in question is indeed cognitive (pp. 32, 43, 80, 123).

Bonjour believes he can slip through the horns of my dilemma with help from his Doxastic Presumption: the presumption that one's representation of one's belief-system is at least approximately correct. On Bonjour's view the Doxastic Presumption is unjustified and unjustifiable (pp. 106, 147). Can the Doxastic Presumption take us through the dilemma's horns? Surely it cannot. *The second horn of my dilemma stems directly from the Doxastic Presumption.* The penultimate paragraph of 'Internalism and Coherentism' (ANALYSIS above, p. 163) anticipates an appeal to the Doxastic Presumption (see the pages cited), and it specifies why such an appeal is *ad hoc* and troublesome. In fact, that very paragraph erects the second horn of my dilemma. So the Doxastic Presumption impales the coherentist on the dilemma's second horn.

I have suggested that Bonjour's use of the Doxastic Presumption fails to preserve the essential connection between justified belief and adequate likelihood of truth. Bonjour's reply (ANALYSIS above, p. 165): 'this result follows only if adequacy requires that likelihood of truth be established in a way which requires no background assumptions of any sort . . . [but] any imaginable epistemological view is inadequate when judged by such a standard'. I doubt both parts of this reply. We plausibly can acknowledge an epistemic role for background assumptions *so long as they are justified but do not depend for their justification on other beliefs*. Also I happen to have formulated a theory of evidential probability (I trust it is at

least imaginable) that does without unjustified background assumptions such as Bonjour's. (See my *Knowledge and Evidence*, forthcoming 1989 from Cambridge University Press.)

Bonjour's reply misses the point in any case. He cannot consistently embrace unjustified background assumptions in his coherentism while using his aforementioned anti-foundationalist stricture (*SEK* p. 69) to reject certain versions of foundationalism. If the foundationalist cannot plausibly attribute an essential epistemic role to unjustified beliefs, the coherentist cannot either. Zoology recapitulates epistemology: what's bad for the goose is bad for the gander also.

If sound, Bonjour's anti-foundationalist argument leads not to coherentism, but to *scepticism*. This is an additional lesson of my dilemma. But Bonjour's argument rests on a false premiss: the premiss that psychological contents 'can do justificatory work' only if they are propositional or judgemental. This is another unjustified assumption of Bonjour's coherentism. Such an assumption gives us no genuine hope of escaping Aristotle's regress problem. So we face another dilemma: scepticism or foundationalism. For reasons presented elsewhere, I recommend foundationalism.

Loyola University of Chicago,
Chicago, IL 60626, U.S.A.

© PAUL K. MOSER 1988

THE INS AND OUTS OF 'METAKNOWLEDGE'

By JOHN BENDER

IF Keith Lehrer is a trustworthy source of information about things epistemological, the debate between 'internalist' and 'externalist' theories of knowledge is the result of a false dichotomy, and the correct analysis of knowledge involves both external and internal factors.

Such theoretical arbitration should be valued whenever we can get it, and I have no grievance in principle against a mixed view. Nor is my present concern with the detailed workings of Lehrer's proposal in terms of coherence, a proposal that is, in a sense, a mixed view. My worry, in fact, is that the theory itself does not support the rather new gloss of it that Lehrer offers, and in terms of which he proposes the dichotomy's resolution (in 'Meta-knowledge: Undefeated Justification', *Synthese* 74, 1988, pp. 329-47). According to this gloss, knowledge is a meta-mental state requiring correct (i.e. true) evaluations of lower-order information