

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

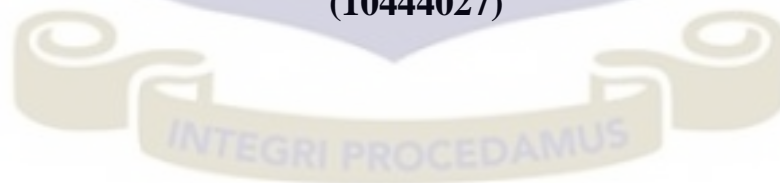
SCHOOL OF ARTS

**AN APPRAISAL OF LAURENCE BONJOUR'S INTERNALIST
FOUNDATIONALISM AS A THEORY OF EPISTEMIC
JUSTIFICATION**

BY

SETH DON ARTHUR

(10444027)



**A THESIS IS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA,
LEGON, IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR
THE AWARD OF MPhil PHILOSOPHY DEGREE**

JULY, 2016

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this project work is the result of an original research conducted by Seth Don Arthur, with student number 10444027, under the supervision of Prof. Helen Lauer and Prof. Kofi Ackah, and that apart from other works which are duly acknowledged, this work has neither in whole nor in part been submitted for a degree either in this university or elsewhere.

.....

SETH DON ARTHUR

(STUDENT)

DATE:

.....

PROF. HELEN LAUER

(PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR)

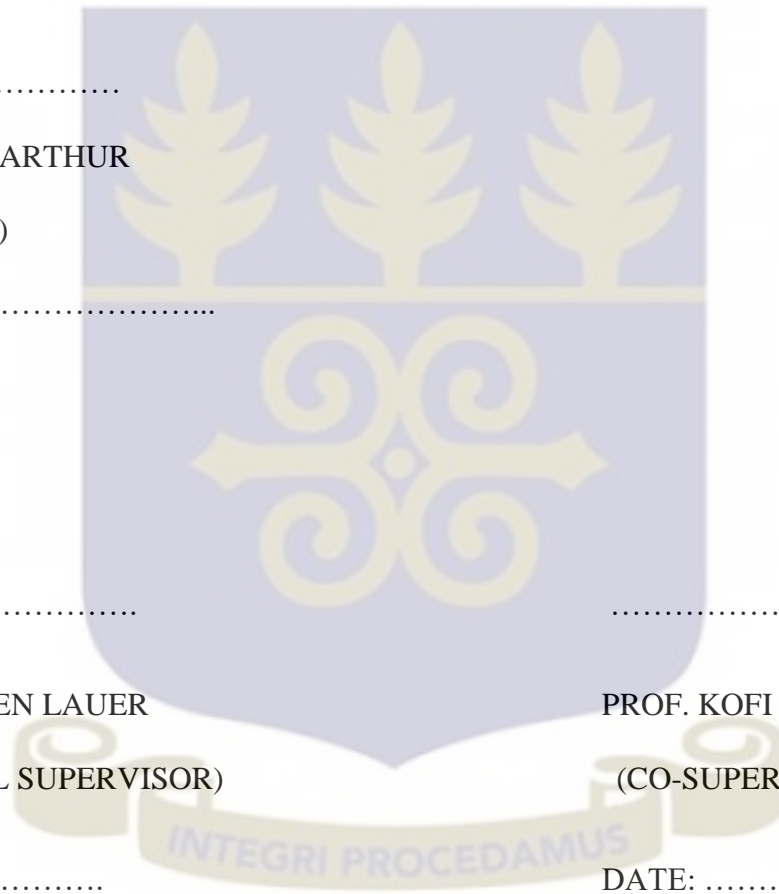
DATE:

.....

PROF. KOFI ACKAH

(CO-SUPERVISOR)

DATE:



ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the issue of how we, human beings, can show that our beliefs about our physical environment are justified. This is called the concept of epistemic justification. What is central to the concept of epistemic justification is the epistemic regress problem (regress problem). In relation to the regress problem, I will examine Laurence BonJour's thesis that basic beliefs which are 'immediately' obtained from our sensory contacts with physical objects adequately prove other beliefs of ours as instances of justified beliefs. With this account, he claims that he has resolved the regress problem. Moreover, BonJour denies as inadequate D. M. Armstrong's and C. I. Lewis' various proposed solutions to the regress problem. My view is that BonJour's criticisms against the above mentioned philosophers are generally tenable. Nonetheless, I will argue that BonJour's own account fails to be adequate in resolving the regress problem. Hence, the analysis made in this study will show that his notion of basic beliefs cannot serve as adequate basis for justification.



DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my parents, especially my deceased dad, Mr. Alfred Kwaku Arthur, and all my siblings.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My foremost appreciation goes to the Almighty God for His grace and mercies. He has been my source of inspiration and strength.

I wish to specially acknowledge my supervisor, Prof. Helen Lauer, for her guidance, and helping me get access to some of the relevant research materials used this study. My appreciation of her is beyond measure.

I am highly indebted to my co-supervisor, Prof. Kofi Ackah, for reading over this work, making constructive criticisms and corrections where necessary. His advice and explanations are priceless.

I express my profound appreciation to Prof. Emeritus Laurence BonJour for taking time off his busy schedule to interact with me to give me that rare personal insight into concept.

My sincere gratitude goes to my parents, my siblings and my dear friend, Paul Ayitey, for their advice, support, encouragement and prayers. I say God bless you all.

Ultimately, my thanks go to the Department of Philosophy, University of Ghana, and its lecturers for giving me knowledge and cooperation which make my education successful.

To my course mates, especially Miss Grace Addison, I say God bless you all for your assistance.

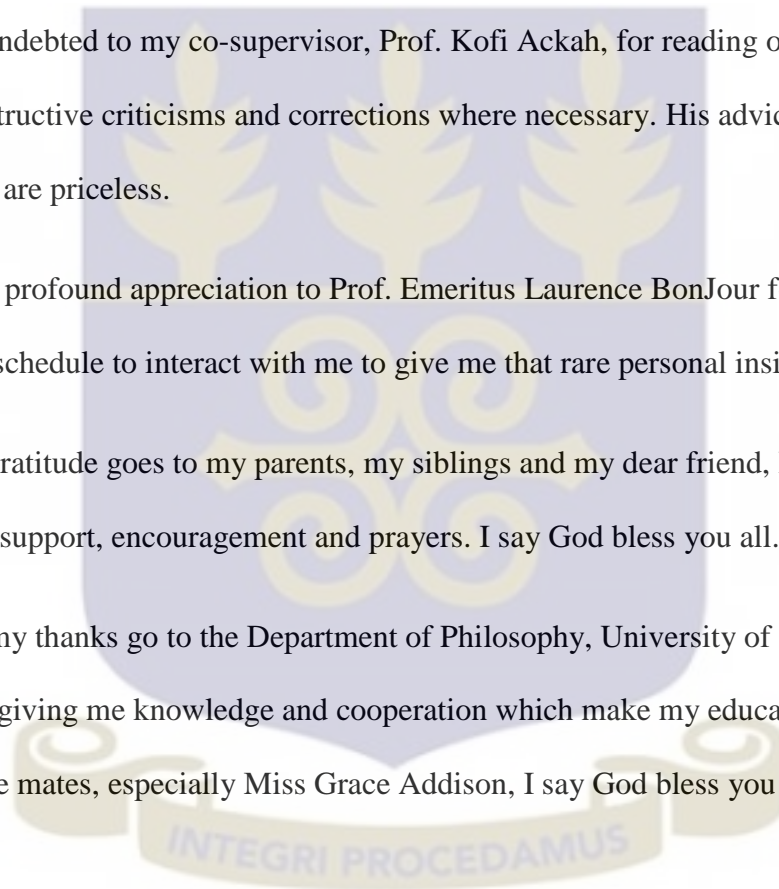
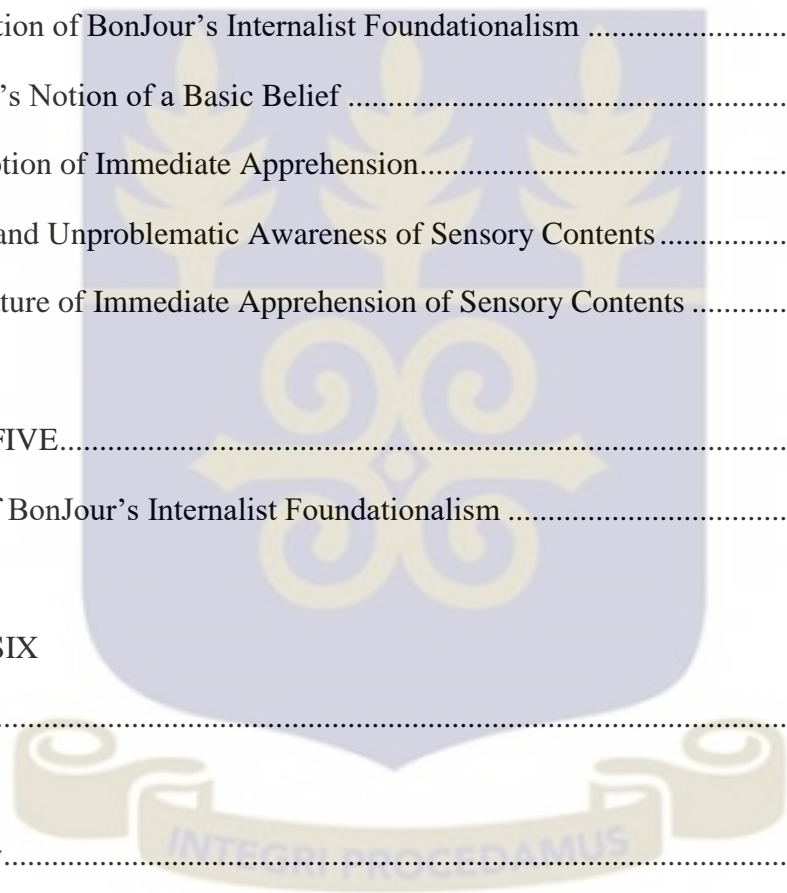


TABLE OF CONTENT

Contents	Page
DECLARATION	I
ABSTRACT.....	II
DEDICATION	III
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	IV
TABLE OF CONTENTS	V
CHAPTER ONE	1
Introduction.....	1
1.1 The Notion of Empirical Beliefs	6
CHAPTER TWO	15
The Concept of Justification	15
2.1 The Epistemic/Nonepistemic Distinction	15
2.2 The Internal/External Approaches to Epistemic Justification.....	24
2.2.1 Internalist Approach.....	26
2.2.2 Externalist Approach.....	29
2.3 The Epistemic Regress Problem	32
2.3.1 The Dialectical and Structural Regress Problem	38
CHAPTER THREE.....	42
The Notion of a Basic Belief.....	42
3.1 Externalist Foundationalism	43
3.1.1 Armstrong’s Notion of a Basic Belief.....	45
3.1.2 Armstrong’s Account of the Nomological Relation	47

3.1.3 BonJour’s Critique of Armstrong’s Notion of a Basic Belief.....	54
3.2 Internalist Foundationalism.....	59
3.2.1 Lewis’ Notion of a Basic Belief.....	60
3.2.2 BonJour's Critique of Lewis' Notion of a Basic Belief.....	62
3.3 The Problem of Origin-Justification Distinction	65
CHAPTER FOUR.....	70
An Examination of BonJour’s Internalist Foundationalism	70
4.1 BonJour’s Notion of a Basic Belief	70
4.1.1 The Notion of Immediate Apprehension.....	73
4.1.2 Direct and Unproblematic Awareness of Sensory Contents	75
4.1.3 The Nature of Immediate Apprehension of Sensory Contents	79
CHAPTER FIVE.....	86
Criticisms of BonJour’s Internalist Foundationalism	86
CHAPTER SIX	
Conclusion	94
Bibliography.....	98



CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The central issue of this thesis concerns the appropriate standard by which a person can adequately justify his beliefs, such as, ‘There is a rotten orange beneath my study desk,’ as a case of knowledge. BonJour (1985) refers to this as the concept of ‘epistemic justification’ (pp. 5 ff.).¹ A primary problem faced by most standards of epistemic justification is that some of these standards, in BonJour’s view, are likely to lead to infinite chain of reasons: what BonJour terms the epistemic regress problem, generally known as the regress problem (pp. 17 ff.). BonJour employs the regress problem to discount Lewis’ and Armstrong’s standards of epistemic justification. Specifically, BonJour argues that Lewis’ type of standard ends him in an infinite regress of justificatory reasons. He also shows that in Armstrong’s quest to resolve the regress problem, he confuses cases of hallucination and illusion with cases of genuine perceptual belief.

In relation to the regress problem, BonJour, in his 1985 work, has been an advocate of the view that an agent’s given belief is ‘epistemically’ justified if the belief involved coheres with or fits into the agent’s internally consistent ‘system of beliefs’ (BonJour and Sosa, 2003: 42-43). He calls this view ‘coherentism’. He, in 2003, adopts the perspective that there are ‘basic beliefs’ that serve as the foundation for the ‘justification’ of other ‘perceptual beliefs’ (BonJour and Sosa, 2003: 60-61). He argues that all the essential

¹ In this thesis, we will take for granted that Plato’s definition of knowledge as ‘justified true belief’ is legitimate. By doing so, it will help us appreciate why the problem of justification, from BonJour’s view, is vital to a knowledge claim. Plato (1956) defines knowledge as justified true belief, p. 98a. That is, three criteria ought to be satisfied before one can claim to know, viz., belief, truth and justification criteria. This definition of knowledge is traced back to Plato’s *Meno*, p. 98a. It should be noted that though Plato gives his assent to the traditional definition of knowledge in *Meno*, he rejects this definition in his *Theaetetus*, (1992: 201c-210a). Though the plausibility of these contrasting views of Plato is not the item of discussion here, it is important to note that the origin of the traditional definition is formally attributed to Plato. We will concentrate only on the justification criterion of Plato’s definition since BonJour takes ‘JTB’ for granted as the standard definition of knowledge. And we will, again, take for granted that there is an independent physical world that we, human beings, perceive through our sensory organs. This is also a supposition that has to be accepted before an investigation into BonJour’s justification theory can be possible since his theory presupposes the existence of a physical world.

elements to make these ‘basic beliefs’ distinct from other beliefs must be known by the agent involved. This view is termed ‘internalist foundationalism’.

The issue of investigation in this study is BonJour’s 2003 claim that his version of internalist foundationalism resolves the regress problem that is faced by other standards for justifying our empirical knowledge (BonJour and Sosa, 2003: 61). The perspective defended in this study is that BonJour’s standard of epistemic justification is inadequate. There are two basic arguments that I will advance to evince the inadequacy of BonJour’s internalist foundationalism. The first, briefly, is that BonJour’s account of ‘basic beliefs’ fails in resolving the regress problem. Also, his account fails to clearly distinguish between beliefs emanating from hallucinatory or illusory defects and cases of genuine perceptual beliefs. The central questions that will drive this study are as follows:

- What is entailed by the epistemic regress problem?
- What special characteristics, in BonJour’s view, make basic beliefs sufficient in resolving the regress problem?

In BonJour’s view, beliefs can be justified in two senses. One of the senses of justifying one’s belief, he argues, does not have as its aim the truth of the belief but some other aim such as the effect of the belief on a community (the good of the community) or on the person who holds such a belief (the person egoistic ambition) etc. (BonJour, 1985: 7-8). He terms this nonepistemic justification. This sense of justification is not the central concern of this study, though I will allude to it whenever referring to it in later pages will throw more light on other issues of importance in this study. The other sense of justification which this thesis focuses on, BonJour explains, is the sort of justification that is necessary for one’s ‘empirical belief’ to advance towards the truth and knowledge in general (BonJour, 1985: 7-8). Thus, one provides reasons for holding a belief with the aim of proving one’s belief as true, and in the long run as an instance of knowledge. ‘Empirical beliefs’ basically refer to beliefs about the external world which are acquired through

sense perception. ‘There is a rotten orange beneath my study desk,’ is an example of empirical belief.² In Chapter One, I will discuss how, according to BonJour, empirical beliefs can be derived from perception. BonJour’s notion of empirical beliefs will be discussed from the works of Fred Dretske (1969) Robert Audi (2001), Scott Aikin (2011).

Discussing BonJour’s notion of empirical beliefs from the above philosophers is not to say that BonJour, Dretske, Aikin and Audi agree on every detail about the entailment of perception. My point for relying on the explanation of empirical beliefs from Dretske’s, Aikin’s and Audi’s perspectives is rather that the philosophers in question together with BonJour have similar views in relation to the notion of perception and how beliefs are derived from perception. The similarity is that whatever is acquired during sense perception, they hold, is not the physical object itself. It is rather a representational image of the physical object that we come to acquire. Hence, falling on Dretske’s, Aikin’s and Audi’s construal of perception, as stated here, will help bring to fore BonJour’s understanding of perception and how empirical beliefs are derived.³

BonJour’s aim for drawing a distinction between the epistemic and nonepistemic senses of justification is to enable him to settle on the type of justification that is required for a knowledge claim. Nevertheless, in Chapter Two, I will analyse the tenability of BonJour’s distinction between these two senses of justification. I will also analyse his claim that the ‘epistemic sense’ is essential for our knowledge claims.

²In traditional philosophy, empirical beliefs contrast with a priori beliefs which, though, the latter could be beliefs about the external physical world, are grasped intuitively or introspectively without recourse to any sense perception. For instance, if we are asked to perform mathematical equation, say, $5+3$, it is assumed that our ability to perform this activity totally and solely involves the use of reason but not the senses. This way of information acquisition is termed ‘a priori’. My concern in this study is not about the ‘a priori’ way of information acquisition but rather the perceptual or empirical means of acquiring information about our physical environment. Hence, in this paper, the general term beliefs will be used to refer to empirical beliefs. In the course of this study, I will make reference to the ‘a priori’ means of acquiring information only when the need arises. Whenever I wish to refer to beliefs that are grasped intuitively I will refer to them by the term ‘a priori beliefs’.

³Notwithstanding the similarities, I will point out the discrepancies that lie within their views when the need arises. Refer to Section 1.1.

There is yet another problem that arises if we grant that Bonjour's epistemic/nonepistemic dichotomy is legitimate. This problem pertains to the nature of the reasons (beliefs) which we are adduced in support of our knowledge claims. Bonjour claims that philosophers disagree on the nature of these reasons. He asserts that Armstrong (1973) and Goldman argue that the relevant elements constitute reasons we adduce in support of our beliefs are outside the mind of the person involved. Put differently, it is not a necessary requirement for the person involved to be aware that these elements obtain before his knowledge claim is accepted. Bonjour calls this 'externalism' or 'externalist foundationalism'. On the other hand, Bonjour also argues that Lewis (1946) claims that all the elements that comprise a 'reason' must be within the apprehension of the person involved. Thus, the person must be aware that all the constituent elements of his 'reason' for holding a belief obtain before his belief can be said to be a case of knowledge. This view is also called 'internalism' or 'internalist foundationalism'. Also in Chapter Two, I will critically evaluate the legitimacy of the 'internalist' and 'externalist' and the bearing they have on justification.

Due to the lack of clarity about the epistemic regress problem, Chapter Two will feature this problem as one of its issues of investigation. Hence, Chapter two will be concerned with the following questions: What does it mean for a certain sort of justification to be involved in the 'epistemic regress'? I will also critically discuss whether or not the regress problem, in fact, arises in relation to finding justificatory grounds for our beliefs.

What will follow the discussion on the regress problem will be a critical analysis of the notion of basic beliefs. Stated differently, in Chapter Three, I will critically analyse Armstrong's and Lewis' accounts of a basic belief. Their accounts will be analysed in relation to the regress problem that they aim at resolving. In this section, I will also

evaluate Bonjour's critiques of the accounts given by Armstrong and Lewis. Thus, the question, 'To what extent is Bonjour's critique against Armstrong's and Lewis' account of a basic belief tenable?' cannot be overlooked.

In Chapter Four of this study, I will discuss in detail the entailment of Bonjour's 'internalist foundationalism'. This will help me identify the characteristics that distinguish Bonjour's notion of basic belief from that of Armstrong's and Lewis'. The final chapter will encapsulate my criticism of Bonjour's standard of justification in relation to 'the regress problem'.

The method employed in this study will be a critical analysis of relevant materials on epistemic justification. Primarily, I will analyse Bonjour's critique of Armstrong's and Lewis' perspectives on justification. From this analysis, I will proceed to critically analyse Bonjour's preferred standard of justification with respect to the problems he identifies with Armstrong's and Lewis' views. This Thesis does not focus on the concepts of truth and belief; rather, the main item of this thesis will be the concept of justification and its related theories. It should be noted that Bonjour is very critical about the proposed solutions of Armstrong, Lewis to the epistemic justification problem. It is the purpose of this study to critically assess how distinct and better Bonjour's internalist foundationalism is from the theories advanced by the above mentioned philosophers. Hence, the central question of this thesis is: To what extent is Bonjour's internalist foundationalism an adequate theory in resolving the regress problem that befalls most of the epistemic justification theories?

I have already indicated in preceding paragraphs that Bonjour was basically concerned with the justification of beliefs which we obtain through sense perception. This therefore requires that in order to fairly evaluate his proposed standard of justification, we must first understand how, in Bonjour's view, beliefs are derived from sense perception. In light of this, I will dedicate the next section to explain how, according to Bonjour, beliefs are derived from sense perception.

1.1 The Notion of Empirical Beliefs

Solomon enters his study room and he feels that his study room is warm. He also perceives a bad smell in the room which makes him look around his study room in search of the cause of the bad smell. Upon looking around for a while, he finally sees an orange under his study desk. Solomon picks the orange, decides to taste it and perceives a sour taste. He then throws the orange away, and upon the orange hitting a glass nearby, Solomon hears a sound of a broken glass. From the above scenario, I can identify five ways of obtaining information from our physical environment. These ways can be stated as follows: we can feel, smell, see, taste or hear physical objects around us. The collective term given to the above means of obtaining information about the physical world is ‘perception’ (O’Brien: n. a).

Broadly explained, perception is the process by which we come to acquire information about our physical environment through our sensory organs (ears, eyes, nose, skin and tongue). The beliefs or knowledge obtained through perception are called ‘empirical beliefs’ or ‘knowledge’ (perceptual beliefs or knowledge) respectively. For the sake of making BonJour’s notion of perception clearer, I will adopt examples from visual experience (sense of sight) whenever I want to illustrate BonJour’s view. I will allude to the other mediums i.e., olfactory (sense of smell), gustatory (sense of taste), tactual (sense of touch) and auditory (sense of hearing) of obtaining information about the external world as to when the need arises. What is entailed by perception? In what ways do the contents of perception relate to the beliefs that result from the contents (perceptual or empirical beliefs)?

Laurence BonJour does not discuss in detail what perception comprises. He asserts

Consider a state of, e.g., visual experience, such as the one that I am presently having as I sit at my computer table. Like an occurrent belief, such an experience is a conscious state. What this means, I suggest, is that, in a way that parallels the account of occurrent belief or thought offered above, it essentially involves a

constitutive, or “built-in,” non-apperceptive awareness of its own distinctive sort of content, namely sensory content (BonJour and Sosa, 2003: 69-70).⁴

From the above extract, I can deduce that, in BonJour’s terms, when any of a person’s sensory receptors comes into contact with a physical object in his environment, what the person immediately acquires through such contact is called sensory content.⁵ For instance, if a person enters his study room and sees a black computer on his study desk, according to BonJour, what that person receives upon seeing the computer may be the sensory content of black patch or a pattern of size—which could either be large or small. That is, the physical computer is not what is directly grasped by the mind of the person involved.⁶ This black patch and the pattern in their original form is neither described nor categorised by the person who receives this sensory content (BonJour and Sosa, 2003: 70-71). He

⁴ My concern with regard to this extract is BonJour’s point that the contents of our experience of external objects are sensory contents but not the external objects themselves. But there is a disagreement among philosophers about the constituent of a ‘conscious (belief) state’. Some philosophers argue that some belief-states have inherent consciousness whilst others claim that no belief can be said to be intrinsically conscious. For any discussion on what BonJour means by the claim that certain experiences are ‘conscious states’, refer to section 4.1.0 ff.

⁵ In this study, the terms ‘sense data’, ‘sensory contents’ and ‘sensations’ will be used interchangeably to refer to the data we obtain when our senses come in contact with physical objects. The idea that sensations or sense data are the immediate by-product of sense perception goes as far back to the writings of Thomas Hobbes ([1651] 1968) David Hume ([1748] 1999). For instance, Hobbes argues that “The cause of Sense, is the Externall Body, or Object, which presseth the organ proper to each Sense, either immediately, as in the Taste and Touch; or mediately, as in Seeing, Hearing, and Smelling: which pressure, by the mediation of Nerves, and other strings, and membranes of the body, continued inwards to the Brain, and Heart, causeth there a resistance, or counter-pressure, or endeavour of the heart, to deliver itself: which endeavour because *Outward*, seemeth to be some matter without, pp.85-86.” There are some epistemologists who will disagree with Hobbes, Hume and BonJour that in the process of perceiving external objects, we are only provided with data or sensations from these external objects but we do not perceive the object itself. For instance, Hilary Putman (1994) argues rather that when our sense organs come into contact with external physical objects what we receive is the external object itself. He asserts that “The alternative to the early modern picture that I have begun to lay out... involves, instead, insisting that “external” things, cabbages and kings, can be experienced... In my next lecture, I shall try further to convince you that that alternative is necessary and feasible, pp. 464-465.” The position advocated by Putman is termed ‘direct realism’ since physical objects are not perceived through any intermediaries such as sense data or images but rather physical objects are perceived in themselves. In this study, I will stick to the claim made by BonJour that upon sensually perceiving physical objects, it is only the objects image but not the physical object itself that we come to acquire. The reason for depending on BonJour’s explanation of sense perception is not that I judge his explanation to be tenable, it is rather that to be able to understand and evaluate BonJour’s internalist foundationalism, it will be prudent to suppose that his claim that sensation or sense datum is the immediate end product of sense perception is acceptable.

⁶ I must admit that the concept of mind is a serious issue amongst philosophers of Mind. In this study, I will stay away from any analysis that seeks to either prove or disprove that the mind with its cognate terms like consciousness, mental states, occurrent and dispositional mental states exists and that it has a certain nature. This is because such analysis is beyond the focus of this study. Hence, it will be taken for granted, just as BonJour does, that the mind exists.

drops a footnote to explain the nature of this sensory content. He states that “Such content is not, as we will see later, propositional or conceptual in character, and this may seem to some to make the very word ‘content’ inappropriate (BonJour and Sosa, 2003: 70).”

In the above extract, by ‘content’, BonJour is referring to the sensation we receive from our perception of external objects. What does BonJour mean by claiming that sensory contents are not ‘propositional’ or ‘conceptual’ in character? Since BonJour does not discuss the notion of perception and how beliefs are related to perception in detail, he does not really explain when the content of our experiences can be considered as ‘conceptual’ or ‘propositional’. But the view he expresses in the extracts above is similar to that of Fred Dretske’s 1969, Robert Audi’s 2001 and Scott Aikin’s 2011 notions on the relation between perception and beliefs. Hence, reading BonJour from the latter set of philosophers will help throw light on BonJour’s notion of empirical beliefs.⁷ For this reason, I will fall on the account of perception as given by Fred Dretske (1969), Robert Audi (2001) and Scott Aikin (2011) in explaining in detail BonJour’s notion of perception.

When Solomon enters his study room and looks to the location of his study desk, he may merely see a black computer on his study desk. He may also claim that ‘There appears to be a black computer on my study desk.’ Aside from this claim, Solomon may further on assert that ‘I can visually perceive that there is a black computer on my study desk.’ Robert Audi terms the first mode “simple perception”, the second mode “perceiving

⁷ I have pointed in preceding footnotes that Hilary Putman is one of the philosophers who hold an opposite view to that of BonJour in relation to how empirical beliefs are obtained. Thus, Putman (1994) contests that in sense perception, it is the physical object itself but not any sensory content that is perceived, pp. 464-465. Following his construal of sense perception will not help us understand BonJour’s notion of empirical beliefs which in the long run will distort BonJour’s standard of justification. It is on this note that I rather propose to resort to Audi, Dretske and Aikin understanding of sense perception in making clearer what BonJour means by empirical beliefs. This is not to say that BonJour on the one hand and Audi, Dretske and Aikin on the other hand agree on every detail about the entailment of perception. My point is rather that the two philosophers in question have similar views in relation to the notion of perception. The similarity is that whatever is acquired during sense perception, they hold, is not the physical object itself. It is rather a representation image of the physical object that we come to acquire. Hence, falling on Audi’s construal of perception, as stated here, will help bring to fore BonJour’s understanding of perception.

to be” and the last mode “perceiving that” (Audi, 2001: 17). Thus, Audi divides perception into three modes (simple perception, perceiving to be and perceiving that). How do these three modes differ from each other? Let us first consider what is constituted by the simple mode of perception. Let us assume that Solomon enters his study room and he has his mind preoccupied by a certain financial crisis he is facing. Let us also assume that as he enters his study room he looks at the corner where he has positioned his study desk. Upon looking in that direction, he sees a black computer on his study desk. Since his mind is preoccupied by the financial crisis, Solomon sees the black computer but fails to recognise the object of perception.

What happens in the above scenario is that Solomon only receives visual data from the object perceived without explicitly or implicitly describing the features of the object. And because the data involved are not described, he does not obtain any belief whatsoever from such perception. The type of perception involved here, in Audi’s view, is the simple perception. This is because the data received are not processed to become information where the data will be related to certain concepts like ‘blackness’, ‘largeness’ and the like. Fred Dretske (1969) calls simple perception “negative belief content” since such experience is not formulated into a belief (pp. 4-5). Scott Aikin (2011) iterates the simple mode of perception as follows, “Mental states that are conceptual characterise their objects in some other way... while nonconceptual states do not (p.123).” By “in some other way”, Aikin means that the sense data which is originally nonconceptual is given properties that distinguish it from other sense data. Thus, Aikin thus considers simple perception as that which involves no concepts.

Out of the first mode of perception, one may derive the second mode of perception which Audi calls ‘perceiving to be’ (Audi, 2001: 25). That is, the data obtained in the simple perception sometimes forms the basis upon which the second mode is established.

He asserts, “Thus, simple perceiving is fundamental: it is required for objectual, *i.e.* *perceiving to be... yet simple perception does not entail it* (Audi, 2001: 24).”⁸ [My additions] For instance, Solomon enters his study room and looks at his study desk, and sees a black computer on the desk. Audi states that the distance between Solomon and the computer may not be favourable for Solomon to have better visuals of the computer. So in this case, Solomon may not be certain about the object that he perceives. Hence, he may formulate a belief such as ‘There seems to be a black computer on my study desk.’ What Solomon gives, in this case, is a rough description of what his visual experience presents him with. Unlike the case of simple perception where the object perceived is not characterised in any way, with this second mode of perception, Solomon gives a bleak characteristic of the object in question. He makes room for the possibility of mistakes to occur since he acknowledges the fact that the object was perceived under an unfavourable circumstance (an unfavourable distance between him and the object). Audi terms perception of this mode ‘perceiving to be’ (Audi, 2011: 17ff.). In Aikin’s view, such perception is non-propositional though it is conceptualised (Aikin, 2011: 123).

‘Perceiving to be’ is non-propositional, according to Aikin, because the belief ‘There seems to be a black computer on my study desk’ is not making a categorical claim. By categorical claim, what I mean is that the claim made by the belief in question is counted as neither affirming nor denying the content of that belief. Thus, by expressing the belief that ‘there seems to be a black computer on my study desk,’ Solomon is not affirming or denying the presence of the object in question—a black computer. Therefore, since the belief in question is neither affirming nor denying the presence of the object involved, such a belief cannot be said to be true or false. The belief is rather conceptual because it characterises the object perceived to possess a certain feature such as

⁸ For discussion on why, according to Audi, ‘simple perception’ does not always entail ‘perceive to be’ refer to p. 12.

‘blackness’ though Solomon’s description of the object of perception is done without certainty.

I must point out that the ‘perceiving to be’ mode of perception is not divorced from simple perception (Audi, 2001: 24, 25). It is simple perception that causes the ‘perceive to be’ mode of perception. It is when one obtains a sensation of a physical object that one can legitimately characterise that object. Without a prerequisite sensation that is acquired through one’s contact with a physical object, a belief formulated under the second mode of perception will not be a genuine belief about one’s physical environment. A belief, such as, ‘There appears to be a computer on my study desk,’ will be inappropriate if such belief is not caused by a sensation that is obtained from one’s environment. Such a belief will be as a result of an illusion—a situation whereby the agent’s mind causes the agent to perceive an object that is totally disconnected from the physical world. Bonjour iterates the essential role played by the simple mode of perception in formulating genuine beliefs about one’s physical environment by asserting that “it is...an a priori truth that empirical knowledge of an independent world is not possible without input from that world (Bonjour, 1985: 142).” The ‘input’ being referred to by Bonjour in this extract is the sensory content that one obtains when one’s senses come into contact with objects in one’s physical environment. This extract, therefore, buttresses the need for the simple mood of perception to be the basis of formulating the ‘perceiving to be’ mode of perception.

Aside from the simple perception and the ‘perceiving to be’ modes of perception, Audi identifies another mode of perception called “perceived that” (Audi, 2011: 17). Let us assume again that Solomon enters his study room and sees a black computer on his study desk, and based on this, he formulates the belief that ‘There is a black computer on my study desk.’ Solomon’s belief in question has a categorical undertone, in that, he claims to be certain that there is, in fact, a black computer on his study desk and that under

his present circumstance his belief cannot be wrong. The difference between the ‘perceiving that’ and the ‘perceiving to be’ is that the latter does not make a strong claim about the object perceived. It leaves large room for errors whereas the former mode of perception leaves, if any, a little room for error. As a result of the categorical nature of the ‘perceiving that’, Aikin refers to ‘perceiving that’ as propositional belief (Aikin, 2011: 123). By ‘propositional belief’, he means that beliefs that are formulated from ‘perceiving that’ can be evaluated as either true or false. Such beliefs are also grounded on simple perception on the same ground that ‘perceiving to be’ is considered to be grounded on perception.⁹

It must be noted that although ‘perceiving to be’ and ‘perceiving that’ are both grounded on ‘simple perception’, it is not always the case that ‘simple perception’ causes any of these two modes of perception. For instance, Solomon may enter his study room and find his computer on the study desk and fail to formulate beliefs about certain features of the computer though he may acquire beliefs about other features of the computer. He may claim that ‘I can see a black computer on my study desk’ but fail to formulate belief about the size of his computer since what concerns him at that moment is the blackness of his computer. What this means is that he obtains a datum about the size of his computer though he does not conceptualise or characterise the datum. It can be that the datum about the size of his computer will never come to use till it fades off from his memory. In this case, the datum about the size of his computer never caused a belief of any of the modes—‘perceiving to be’ and ‘perceiving that’.

It can be noted from the foregoing discussion that in ‘simple perception’ the sense data obtained are neither explicitly or implicitly described by the person involved although in the case of the other two modes of perception (perceiving to be and perceiving that) the

⁹ Refer to p. 3.

person involved describes the sense data received. What I think clearly brings out this distinction is the point that, in perception, the person involved, say, Solomon, at the time of seeing his computer in his study room, may obtain a lot of sense data about his computer. It is possible that Solomon may be aware of some of the data he receives though he may also be oblivious of other data. Let us suppose that the size of his computer is among the sense data that Solomon receives upon seeing his computer. Let us again suppose that Solomon, though receiving the sense datum in question, is unaware that he has acquired the sense datum of the size of his computer. This will then mean that this sense datum (the size of the computer) will only be stored in his memory waiting to be described when Solomon's awareness identifies it. If Solomon later becomes aware of the sense datum in question, it will be there and then that that sense datum may be said to be described by him.¹⁰

In the above discussion, through Audi's construal of perception, I have shown what BonJour means when he makes reference to perception. Thus, I have discussed how the experiences we obtain through our senses cause us to express certain beliefs about our physical environment. Nonetheless, I have also talked about the point that not all instances of perceiving a physical object lead into belief formation. What is contentious and more central to the course of this study is not the issue of whether or not experience causes perceptual belief. A couple of philosophers have argued that experience is an insufficient basis for crediting perceptual beliefs as justified.¹¹ This is based on the fact that some of our experiences are derived under unfavourable condition that the perceivers may be ignorant of. BonJour (2003) thinks otherwise. He claims that there are some beliefs which

¹⁰ There is a problem that arises in connection with the of nature our immediate awareness the sense data or the sensory contents of our experiences. C. I. Lewis (1946) and David Rosenthal (1986) argue that the sensory contents of our experiences are described immediately we become aware that we have such content. On the other hand, Laurence BonJour (2003) holds that our immediate awareness of our sensory content does not describe the content therein. It is rather another belief that he terms apperceptive belief that describes the content of our awareness. In Chapter Four of this study, I will discuss this problem in detail.

¹¹ Here I am referring to BonJour (1985), Donald Davidson ([1983] 2001) and Keith Lehrer (1974).

due to their immediate relation to experience serve a sufficient ground for justifying true beliefs. Let us suppose that experiences cause perceptual beliefs: do these experiences play any essential role in justifying perceptual beliefs as instances of knowledge? It is the 'justification' relation between our sense perceptual experiences and their respective perceptual beliefs that they supposedly cause that this study focuses on. In what way does Bonjour (2003) discuss perceptual experiences as playing an essential role in adequately justifying our true beliefs as candidates of knowledge?



CHAPTER TWO

The Concept of Justification

The purpose of this chapter is to specify the different senses with which a person may generate ‘reasons’ in support of his beliefs, such as: There is a rotten orange beneath the study desk in my study room. The goal that a person holds for adducing ‘reasons’ for accepting or discarding a belief determines the sense in which the ‘reasons’ are to be understood. Is the person aiming at proving the truth value of his belief or he is rather aiming at attaining a different effect, such as, his selfish ambition or the utility of the person’s community when he provides reasons in support of his beliefs? In the first section of this chapter, I will analyse why this study is basically about ‘reasons’ that we provide in order to establish the truth-value of our beliefs. Also another issue that will be discussed in this chapter is whether a person who holds a belief about his external world to be true ought to be aware that the ‘elements’ that make his beliefs true obtain. Finally in this chapter, I will discuss a problem that arises from the claim that a person must have access to the ‘elements’ that make his beliefs true. This problem is that if one claims to know the ‘elements’ that makes one’s beliefs true, one will end up in a kind of ‘regress problem’. Is this problem defensible?

2.1 The Epistemic/Nonepistemic Distinction

Laurence Bonjour (1985), in his bid to account for how one’s true beliefs can be adequately supported with reasons to attain the status of knowledge, first states two primary characteristics of what he claims to be an appropriate standard of sufficiently supporting one’s beliefs with reasons. These two characteristics, in his view, are ‘truth-conduciveness’ and the ‘deontic’ nature of these ‘reasons’ (pp. 7-8). Although the latter characteristic plays an integral role in his standard of ‘epistemic justification’, it will not be an issue of discussion in this thesis. This is because its analysis in this study will have

little to do with the distinction at stake in this section and the general line of discussion in this thesis. In a rough view, the ‘deontic’ characteristic of ‘reason’ requires that since reasons adduced in support of empirically true beliefs of an ‘epistemic agent’¹² are ‘cognitively apprehended’ by the agent in question, it is the ‘epistemic responsibility’ of the agent to subscribe to beliefs that are adequately supported with ‘adequate reasons’.¹³ For example, let us consider a person whose target is to get to the main campus of University of Ghana but he is faced with choosing between two routes. For the first route, it is wide and tarred but he has no reason whatsoever to believe that it leads to his destination. For the second route, though it is narrow and not tarred, he has confirmation from other users of that route that it leads to his destination. The ‘deontic’ characteristic requires that the person involved opts for the second route but not the first since he has ‘enough’ reason to believe that the second leads to his destination. What this chapter is concerned with is the characteristic of ‘truth-conduciveness’ but not the ‘deontic’ characteristic.

In relation to ‘truth-conduciveness’, Bonjour argues that there are two different senses that an epistemic agent may adduce reason in support of his beliefs (Bonjour, 1985: 5-6). For instance, if an agent holds a belief such as ‘There is a rotten orange under his study desk which is in his study room,’ upon what sorts of reason does an agent hold such a belief? Bonjour holds that the agent may adduce reason in support of his above belief with the intent of proving the truth of the belief. This basis of supporting a belief with reason is termed the ‘epistemic’ sense of justification. On the other hand, he claims that an agent may also support his belief with reason on the basis that holding such a belief, for example, fulfils the selfish ambition of the agent or promotes the utility of his society

¹² ‘Epistemic agent’ as used in this thesis refers to an agent that has the proclivity to seek the attainment of true beliefs when the need arises. The terms ‘cognitive agent’, ‘agent’ or ‘person’ will be intermittently used interchangeably with ‘epistemic agent’ in this thesis.

¹³ Terms like ‘cognitive apprehension’ and ‘adequate reason’ will be discussed in detail in later chapters.

rather than proving the truth of the belief in question. This way of supporting one's belief with reason is also termed 'nonepistemic' senses of justification (BonJour, 1985: 5-6). Is the distinction between the epistemic sense and the nonepistemic sense legitimate?¹⁴

BonJour maintains, "It is this essential relation to truth which distinguishes epistemic justification from other species of justification aimed at different goals (BonJour, 1985: 8)." From BonJour's standpoint, the epistemic sense of justification 'aims' at truth, i.e., it is 'conducive to truth', whilst the nonepistemic sense does not 'aim' at truth (BonJour, 1985: 7-8).¹⁵ Two legitimate questions that ought to be posed are: Who determines the goal or aim of a belief? What does BonJour really mean by 'truth-conduciveness'?

In the case of who determines the goal of a belief, BonJour has this to say: "What makes us cognitive beings at all is our capacity for belief, and the goal of our distinctively cognitive endeavour is truth: we want our beliefs to correctly and accurately depict the world (Bonjour, 1985: 7)." Though he does not clearly give a response with regard to who determines the aim of a belief, it can be inferred from the above extract that "we" as used by BonJour in the extract above set the aim of a belief. The term "we" refers to any 'being' that is capable of conceptualising the data we obtain from our environment. These 'beings' who are generally construed as human beings, and hence epistemic agents, themselves, set the aims or goals of the beliefs they possess. One may argue that if the goal of our beliefs is to accurately coincide with the external world, then it implies that, "we" the agents, already know the external world. For if we have no knowledge of what we aim at, our search will be futile or unproductive since we cannot identify the truth even if our supposed rationally supported beliefs, in fact, depict the external world. But if the

¹⁴ This question is essential because sometimes both senses of justification lead the agent to the truth-value of the belief involved. If this is possible, then it only appears the distinction is needless, hence, there is the need to investigate whether the distinction is appropriate. Refer to pp. 15-23 for further discussion on this matter.

¹⁵ William Alston (1985), pp. 59, 69, and Mathias Steup (1988), pp. 74-75, both agree with BonJour on the basis that epistemic sense of justification is aimed at the goal of truth whilst the nonepistemic sense aims at something other than truth.

supposition that the agent already knows the external world is maintained, then this supposition may amount to a ‘regress problem’ if the agent’s aim is to know the external world. To illustrate this, let us assume that an agent’s aim is to prove that his belief, ‘There is a rotten orange beneath the study desk in my study room,’ depicts a particular state of affairs in his environment. For the agent to be able to prove this, it is required that the agent already knows the physical environment that is being described by the belief he possesses. Now, what shows that the agent involved knows the state of affairs under discussion?

To show that the agent involved knows the state of affairs described with the belief, ‘There is a rotten orange beneath the study desk in my study room,’ the agent may have to cite a reason—which is in this case a belief—and also prove that that reason reflects its state of affairs. In proving the latter reason, the agent may have to give an endless number of beliefs, fall on already cited reasons in the chain of reasons or stop on a reason that has no basis of credibility. An infinite regress of justifying one’s knowledge about the external world ‘might’ threaten in one’s attempt to respond to this question.¹⁶ Ending on any of these options will defeat the agent’s claim that he knows that his original belief depicts the external world.¹⁷

With regard to what is constituted by truth-conduciveness, BonJour argues that as cognitive agents, our epistemic goal is to make sure our accepted beliefs are true or approximately true. So, he asserts, for an agent’s beliefs to be justifiably true, the agent should only subscribe to beliefs that are backed by sufficient reasons (BonJour, 1985: 7-8). In other words, the epistemic perspective of justification stipulates that one ought to accept only beliefs that are grounded on adequate reasons since it is the best means wherein an

¹⁶ I have used ‘might’ in this claim because there is contention among scholars about the tenability of the supposed infinite regress. This contention will be analysis in subsequent sections.

¹⁷ Refer to section 2.3.0 for discussions on why the options identified in this paragraph are problematic with respect to knowledge claim.

agent's beliefs can be said to make progress towards the truth. Bonjour's way of characterising the epistemic sense of justification implies that the reasons paraded in support of an agent's beliefs are internal or part of the cognitive state of that agent.¹⁸ This broadly means that the epistemic agent is aware, knows or possesses the reasons that stand to proving one's belief is true. With regard to these reasons, Bonjour claims that the agent has the freewill of choosing which beliefs to be upheld and which ones to be refrained from.

Though an agent, according to Bonjour, has the option of choosing what belief he wants to uphold and what belief he wants to refrain from, however, for his true belief to be construed as epistemically justified, Bonjour asserts, the agent must derive his true beliefs by choosing those beliefs which are supported by sufficient reasons (Bonjour, 1985: 8).¹⁹ For this reason, Bonjour argues that the epistemic perspective of justification is truth-conducive since this perspective maximises the likelihood of the truth of one's beliefs and minimises false beliefs. Bonjour makes the following assertion about the role of epistemic justification

If epistemic justification were not conducive to truth in this way, if finding epistemically justified beliefs did not substantially increase the likelihood of finding true ones, then epistemic justification would be irrelevant to our main cognitive goal and of dubious worth. It is only if we have some reason for thinking that epistemic justification constitutes a path to truth that we as cognitive beings have any motive for preferring epistemically justified beliefs to epistemically unjustified ones (Bonjour, 1985: 8).

On the other hand, Bonjour denies that nonepistemic sense of justification is truth-conducive. He argues that the nonepistemic perspective aims at something else rather than truth. This other aim could be the self-interest of the agent, community good or some other

¹⁸ This version of epistemic justification is 'internal' in character. That is, beliefs derive their support from the cognitive state of the agent. 'Internalism' stands in opposition to 'externalism'. Deeper analysis will be made on 'internalism' and 'externalism' distinction in the next section of this chapter.

¹⁹ For an example on the 'deontic' characteristic of justification, refer to the example on p. 15.

consequence aside from establishing the truth of that belief (BonJour, 1985: 7). He

illuminates

A different sort of justification for believing, still nonepistemic in character, is illustrated by Pascal's Famous wager... Pascal argues, roughly, that it is rational to believe that God exists because, on the one hand, if God exists, belief will be enormously rewarded and failure to believe horribly punished; and on the other hand, if God does not exist, the consequences of either believing or not believing will be very minor by comparison... The point is that even if *this argument* is otherwise acceptable, the kind of justification which *it provides* for the *belief* in question is not the right kind to satisfy the requirement for knowledge—no matter whether the belief in question happens in fact to be true. It is what might be called prudential or pragmatic justification, not epistemic justification (BonJour, 1985: 7).

This notwithstanding, he points out in the last but one line of the above extract that nonepistemic justification of a belief may coincide with what is the case in a particular state of affairs. Thus, the agent's belief that 'God exists' may be coincidentally true, but the prime aim that the agent attaches to holding such a belief is not that he wants to establish the truth-value of that belief (BonJour, 1985: 7). He may probably be aiming at saving his own life (his own good) since if his belief happens to be true, he may have the benefit of being rewarded instead of being punished. Richard Foley terms such coincidence, "epistemic luck" (Foley, 1984: 117, 118).

Epistemic luck, from Foley's perspective, simply means that the person's belief being true is unexpected or coincidental (Foley, 1984: 118). Let us consider the following as an example of the nonepistemic sense of justification. When a community accepts the belief, say, 'Having sex in a forest will bring curse to the respective families of the persons involved and even to the community as a whole,' the community's acceptance of this belief might not necessarily hail from the basis that they believe the above claim to be true. Rather, the belief is subscribed to by the community for prudent or pragmatic goals. That is, the community's goal may be that the acceptance of the belief in question, be it that the belief is true or not, will create a peaceful coexistence in that community.

Abstaining from having sex in a forest will secure the community members from being

attacked by wild animals like snakes, lions and so forth. This will, in the immediate effect, help to preserve the lives of the members of that community, and in the long run, sustain the continuity of the heritage of the community involved since the members who uphold the community's heritage will not perish so easily. And acting contrary to the above belief may expose the persons involved to vicious attacks by such wild animals which will, in the long run, put the community's heritage at risk. Although such a belief can be justified as per the set goals of the community, it cannot be construed as epistemically justified, since the truth or falsity of the belief is irrelevant to the goal of holding such a belief. From this example, although the community's aim for holding unto such belief may be to protect the lives of its members and sustaining its heritage, it could, though at the hindsight of the members, happen that going contrary to the belief invites curses upon themselves. Probably, the curse could be that the gods sent vicious animals to prey on such victims which, in the long run, rapidly reduce the population of the community, putting the heritage community at risk. What this discussion shows is that though nonepistemic justification may in the long run coincide with the truth of a belief, it differs from the epistemic sense on the ground that the latter is oriented towards the truth which the former is not.

At this point, I wish to bring to our notice that within the confines of epistemic justification, a belief can either be epistemically justified or epistemically unjustified. The former of these two holds that the acceptance of a belief ought to be on the basis of sufficient reasons and this indicates that the probability of the belief being true is reasonably high. Premising one's belief on sufficient reason does not mean that, necessarily, the belief is true, but rather, it only increases the belief's probability or chance of being true than being false. On the other hand, a belief that is grounded on either a complete absence of reason or on insufficient reason is said to be epistemically unjustified.

The total lack of reason or insufficient reason makes the belief less probable to be true than to be false. Put differently, such a belief is likelier to be false than to be true. If in the total absence of reason or presence of inadequate reason the agent's belief turns out to be true, the agent will still not be taken to know that his belief actually depicts the state of affairs described by it. Hence, the agent does not know that the belief involved is true.

What we can credit the agent with is to say that he was lucky to have his belief to be true; hence, he is epistemically lucky.²⁰

A typical example of epistemically unjustified belief can be cited from William James (1956). James imagines a situation wherein a cognitive agent is presented with two alternatives to choose from. James avers that even in the absence of a reason why the agent must prefer any of the alternatives to the other, the agent must nevertheless make a choice (p. 59). In this scenario, the cognitive agent seeks to obtain the belief which is true though he has no reason to that effect. If the choice opted for leads the agent to the true belief, the belief cannot be construed as epistemically justified but rather epistemically unjustified. The agent's belief is 'epistemic' only in the sense that his choice of belief is oriented toward attaining the truth, although he had no clue as to which belief was probably true or false. But since there was no reason or enough reason available to the agent in determining which of the choices at his disposal was true or false, the agent's choice was only based on guesswork, hence, his true belief is unjustified though coincidentally true.

It is also important to distinguish epistemically unjustified beliefs from nonepistemically justified beliefs. At a first glance, one may confuse these two

²⁰ William James (1956) holds a contrary view. His position is that one can be said to know even if in the absence of reason an agent opts for a belief that is true, p. 59.

interpretations of beliefs.²¹ In that, one might misconstrue epistemically unjustified belief to be nonepistemic by claiming that since the belief is unjustified, it is necessarily nonepistemic. I consider such view as a misconception. It has to be noted that epistemically unjustified belief is truth oriented though it either has no supporting reason or it has inadequate supporting reasons, and the belief may either be true or false.²²

Whereas a nonepistemically justified belief has its aim disconnected from the search of true beliefs, the latter belief is instead tilted towards an end like one's self-interest, the utility of a community etc. As considered in our earlier example, if the members of a community uphold the belief, 'Having sex in a forest will bring curse to the respective families of the persons involved and even to the community as a whole,' on the aim that they want to safeguard the lives of its members from the vicious attacks from wild animal, then that belief is nonepistemically held. This is because the adherents of the belief involved are not primarily concerned with establishing the truth-value of the belief in question, but rather they are concerned with preserving their own lives and sustaining the heritage of the community involved. If, at the end of the day, the adherents of this belief are able to achieve this aim, then their belief will be considered as justified in the nonepistemic sense. With the truth factor of beliefs at play, it will be inappropriate for one to merge epistemically unjustified beliefs and nonepistemically justified beliefs as referring to the same kind of justification.

In brief, the above discussion in this section focused on the epistemic/nonepistemic dichotomy. Arguably, the conclusion that results from this discussion is that the epistemic and nonepistemic distinction is a legitimate one. This is because each of these senses of supporting one's beliefs with reasons has different motivations. With regard to the

²¹ I have to point out that I have not come across any philosopher who interchanges the interpretation of nonepistemically justified belief for epistemically unjustified belief and the vice versa. The exercise taken in this paragraph is to foreclose any possible misinterpretations of these two notions in the future.

²² A classic example has been given in the previous page. Also refer to William James (1956) for an elaboration on this example, p. 59.

epistemic sense, one's choice of a belief is primarily motivated by the attainment of truth whereas the nonepistemic sense has its motivation from something different from truth (e.g. self-interest, an altruistic interest or utility of a community). The discussion therefore suggests that for a belief to be epistemically justified, that belief ought to be supported by adequate reasons which will give the belief a higher likelihood of being true.

For the reasons that the epistemic sense of justification attempts to prove why an agent's belief is true; and since this thesis examines Bonjour's theory which purports to be about a person's claim to show that his belief is true, I will, therefore, focus on the epistemic sense of justification in the subsequent chapters but not on the nonepistemic sense, though for effect of clarity I may in the course of this study refer to the nonepistemic sense. A serious problem arises when it behoves philosophers to account for the source of epistemic justification; whether this source is constituted by some 'internal' elements of the cognitive agent or elements 'external' to the cognitive agent. Which of these sources is sufficient for justification? Bonjour draws and upholds that beliefs are adequately justified by reasons that are 'internal' to the agent involved. The subsequent section of this chapter will be aimed at ascertaining the defensibility of each of the above sources as adequate sources of epistemic justification.

2.2 The Internal/External Approaches to Epistemic Justification

Granted that Bonjour's distinction between beliefs that are supported with reasons for the purpose of reaching the truth and those beliefs which are held unto for the purpose of different aim than reaching the truth holds, a major problem arises. This major problem pertains to the source and nature of the reasons one adduces in support of his true beliefs.²³

This problem is better formulated as follows: From where do epistemic agents derive their

²³ It should be pointed out that in this section, I will discard the problems that were raised against Bonjour's epistemic/nonepistemic distinction to enable me analyse the internalist/externalist approach to epistemic justification.

sufficient reasons to ground their empirically true beliefs? Let us consider the following example to illustrate what characterises this problem. Let us assume an epistemic agent claims the belief, 'There is a black computer positioned on my study desk in my study room,' is true. And he further claims that he possesses a further belief, that is, 'I am presently in my study room and I can see that there is a black computer on my study desk,' adequately justifies his initial belief as a case of knowledge. Considering these two beliefs—the initial and the further beliefs—is it necessary for the agent to have access to the reason that validates his further belief above?

In light of whether or not it is necessary to have access to the reason that validates his further belief above, BonJour (2003) asserts that there are primarily two positions to this issue (p. 7). He makes the following claim:

On the other hand, there is the dichotomy between internalist and externalist accounts of such justification. Must epistemic justification depend on elements that are internal to the believer's conscious states of mind in a way that makes them accessible to his conscious reflection (at least in principle), or might it derive instead from factors that are external to those states of mind, entirely outside the scope of his conscious awareness (BonJour and Sosa, 2003: 7)?

It can be deduced from the above extract that BonJour's assumed possible perspectives on the issue in question are 'internalist' and 'externalist' perspectives. In view of the belief, 'There is a black computer positioned on my study desk in my study room,' according to BonJour, the 'internalist' position will be that the reason that supports the truth of the belief ought to be 'internal' to the agent's mind. Whereas the 'externalist' position is that the reason that supports the truth of the belief above must be 'external' to the agent involved. I deem the explanation given by BonJour on the terms 'internalism' and 'externalism' unsatisfactory.

My reason is that in explaining the two terms involved, BonJour employs those same terms viz., 'internal' and 'external' respectively. 'Internal' and 'external' are the same terms whose meanings BonJour attempts to clarify. The only difference here is that

the latter set of terms is the adjectival form of the former set of terms. Aside from this difference, the latter set terms (internal and external) gives no clarity to the terms ‘internalism’ and ‘externalism’ which he tries to explain. Hence, the explanation given by BonJour in the above extract amounts to circularity since in his explanation he employs the same words which he intends to explain. And in circular explanation no information is given on the terms to be explained. Thus, BonJour fails, with respect to the above extract, to explain what is meant by ‘internalism’ and ‘externalism’. On this note, I will in subsequent section further investigate what BonJour means by ‘internal’ and ‘external’ with respect to the justification of our beliefs.

2.2.1 Internalist Approach

As indicated in the preceding section, BonJour asserted that the ‘internalist’ perspective on justification holds that a true belief is considered as justified if and only if all the ‘elements’ that constitute the reason for warranting that true beliefs as justified are ‘internal’ to the cognitive agent.²⁴ What then is meant by the term ‘internal’ as referred to by BonJour? In relation to what ‘internal’ means, we will discuss two ways in which BonJour attempts to explain the term under discussion. BonJour asserts

a theory of justification is internalist only if it requires that all of the factors needed for a belief to be epistemically justified for a given person be *cognitively accessible* to that person, internal to his cognitive perspective (BonJour, preprint: 4).

²⁴ What is the nature of the elements that constitutes reasons for accepting true beliefs as knowledge? On this question, the internalists do not agree on the nature of these elements. For instance, Richard Feldman and Earl Conee (2001) hold the perspective that elements that qualify to form part of justificatory reasons for a person’s empirical beliefs should be mental in nature (pp.3-5). Their claim is made on the premise that once elements such as sensory content of our experience are internalized—cognitively grasped—these elements become mental in nature and they cease to be non-mental in nature. This presupposes that they credit mental elements as the only legitimate factors to justify our empirical beliefs (p.5). This stated view is called “mentalism”. On the other hand, Laurence BonJour holds the view that the elements under dispute cannot be entirely mental in nature. He rather claims that what is mental in relation to these elements is only ‘the act of grasping’ but not the sensory content of our experiences. He agrees that our sensory contents form an aspect of the reasons we adduced to justify our empirical beliefs as knowledge though these sensory contents stand as the non-mental component of these reasons. Simply put, the disagreement between BonJour on the one hand and Feldman and Conee on the other hand is about how these experiential or sensory contents are to be construed—mental or non-mental. I will do detail discussion on this dispute in Chapter Four.

From the extract above, Bonjour explains the term 'internal' by using the term "cognitive accessibility". But, in my opinion, this "cognitive accessibility" is as obscure in meaning as the original term, 'internal', that it purports to explain. I do not understand what it means for a reason to be "cognitively accessible" to the mind of an agent.

In explaining the term "cognitive accessibility", Bonjour claims, "One way for the elements of a reason to be cognitively accessible is for the belief or awareness that they obtain to be justified by something further (Bonjour, preprint: 7)." It can be deduced from the above extracts that if an agent is said to have "cognitive accessibility" of a reason, then the agent must be 'aware' of the 'elements' that make that reason true. One's awareness of such "elements" becomes a further reason for justifying one's initial reason as true. Hence, Bonjour's assertion that the agent must further account for the agent's own claim that the reason involved obtains. This therefore supposes that a justified belief ought to be preceded by a series of justified reasons, since each reason in turn has to be supported by a prior reason.

Bonjour points out a problem that may result from understanding "cognitive accessibility" in terms of our awareness of the 'elements' of a reason as follows:

Precisely what generates the regress problem in the first place, after all, is the requirement that for a belief to be justified for a particular person it is necessary... the believer in question know or at least justifiably believe some such set of premises or reasons and thus be 'himself' in a position to offer the corresponding justification (Bonjour, 1985: 43).

For instance, in view of the belief, 'There is a black computer on my study table,' if the epistemic agent claims it as justified and that it is warranted by the belief, 'I am presently in my study room and I can see that there is a black computer on my study desk,' then there will arise the need for the agent to provide a reason in support of his latter belief as sufficiently justifying the former belief. The agent may claim that he is presently 'aware' of the "elements"—which here refers to the blackness of the computer and perhaps the

roundness of the table—that constitute his latter reason. That is, this awareness forms another reason upon which his second belief is directly justified. If the agent is asked to justify his claim that the ‘elements’ he is aware of are true, he may further say that he is aware that he is relatively close to the black computer and that his visual receptacle within that distance cannot deceive him. But the agent can be asked to prove how he knows that the distance between him and the black computer is favourable for visual perception. The agent may continue to give a series of reasons. This because for each proposed supporting reason there could be another preceding belief or reason that justifies it ad infinitum. The effect of this trend of justifying a belief is that since the chain of justification is endless and that one may not be capable of providing all of these beliefs, one’s original belief cannot be said to be justified. This is a version of a problem dubbed the ‘epistemic regress problem’.²⁵

It is necessary to note that the internalist approach to epistemic justification draws its support or strength from the view that the degree of likelihood of an outcome of an event is assessable through the state of mind of the cognitive agent. It is the strength of the agent’s internal cognition that serves as the basis for determining the degree of likelihood of an outcome (Cohen, 1989: 42). This view is termed Bayesian probability. The rationale for claiming that ‘the internalist approach’ to epistemic justification lends support from the Bayesian probability is that, for the internalists as for the Bayesians, an agent’s own subjective mental or cognitive state is all that there is for that agent to draw support in relation to the beliefs he holds. That is that the stronger the support that the agent’s internal cognition gives to a belief, the higher the probability that the agent’s belief is true rather than being false. On the contrary, if the support given by an agent’s cognitive state is weak, then that agent’s belief is more probably false than being true.

²⁵ As part of the objectives of the next section, I will discuss the epistemic regress problem in detail.

The ‘epistemic regress problem’ pointed out in the preceding paragraphs gives rise to another problem. This other problem pertains to the ‘structure’ of the supposed ‘internal’ reasons that justify one’s belief. In reference to the structure of these reasons, ‘internalists’ are bifurcated into ‘internal foundationalists’²⁶ and ‘internal coherentists’. The first versions of ‘internalism’ will be analysed later in Chapters Three and Four. But a gist of the latter version will be looked at in the next section when we are set to analyse the tenability of the ‘epistemic regress problem’.

2.2.2 Externalist Approach

Contrary to the ‘internalists’ perspective to epistemic justification, the ‘externalists’ hold, according to Bonjour, that for an epistemic agent’s belief, ‘There is a black computer positioned on my study desk in my study room,’ to be sufficiently justified by a belief, such as, ‘I am presently in my study room and I can see that there is a black computer on my study desk,’ either all or some of the elements that constitute the reasons why the second belief is justified ought to be ‘external’ to the agent involved (Bonjour and Sosa, 2003: 7; 1985: 43). I have argued in previous sections that Bonjour’s explanation of the ‘externalist’ in light of the term ‘external’ is circular, therefore, uninformative.²⁷ To explain what he means by ‘external’, Bonjour asserts, “The externalist...claim that although there must indeed exist a reason why a basic empirical belief is likely to be true...the person for whom the belief is basic need not himself have any cognitive grasp at all of this reason (Bonjour, 1985:34).”

In the above extract, Bonjour substitutes the term ‘cognitive unavailability’ for the term ‘external’ (Bonjour and Sosa, 2003: 25). But in my view, the mere replacement of the term ‘external’ by ‘cognitive unavailability’ does not help to throw light on what it

²⁶ The internalist foundationalism is the view advocated by Bonjour (2003) and Bonjour’s version is the main item of evaluation in this thesis.

²⁷ Refer to Section 2.2.0.

means for a reason to be 'external' to an agent. This is to say that the latter term which replaces the former is similarly difficult to be understood as the term (external) it explains. Therefore, 'cognitive unavailability' does not do as a viable explanation of what it means for a reason to be 'external' to a person.

By 'cognitive unavailability', Bonjour means that the agent involved needs not possess in his state of mind or awareness the reason that supports his true belief (Bonjour, 1985: 34; Bonjour and Sosa, 2003: 25). But what does it mean for an agent not to be aware of the reason that supports his true belief? Unlike the 'internalists' who claim that an agent must 'justifiably believe' that the reason that supports his belief is true, the 'externalist' probably may claim that although such justified reason may exist, he must not necessarily believe so. Stated differently, all that is necessary for a belief to be warranted as true, according to the 'externalists' as presented by Bonjour, is that there be a reason that makes the agent's belief 'I am presently in my study room and I can see that there is a black computer on my study desk,' justified, though the agent involved may not have in his mind that reason. In my view, this latter explanation of 'externalism' seems temporarily convincing since it involves no circularity. Circularity does not occur here because, with 'externalism', unlike 'internalism', one is not required to 'justifiably believe' the reason that supports his true belief.²⁸

Let us grant that the explanation of 'externalism' above involves no circularity and is not problematic. In doing so, the following question may then arise: to what extent does it suffice as a standard of justification? In my opinion, the 'externalists' may not be faced with the task of parading a ceaseless chain of reasons in support of a belief such as, 'I am presently in my study room and I can see that there is a black computer on my study desk,' that is deemed true as encountered by the 'internalists'. My point is that once an agent

²⁸ Compare this to the 'internalist position' in the preceding section.

does not have in his mind the reason that justifies his above belief, the agent involved will not be compelled (by his interlocutor) to account for why that reason is true. There will be, in effect, no need for him to be interrogated further about a reason that he has no idea of. Thus, if interrogations that require further reasons cease, then reasons that are intended as responses to such interrogations also cease. This will, therefore, truncate ‘the infinite regress’ that is faced by the ‘internalists’.

Nonetheless, a problem that befalls ‘the externalist approach’ is that this approach indirectly deprives epistemic agents of having empirically justified beliefs. The reason is roughly that an agent cannot claim to have a justified belief and at the same time deny having any reason in support of why he considers the belief justified. The problem about claiming one’s belief as justified and yet as not having any supporting reasons to it is that the agent involved may not have any basis to distinguish his supposed justified belief from his lucky guesses about his physical environment. The similarity between a supposed justified belief and a lucky guess is that in both cases, their content (thus what they predict) reflects their respective objects in the physical world. But what could probably be the ground of distinction? The ground of distinction will be that for the former, there is a justified reason though not in the awareness of the agent involved, whereas for the latter, there may not be any justified reason at all. But what difference does this justified reason make, from the perspective of the agent, if he does belief such reason? He will have no ground to distinguish between a supposed justified belief and his lucky guess if he is oblivious to this justified reason. From the agent’s perspective, the line of difference ceases to exist which renders his supposed justified belief unjustified from the first person’s point of view.²⁹

²⁹ The Chapter Three of this thesis tackles this problem in detail.

In sum, the analysis made in the preceding section reveals that both ‘internalism’ (aside from its definition challenges) and ‘externalism’ seem to prescribe insufficient conditions for epistemic justification. This is because ‘externalism’ does not give any clear way of separating justified beliefs from lucky guesses. On the other hand, ‘internalism’ is trapped in what is called ‘the infinite regress problem’. The next section discusses the regress problem: how it evolves, its relation to justification and its tenability as a problem of justification.

2.3 The Epistemic Regress Problem

A person may claim that he is justified in holding the belief, ‘The car that is parked in front of Ohene Gyan Stadium is of red colour’. How does the person involved prove that his belief is, in fact, justified? He may respond that his belief is justified because he is currently standing in front of the stadium and that he can visually perceive a red car. When interrogated further to prove that he is in fact seeing a red car but not, say, a pink car, he may say that he justifiably believes that the distance between him and the red car is relatively close for a better visual. This trend of providing reason after reason in support of one’s knowledge claim may go on and on. This is because every belief (B1) given as a support to a subsequent belief would itself need a prior belief to support it (B1).

The above argument is intended to show that the justification of a belief cannot go on indefinitely and that there is a point that the chain of justification truncates (BonJour, 1985: 21-25). For instance, Aristotle who is known to be one of the earliest pioneers of this argument uses it to defend the possibility of empirical knowledge. His argument can be identified in the following extract:

Some hold that, owing to the necessity of knowing the primary premises, there is no scientific knowledge. Others think there is, but that all truths are demonstrable. Neither doctrine is either true or a necessary deduction from the premises. The first school, assuming that there is no way of knowing other than by demonstration, maintain that an infinite regress is involved, on the ground that if behind the prior

stands no primary, we could not know the posterior through the prior... if on the other hand—they say—the series terminates and there are primary premisses, yet these are unknowable because incapable of demonstration, which according to them is the only form of knowledge. And since thus one cannot know the primary premisses, knowledge of the conclusions which follow from them is not pure scientific knowledge nor properly knowing at all, but rests on the mere supposition that the premisses are true... Our own doctrine is that not all knowledge is demonstrative: on the contrary, knowledge of the immediate premisses is independent of demonstration (Aristotle, 1928:3).

In Aristotle's view, as indicated in this extract, belief justification can neither go on indefinitely nor end on a belief that is unjustified. He rather claims that there are beliefs which by virtue of their closeness to experience are justified in themselves, hence, help stop the supposed endless chain of belief justification.³⁰ Thus, Aristotle uses this argument to iterate the point that justification has a stopping point. On the contrary, Sextus Empiricus uses the supposed infinite chain of belief justification to show why we should abstain from making value judgements about our physical environment. Empiricus asserts

The one based on infinite regress is that in which we say that what is offered as support for believing a given proposition is itself in need of such support, and that support is in need of other support, and so on ad infinitum, so that, since we have no place from which to begin to establish anything, suspension of judgment follows (Empiricus, 1996: 30).

Empiricus' point is that since we cannot reach, in terms of justifying our beliefs, the last belief that does not derive its support from other beliefs but from itself, our claim to have empirically justified beliefs will lack credibility. It is, probably, in light of an analysis similar to that of Empiricus' but not that of Aristotle's that leads BonJour to construe the regress that ensues above as a problem pertaining justification. That is, any standard of justification would have to take into consideration how best this challenge can be resolved and at the same time maintaining the credibility of the beliefs involved (pp. 17-25). BonJour considers the regress that ensues to be vicious since the regress goes a

³⁰ A detail analysis of this position, though not that of Aristotle's but Lewis', Armstrong's and latter BonJour's will be done in later chapters. The reason for bringing in Aristotle is show how different he uses the regress argument from that of Empiricus and BonJour.

long way to deny that we can, in fact, acquire empirical beliefs that are sufficiently justified.

In brief, the regress in question can be explained as follows: for one to prove his belief that 'P,' one may have to give the belief 'P1' to be the basis upon which the claim 'P' is justifiably inferred. Also, for 'P1' to adequately support 'P,' 'P1' has to be known by one to hold which could mean that 'P1' has to be supported by yet another belief, say, 'P2.' In a similar way, for 'P2' to be considered as an adequate support for 'P1,' 'P2' will also need a further belief, 'P3,' to support 'P2.' And this trend will go on ad infinitum. There are four logical possibilities to the regress of beliefs justification that Bonjour points out. These possibilities will be identified and briefly discussed.

One of the possibilities to the regress under study stipulates that the chain of reasons that is purported to establish a person's belief, 'If you enter my study room, you will see a computer on my study desk,' as a case of knowledge terminates with reasons, such as, 'I used the same computer yesterday in the study room,' that are not supported by any further reason (Bonjour, 1985: 21-22). The point with this consequence is that the terminating reason in question is not warranted in any way, that is, if the person involved is asked to prove why he considers the reason that supposedly terminates the chain to hold, he may answer as follows: 'I only have a hunch that I used the computer yesterday,' 'I only guessed that I used the computer yesterday' or 'I have no reason to back my claim that I used the computer yesterday.' Simply put, the person involved possesses no reason to ground his terminating reason as that which holds.

The problem associated with the above possibility is that, although it halts the regress of reasons, since the terminating reason is itself not supported by any reason, the terminating reason fails to offer good support to the original belief in question (Bonjour, 1985: 22). This is because the original belief is deduced from the terminating reason

(either directly or indirectly) and so once the terminating reason lacks a basis to institute its own credibility, the credibility of original belief also becomes doubtful. Therefore, this response rather, in the long run, shows that one cannot possess a belief that is justified. What this objection implies is that for a person to have a supposed good reason (R1) for claiming his original belief to hold, R1 must either be a belief whose justification is self-sustained in that it does not depend on other beliefs for its justification or R1 must be supported by another good reason (R2).³¹ R2 also has to be supported by R3 and R3 by R4...Rn. The latter trend of supporting one's belief leads us to the next possibility to the supposed regress involved in justification.

BonJour states the next possibility as follows: assuming a person claims that his belief, 'The car that is parked in front of Ohene Gyan Stadium is of red colour', is an instance of a justified belief, he may claim that this belief is justified because it is supported by another belief, 'I am currently at the stadium and I can see a red car parked in front of it.' When interrogated to substantiate why he is certain that it is a red car but not a pink car that he sees, he may claim that he has a good eye sight and that the distance between him and the supposed red car is relatively close for good visual. If the interrogation continues ad infinitum, the person may continue to give an endless but unrepeated sequence of reasons as the basis for accepting each of the subsequent reasons in that sequence as justified (BonJour, 1985: 21-22). The point is that with such consequence to the infinite chain of reasons, the person involved may provide an infinite chain of reasons in support of his belief.³²

BonJour argues that the ordinary human mental capacity is finite and that it is impossible for a finite mind to harbour an infinite series reasons (BonJour, 1985: 19, 24). I do not understand what BonJour means by the claim that the human mental capacity is

³¹ The former option will be discussed in later paragraphs.

³² Peter D. Klein (1999) picks and modifies this response and terms it "infinetism".

finite in nature. Does he mean that a person cannot continually give reasons for his belief when the interrogation to which he is responding has not ended? Since Bonjour does substantiate his claim about the finitude nature of human minds, I will not pursue this question further.

Another logical possibility to the regress under discussion is that in offering reasons in support of one's belief, say, 'If you enter my study room, you will see a computer on my study desk,' one may fall back on reasons which have already featured in the chain of reasons or one may fall back on the original belief itself in order to support the already reasons given (Bonjour, 1985: 21). For instance, the person involved may state the following chain of reasons in support of his belief in question: 'I used the same computer yesterday evening before going to bed,' 'The computer I used yesterday evening is of black colour and the computer I claim to be in my study room presently is also of black colour,' and 'I have presently entered my study room and I can see a black-coloured computer on my study desk.' And when the person involved is questioned to prove how he knows that the reason, 'I presently can see a computer on my study desk' obtains, he may either repeat one of the reasons already offered in the chain of reasoning, such as, 'I used the same computer yesterday evening before going to bed,' or he may repeat the original belief itself (If you enter my study room, you will see a computer on my study desk) as an answer to the question. Bonjour calls this means of provision of reasons that falls back on either the original belief or on any of the reasons already offered in the series of reasoning 'coherentism'.³³

The problem that is associated with the general claim of 'coherentism' is that it leads us into circular reasoning. Thus, a reason or belief in the chain of reasoning that itself needs justification is repeated in the chain so as to serve as justification for other

³³ Philosophers who have adopted and restructured 'coherentism' are W. V. O Quine (1960; [1969] 1994), Donald Davidson (1984; [1983] 2001) and Bonjour himself (1985).

beliefs in the chain. What makes justification of this sort inadequate is that such way of proving our beliefs as true gives us no further information about the belief we endeavour to justify except the inadequate information already contained in the chain (BonJour, 1985: 24-25). The point here is that the belief (all the beliefs in the chain of reasons) repeated in the chain of reasons is itself either unjustified or weakly justified that is why initially it needed justification from another belief. Hence, such a belief cannot adequately justify other beliefs. For such circle of belief to be justified, it may probably require its justification from a different belief that does not form part of the circle.³⁴

Finally, according to BonJour, there are some ultimate reasons which serve as a good terminal point when reached within a chain of reasons (BonJour, 1985: 21). Assuming a person claims that his belief ‘If you enter my study room, you will see a computer on my study desk,’ is a case of a justified belief, then it requires that the person possesses an ultimate reason such as ‘I have entered my study room and I can presently see a black computer on my study desk’ that will serve as a good basis to justify his original belief. BonJour asserts that these ultimate reasons are justified in themselves, hence, do not derive their justification from any other source (reason). BonJour terms the ‘self-justified’ reasons “basic beliefs”. He also refers to the supposition that only “basic beliefs” can serve as good and foundational reasons upon which one’s other belief can be justified as ‘foundationalism’.³⁵ How plausible can a basic belief’s justification depend on itself without seeking justification from other beliefs? In relation to this question, the notion of basic belief and the regress problem will be our central focus in subsequent chapters.

³⁴ BonJour (1985) and Quine (1960; [1969] 1994) attempted a similar solution to ‘coherentism’ as they claimed to still be ‘coherentists’. But since this study is not centred on ‘coherentism’, we will not investigate into their views in this study.

³⁵ Major proponents of ‘foundationalism’ are Alvin Goldman (1967), D. M. Armstrong (1973), C. I. Lewis (1946) and Laurence BonJour (2003).

It is with regards to the difficulty in finding a tenable way of resolving the regress under discussion that, in my view, BonJour concurs with Empiricus—as against Aristotle—to consider the supposed regress that evolves during the justification of one’s belief as a problem. Because of this difficulty, BonJour terms the regress ‘epistemic regress problem’. From the analysis in this section, it appears the regress cannot be resolved since all the four possible logical consequences seem inadequate. In relation to the difficulty in resolving the regress, BonJour’s notion of “basic beliefs” in relation to the regress problem will be examined in Chapters Four and Five of this study.

2.3.1. The Dialectical and Structural Regress Problem³⁶

There are probably a number of ways that the regress problem identified in the earlier section can evolve. We will in this section consider two of these ways which are proposed by Robert Audi (1993). The discussion done here will help distinguish the type of regress that was discussed in the preceding section from another type which, in Audi’s view, merely resembles the former type. The discussion will also reveal the type of regress that BonJour is concerned with though he does not clearly make this distinction.

Audi proposes two ways that the regress problem about our knowledge claim can generate (Audi, 1993: 118). In his view, one of the ways wherein the regress arises is that in answering the question “How do you know?” one is required to only provide the evidence or sources from which one obtains one’s knowledge (Audi, 1993: 118). For instance, if a person claims that he knows the location of University of Ghana main campus, as regards the type of regress that may ensue here, the person may have to cite evidence or explanations by which he claims to know this location. He may claim knowledge of the location by citing the directions given to him by Solomon. When asked

³⁶ Laurence BonJour does not really make a distinction between the dialectical and the structural regress problem. But at the end of this section it will come out that the type of regress problem that BonJour was concerned with is the dialectical but not the structural. It is because BonJour does not really make such a distinction that is why I have to fall on the Robert Audi (1993) with regards to the distinction at stake.

further about how Solomon knows about the location, the person may reply that Solomon also received his directions from Selina. Selina, in turn, was told about the location by a friend of hers when she was taking to the location by this friend of hers. Audi asserts that the initial person who makes the claim about the location may go on giving evidence upon evidence ad infinitum to the effect that he knows the location. According to Audi, this type of regress problem results when the person involved is already assumed to possess knowledge of the location in question (Audi, 1993: 120). Audi writes that “The informational form of the question typically does presuppose that the person knows the proposition in question (Audi, 1993: 120).”

In Audi’s view, the person involved only has to state the process through which he arrived at the knowledge of the University of Ghana main campus location. The point Audi is driving at is that the person providing the evidence is not required to justify that the evidence he is giving is in fact true since it is already assumed that the person knows the location.³⁷ Rather the person is only required to produce the information about how he derived that knowledge without giving arguments in defence of the information given. Audi, thus, terms the regress that results from a person’s bid to provide information without argumentation about his knowledge claim ‘the structural regress problem’ (Audi, 1993: 120).

On the other hand, Audi argues that a regress problem can also ensue when a person aims at providing response in the form of argument to the question “How do you know (Audi, 1993: 119).” For instance, if a person claims that he knows the location of the University of Ghana main campus, the person would have to provide evidence to the effect that he, in fact, knows the location in question. This is similar to the structural regress

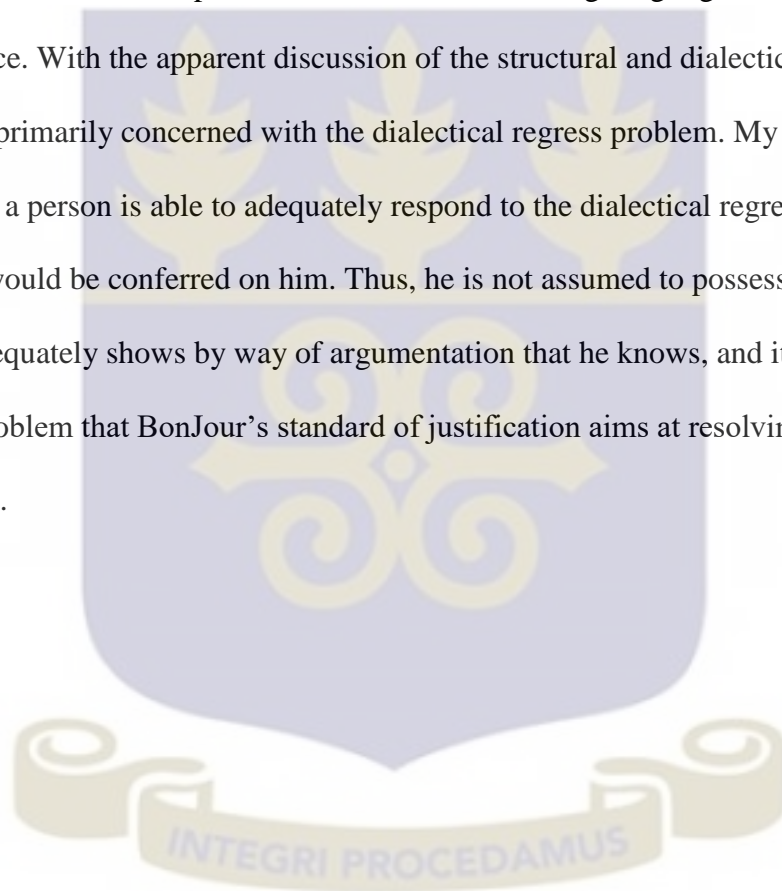
³⁷ As we will see later in this study, D. M. Armstrong (1973) was concerned with this type of ‘regress problem’. Thus, he aimed at identifying the source of his empirical beliefs which is a ‘basic belief’ without making it a necessity for one to have the reason that makes basic beliefs an adequate justifier for other beliefs.

problem. Thus, here also, the person may produce the same evidence listed in the context of the structural regress problem. That is, the person involved may claim that he had direction of the location from Solomon, who in turn had his direction from Selina ad infinitum. But the difference between this context of the regress problem and that of the structural regress problem is that, unlike the latter in which merely providing evidence is accepted, in relation to the former, according to Audi, the person must show that he knows that the evidence or explanations mentioned hold. Differently stated, the person must adduce argument to ground his claim that he knows the location of the university by proving with arguments that the evidence that ground his knowledge claims are in fact true (Audi, 1993: 122). So in this context, the person who makes the knowledge claim must justify the evidence he provides for his claim. For example, he must justify why he claims that Solomon knows the location and hence Solomon's direction is true. Thus, the person may argue that Solomon's auditory sense works perfectly and hence heard the direction given by Selina clearly.

The person involved in the above scenario may be required to prove why he claims Solomon's auditory sense is perfect and also prove other reasons given in support of the just mentioned reason. The person must equally perform similar justification for all other evidence he produces. Audi states that "The skeptical form of the question does *not* presuppose that the person in question really has any knowledge... (Audi, 1993: 120)." His point is that the person involved, in this context of regress problem, is not assumed to have knowledge unless the person can prove with arguments to establish that he actually knows. Audi calls the regress that results in this context 'the dialectical regress problem' (Audi, 1993: 119).

My view, as regards Audi's structural and dialectical distinction, is that a person who makes a knowledge claim may choose to be interested in only the description of the

procedure through which he obtained that particular knowledge and leave out any defense that the procedure is warranted. Thus, the person presumes that the claim he makes is in fact an instance of knowledge which is accepted by others as so, hence he needs not defend with argument the procedures he provides. But when the person becomes interested in defending the descriptions he provides for his knowledge claim, then any regress that ensues will be different in character from the regress that results from the person's bid to only give evidence or description of this evidence without giving arguments in defence of these evidence. With the apparent discussion of the structural and dialectical distinction, this study is primarily concerned with the dialectical regress problem. My reason is that it is only when a person is able to adequately respond to the dialectical regress problem that knowledge would be conferred on him. Thus, he is not assumed to possess knowledge unless he adequately shows by way of argumentation that he knows, and it is also this type of regress problem that Bonjour's standard of justification aims at resolving (Bonjour, 1985: 17-25).



CHAPTER THREE

The Notion of a Basic Belief

D. M. Armstrong, A. Goldman and C. I. Lewis argue that beliefs acquired through sensory experience are adequately justified by other beliefs whose justification is derived from no other beliefs except themselves. This stated view is generally termed ‘foundationalism’. ‘Foundationalism’ is an epistemic justification theory which roughly holds a person’s empirical belief, ‘There is a yellow book on the rectangular table,’ to be an instance of justified belief on any of these two claims: First, if the truth of the person’s belief is proven by the belief itself, then that belief is considered as justified. Second, if the truth of the belief under discussion is proven by a supporting belief whose truth depends on no further belief than the supporting belief itself, then the initial belief is considered as a justified. Here also, the supporting belief is construed as justified.

From the above claims, it can be said that the core claim of foundationalism is that the belief that ends the regress identified in Chapter Two must be ‘self-justified’. Thus, a ‘self-justified belief’ is a belief whose truth-value is proven by recourse to the belief itself. Armstrong, Goldman and Lewis also refer to a self-justified belief as ‘basic belief’ or ‘foundational belief’.³⁸ What then is constituted by a ‘basic belief’ and what makes it ‘self-justified’? Armstrong, Goldman and Lewis are divided over what is entailed by a ‘basic belief’. Primarily, I will review D. M. Armstrong’s view on the nature of a ‘basic belief’ in light of Bonjour’s critique that it fails to resolve the regress that ensues in belief justification. The review of Armstrong’s view will be followed by my review of Bonjour’s rejection of Lewis’s perspective on what is entailed by a ‘basic belief’.

³⁸ In this study the terms foundational and basic beliefs will be used interchangeably.

3.1 Externalist Foundationalism

Generally, D. M. Armstrong and Alvin Goldman hold the view that our empirical beliefs can stand as candidates of knowledge only when their justification is obtained by recourse to certain ‘special relation’ that either directly or indirectly holds between these beliefs and our external environment (Bonjour, 1985: 34-35). In a more precise manner, they claim that one’s empirically true belief, ‘P’, is justified if and only if the reason or warrant for one’s claim is derived from a certain relation that obtains between the agent’s belief and his state of affairs (Foley, 2004: 5). Also, Armstrong and Goldman hold that it is not a necessary requirement that we, epistemic agents, should be aware that this ‘special relation’ obtains before our empirical beliefs are asserted as duly justified (Armstrong, 1973: 168-169). What matters, in their view, is that this ‘special relation’ must obtain between the belief involved and the external world regardless of whether the agent holding that belief is aware that the relation obtains or not. The account given above is what has been generally termed ‘externalist foundationalism’ or ‘externalism’ (BonJour, 1985: 34-35).

The point of departure between Armstrong and Goldman pertains to the nature of the ‘special relation’ that ought to hold between an agent’s state of belief and his external world. What kind of ‘special relation’ must obtain between an empirically true belief and the external world for that belief to be adequately justified? Should this relation be construed as ‘causal’ as Goldman argues, or it should rather be construed as ‘reliable’ as advocated by Armstrong? Before I move to discuss in detail D. M. Armstrong’s version of ‘externalism’ which is a central issue of this section, it will be prudent to first show how Armstrong’s ‘reliabilist’ view of the ‘special relation’ differs from Goldman’s ‘causal’ view of this ‘special relation’. It should be noted that the discussion of Goldman’s version does not mean that his view is going to be subjected to rigorous criticism. Rather my

purpose for introducing Goldman's view in this section is to help substantiate some of the discrepancies that are inherent among 'externalist foundationalist' philosophers.

Goldman (1967) is among the earliest philosophers who contributed, to a great extent, in proposing 'externalism'. He claims that the justification of the belief, 'I see a yellow book on that rectangular table,' depends on the medium through which this belief is formed (Foley, 2004: 2). The above belief is justified, according to him, if the belief is caused in an 'appropriate way' by the external environment (p. 369). Goldman's view is branded 'causal theory' of epistemic justification. Broadly stated, Goldman's 'causal theory' of justification is that there is a 'causal relation' that obtains between the external world and the belief produced (p. 369).³⁹ For instance, if the belief 'I see a yellow book on that rectangular table' is 'appropriately' caused, then the condition listed above obtains between the belief and the external world.

To put Goldman's assertion above into (justification) perspective, he holds that a basic belief, 'I see a yellow book on that rectangular table,' requires that that belief be produced and sustained by a perceptual process (Foley, 2004: 3). But is it always the case that empirical beliefs are genuinely caused by their respective external objects? How does an agent decide which belief is genuinely caused and which one is not genuinely caused if this process is beyond the agent's mental apprehension?⁴⁰ How does he (the agent) then justify his knowledge about a certain state of affairs if he is not aware of the conditions that facilitate his apprehension of this state of affairs? Since the agent may not be able to distinguish an instance of genuine perception from fake perception, he cannot also claim

³⁹ For his causal theory to be temporarily accepted, it is important to appreciate Goldman's notion of a 'belief'. In his view (1993), beliefs are immaterial in nature, p. 365. Granted that beliefs are immaterial, the difficulty that arises is: how does the external world being a concrete substance cause an immaterial substance? This question will not be pursued further since its pursuance does not affect the epistemic justification problem in anyway. The above question is only to point out a problem that may befall Goldman in other aspects of philosophy, especially, in Philosophy of Mind.

⁴⁰ The term 'mental apprehension' refers to one's awareness or consciousness. For a reason or process to be beyond an agent's 'mental apprehension' means the agent is not aware of that reason or process. Thus, 'mental apprehension' will be used interchangeably with awareness and consciousness.

that his belief 'I see a red car' is justified. This is a problem that ought to be resolved by Goldman and his followers. Since Goldman's view on the 'special relation' is not the focus of this thesis, I will not discuss in detail the questions above.

On the other hand, Armstrong replaces Goldman's 'causal relation' with what he (Armstrong) calls 'reliable relation or a nomological relation' (Armstrong, 1973: 166). I will therefore refer to Armstrong's theory of epistemic justification as a 'nomological theory' of epistemic justification. By the 'nomological relation', Armstrong means a 'law-like relation'. He contends that for an empirical belief to be sufficiently justified there ought to be a 'law-like relation' that obtains either directly or indirectly between that empirical belief and its respective physical object or state of affairs (Armstrong, 1973: 166). Much will not be discussed on Armstrong's position here. Detailed and a critical look at his perspective will be considered in the next section.

What I wish to evince through the discussions above is that whilst Goldman construes causation as the relation referred to by externalism, Armstrong, on the other hand, understands the relation as one that is of 'law-like' in nature. This discussion therefore presupposes that, essentially, externalists agree that an epistemic justification of an empirical belief involves necessarily a special connection, be it indirect or direct, between an empirical belief and the external world. They, nevertheless, disagree on what the entailment of this special relation must be. With this point clearly made, we will proceed to the next section which treats in detail Armstrong's nomological theory of epistemic justification.

3.1.1 Armstrong's Notion of a Basic Belief

D. M. Armstrong (1973) acknowledges the supposition that any cognitive agent who endeavours to prove the veracity of his empirical belief ought to provide for that belief an adequate reason. But he denies that the 'elements' that support a 'basic belief'

ought to be known by the agent involved before that belief can be deemed as adequately justified (p. 162). In his view, to grant that the agent must possess such elements will mean that the agent would have to give reason after reason why these elements obtain. Hence, a regress of justificatory reasons threatens.⁴¹ His point is that such means of belief justification leads an agent to infinitely providing reasons in support of his supposed ‘basic belief’. Its implication is that the agent’s aim to prove his claim to empirical knowledge will be futile, since his mental capacity will not be able to apprehend all these indefinite reasons (pp. 154-155). He asserts

But the case of non-inferential knowledge is peculiarly important. Thinking about the threatened infinite regress in the classical analysis of knowledge seems to lead to the conclusion that there must be non-inferential knowledge. Furthermore, we seem *forced* in the case of this sort of knowledge to look for some non-classical solution to the problem. (The classical or ‘Cartesian’ postulation of self-evident truths can rather easily be shown to be an insufficient account of the basis of all that we think we know.) If we can find a non-classical solution to the problem of non-inferential knowledge, where such a solution is clearly required, we may then try to extend the solution to cover all cases of knowledge (p. 162).

The classical account mentioned in the above extract refers to one of the versions of internalism, namely, internalist foundationalism. In the subsequent sections, we will consider C. I. Lewis’ internalist foundationalism (1946) with regard to the supposed epistemic regress problem. For the time being, let us concentrate on Armstrong’s preferred account of justification. Armstrong deems the regress vicious, since the regress goes a long way to deny the possibility of having a justified belief and knowledge in general. For that reason he rejects the plausibility of the claim that the regress goes on indefinitely.

To halt the regress problem, Armstrong advances his version of ‘externalist standard’ of epistemic justification called the ‘reliabilism’. His claim, with regard to this standard, is that there is the necessity for a sort of ‘law-like relation’ to connect a cognitive agent’s empirically true beliefs, such as, ‘There is a yellow book on the rectangular table’, either directly or indirectly, with their respective states of affairs. But what does

⁴¹ An in-depth analysis of the regress problem has been given in the preceding chapter.

Armstrong mean by the notion of ‘law-like relation’? Differently put, what entails such a relation? The following subsection gives a detail analysis of the nature of this ‘nomological relation’ or ‘law-like relation’ and how it helps in resolving the ‘regress problem’.

3.1.2 Armstrong’s Account of the Nomological Relation

In Armstrong’s perspective, for an agent to claim that a belief such as ‘I see a yellow book on the rectangular table’ to be justified, it is essential that a ‘law-like relation’ or connection holds between that belief of the agent and the corresponding state of affairs that the belief is referring to (Armstrong, 1973: 166). He states

Suppose that ‘p’ is true, and A believes that p, but his belief is not supported by any reasons. ‘p’ might be the proposition that there is a sound in A’s environment. (The previous section indicates why this example is chosen.) What makes such a belief a case of knowledge? My suggestion is that there must be a law-like connection between the state of affairs Bap and the state of affairs that makes ‘p’ true such that, given Bap, it must be the case that p (Armstrong, 1973: 166).⁴²

Let us, for instance, say that a cognitive agent claims that his empirical belief, ‘I can see a yellow book on the rectangular table’ is true. As per Armstrong’s statement above, the agent’s empirical belief is epistemically warranted on the premise that there is a ‘law-like’ connection which directly holds between the agent’s belief and the state of affairs that the belief is referring to. What, therefore, are the characteristics of the ‘law-like’ relation that ought to obtain between a state of belief and its respective state of affairs before that belief can be said to be a case of a justified belief?

As a response to the above question, Armstrong writes

What are law-like connections of nature? First, they are the sort of connections which can in principle be investigated by scientific method: by observation and, in particular, by experiment. In the case of a thermometer the investigation would not be difficult, in the case of beliefs it could be very difficult indeed, but there is no difference in principle between the cases... It is far harder to experiment with the

⁴² ‘Bap’ as used by Armstrong refers to the shorthand form of the claim, “A” (representing an agent) believes that the claim “P” is true.’

beliefs of human beings, and so there may be much more guesswork in the assertion that a similar connection exists... *Second*, the law-like generalisations which record the existence of such connections yield counterfactual or, more generally, subjunctive conditionals... *Third*, the connection between belief and state of affairs is a connection which holds independently of us who may record its existence. It is an ontological connection. It is not however causal connection. The state of affairs Bap does not bring the state of affairs that makes 'p' true into existence... It is frequently the case that this state of affairs brings the state of affairs Bap into existence. But that does not occur in all cases (Armstrong, 1973: 168-169).⁴³

The first characteristic stipulates that the law-like relation in question is observable or scientifically provable. And the third stipulates that the law-like relation is 'ontologically' independent of the epistemic agent and his beliefs, and the state of affairs that the agent's beliefs reflect. To understand these characterisations better, let us adopt Armstrong's thermometer-model. He uses the thermometer-model in explaining the epistemic justification of our empirically true beliefs. This is because he holds that cognitive agents' empirically true beliefs represent its object in the empirical world in a similar fashion as a good thermometer reading supposedly gives an exact temperature of the environment wherein it (thermometer) operates (Armstrong, 1973: 166-167).

Armstrong's explanation in light of the first property (observability) of the 'law-like relation' is that scientists through experimentations are in a good position to identify this 'law-like connection' that obtains between the thermometer and the environment. Likening this to empirical beliefs, he maintains that though the relation ought to hold between the agent's belief and the empirical world, it is not always the case that this relation is easily detected or always detectable by scientists or even by the epistemic agents themselves (Armstrong, 1973: 168-169). In his view, it is not a necessary condition that the agent involved become aware of this relation but what is important, Armstrong emphasises, is that for the belief to be adequately justified, not only should the relation not

⁴³ For the purpose of this study, I will concentrate on the first and the third characteristics of the law-like relation that Armstrong outlines in the above extract since the discussion of the second characteristic has less bearing on the progress of this study.

fail to obtain, it must also be 'reliable'.⁴⁴ He asserts, "The relation of BxJy to Jy is that of completely reliable sign to thing signified (Armstrong, 1973: 182)."⁴⁵ That is, this relation is a sufficient and necessary condition for asserting the veracity of one's belief. He substantiates this point as follows

There is absolutely no need that A know that condition (ii) be satisfied; all that is necessary is it *be* satisfied. So there is no vicious regress. (It follows from this, incidentally, that A may know without knowing that he knows. This is indeed usually the case when A is a dog or a small child...) (Armstrong, 1968: 190).

But the problem that needs to be tackled is as follows: Is it possible for an agent to claim that his empirically true belief is warranted when he is not aware of the relation or the elements that warrants his belief as true? This problem will be attended to in due course.

On the third characteristic of the 'law-like relation' which relates to the issue of causality, Armstrong argues that the relation is caused neither by the empirical belief held by the cognitive agent nor the object of perception of which the belief is about (Armstrong, 1973: 169). For instance, if in a certain condition (law-like relation) a good thermometer operating in a 70⁰ environment registers 70⁰, it should not be taken to mean that since the good thermometer registered 70⁰, it has imposed or caused the weather condition in the supposed environment to rise to a temperature of 70⁰. The 70⁰ temperature recorded by the thermometer existed independently even before the thermometer registered it.

On the other way round, Armstrong accepts that often environmental temperature can cause a good thermometer to register an appropriate weather temperature in situations where this law-like relation obtains. He rejects this casual relation as necessary since

⁴⁴ This particular point is what makes Armstrong's standard of justification an attempt to resolve the structural regress problem but not the dialectical. Thus, in his view, justification should adequately end on a belief that has a direct connection with experience though the person involved may not possess the reason that makes the belief justified.

⁴⁵ In this quotation 'BxJy' refers to a particular state of belief, say, 'Kofi believes that fruits are good sources of vitamins' whereas 'Jy' refers to the state of affairs of which the belief is about which in this situation is 'Fruits are good sources of vitamins.'

sometimes where the reliable relation fails to obtain, the environmental temperature can still cause a bad thermometer to register a temperature that coincides with the weather condition of the environment (Armstrong, 1973: 166). Relating the thermometer-model to empirical beliefs, Armstrong denies the plausibility of empirical beliefs having any causal efficacy on the external world (Armstrong, 1973: 169). That is, he rejects an agent's belief, 'The book on the desk is blue,' as adequately justified only when this belief moulds or causes changes in the external world. He implicitly frowns on the claim which is roughly that a true belief is that which manifests or moulds the external world.

The situation is a peculiar one, and my intuitions, and I would suppose other people's, are not completely clear on the matter. But it seems, on the whole, that we ought not to speak of knowledge here. The essential point of a 'faculty of knowledge,' is that it should, in respect of what is known, be passive to the world. If the 'reflection' is achieved by our mind moulding the world, we are not knowing but creating (Armstrong, 1973: 181).

On the contrary, Armstrong somewhat agrees with Goldman's causal theory, since Armstrong acknowledges that the external world often causes the agent to possess empirical beliefs which sometimes are true (Armstrong, 1973: 169, 181). "It is frequently the case," he remarks, "that this state of affairs brings the state of affairs Bap into existence. But even that does not occur in all cases (Armstrong, 1973: 169)." Hence, Armstrong denies that this causal relation is a necessary and sufficient condition for justifying the veridical status of a belief. For example, Armstrong holds that in certain situations, as in the case of a bad thermometer, a true belief can be obtained by an agent who is a victim of visual hallucination though the belief is caused by an appropriate environment (Armstrong, 1973: 158-159, 180-181). In effect, the agent cannot be said to know what obtains in his physical environment but rather he was epistemically lucky since the relation that obtained between his belief and his environment was unfavourable for knowledge acquisition. It is on this premise that Armstrong holds the position that the law-

like relation should not be construed as a causal relation between the belief involved and the external world.

Unfortunately, Armstrong does not give us further information about this supposed reliable relation. Bonjour, on the other hand, assumes that this relation that Armstrong is referring to may encompass the state of an agent's sensory apparatus, his mental process, the state of the environment and other unstated factors (Bonjour, 1985: 36). With an account of what constitutes Armstrong's law-like relation at hand, now the question arises: What is the implication of this law-like relation for the epistemic regress problem? Or, how does the supposed reliable law-like connection solve 'the regress problem'?

The operation of the law-like relation will be well understood when we consider what Armstrong means by 'non-inferential beliefs'. Armstrong argues that an agent's empirical belief, 'There is a yellow book lying on a rectangular table which is positioned at centre of my living-room' is adequately justified by recourse to a 'non-inferential belief' such as 'I can, at the moment, visually perceive a yellow book lying on a rectangular table which is located at the centre of my living-room.' What characteristics of non-inferential beliefs make Armstrong hold the view that such beliefs are the terminal point of the infinite regress of justificatory reasons? This question requires that we analyse his notion of non-inferential belief. But before we do so, it must be noted that for an empirical belief to be adequately justified, Armstrong argues that the belief involved must either be inferred from a 'non-inferential belief' or must itself be a 'non-inferential belief' (Armstrong, 1973: 162). Thus, the issue of indefinitely providing warrants for the above belief will come to a halt when the agent reaches such 'non-inferential belief'.

The above explanation is how Armstrong supposes the vicious regress problem gets terminated (Armstrong, 1973: 163, 190). Let us now probe his notion of 'non-inferential beliefs'. What, according to Armstrong, is the distinction between 'non-

inferential beliefs' and other beliefs (inferential beliefs)? What trait makes 'non-inferential beliefs' viable to resolve the infinite regress of belief justification? We will consider the first question before looking at the second question. Once we have delineated the inferential from non-inferential beliefs, we will then be in a good position to analyse Armstrong's contention that a non-inferential belief is ahead of an inferential belief in resolving 'the regress problem'.

In specifying what non-inferential belief is, Armstrong stipulates that there are two kinds of experiential beliefs. These two kinds, in his view, are inferential and non-inferential beliefs (Armstrong, 1973:163). He states

I suggest that at least one place where non-inferential knowledge is to be found is in *the simpler judgements of perception*. I do not say that this is the only place where non-inferential knowledge is found... Nor is it the case that all our simpler judgements of perception are instances of non-inferential knowledge. First, such judgements can be false. Second, even where they are true, it is possible for them to fall short of being knowledge. Third, even where they are knowledge, it is possible for them to be inferential knowledge. All that is asserted is that instances of non-inferential knowledge are common among the simpler judgements of perception (Armstrong, 1973: 163).

Armstrong asserts that one's belief is deemed inferential if either the belief's origin is derived from or its veracity is sustained by other beliefs (Armstrong, 1973: 201). For instance, Atong's empirical belief, 'There is a yellow book on the rectangular table which is positioned at the centre of my living-room,' is an example of inferential belief if the belief in question is deduced from, as posited by Armstrong, Atongo's belief that 'I can, at the moment, visually perceive a yellow book lying on a rectangular table which is located at the centre of my living-room.' It should be noted, as Armstrong points out, that the veridical status for the former belief is dependent on the latter belief from which the former belief was deduced. Hence, for an inferential belief to be epistemically justified, its prior belief ought first to be epistemically justified. In a similar fashion, when the antecedent belief is unjustified, the original belief also becomes unjustified.

On the other hand, a non-inferential belief is construed by Armstrong as a belief that is 'self-justified' but not 'self-fulfilling' (Armstrong, 1973: 180-181). Let us first consider what Armstrong means when he claims that non-inferential beliefs are not 'self-fulfilling'. He claims that a belief is 'self-fulfilling' when the belief has the capacity to mould the external world to fit the content of that belief (Armstrong, 1973: 181). For instance, William James argues, "And often enough our faith beforehand in an uncertified result *is the only thing that makes the result come true* (James, 1956: 59)." From the perspective of James, the evidence for crediting a non-inferential belief as knowledge is derived from the impact that the belief involved has on the external world. This assumption is what Armstrong opposes. In Armstrong's view, the justification of a non-inferential belief is not dependent on whether or not the belief manifests, creates or recreates the empirical world. Instead, he claims that non-inferential beliefs are 'self-justified' beliefs. By 'self-justified' beliefs, Armstrong refers to beliefs that are epistemically self-sufficient for their veracity. When is a non-inferential belief by its own right sufficient to assert its veracity? And is there really any such belief?

With regards to the above questions, Armstrong proposes that for a non-inferential belief, 'I can, at the moment, visually perceive a yellow book lying on a rectangular table which is located at the centre of my living-room,' to be adequate to establish its own truth, there ought to exist a law-like relation between the belief under discussion and the state of affairs of which the belief is about. He continues that this necessary or sufficient relation that obtains between the two states must be reliable. When this requirement is fulfilled, he contends, the epistemic regress problem will be resolved, and that empirically acquired beliefs will receive adequate justification. These non-inferential beliefs, Armstrong considers, are the basic or foundational beliefs that are needed to resolve the infinite regress problem. Hence, human empirical knowledge, Armstrong avers, is possible

through the availability of non-inferential beliefs. Briefly, from Armstrong's point of view, an adequately justified empirical belief rests on a belief that is a foundational and self-justified belief. The latter belief refers to a belief that is immediately connected to its respective state of affairs by virtue of a reliable condition that obtains between the belief state and the state of affairs.

In relation to Armstrong's position on epistemic justification, it must be recalled that he strongly argues that having a cognitive grasp of or knowing the relation that obtains between two states—the non-inferential belief and the state of affairs—is not necessary. Whether or not an agent has a grasp of this relation has no effect on the adequacy of the justification of either the inferential or non-inferential belief. What matters, in his view, is that the relation must be reliable and must necessarily obtain between the belief state and the state of affairs (Armstrong, 1973: 168-169).

3.1.3 BonJour's Critique of Armstrong's Notion of a Basic Belief

Bonjour disagrees with Armstrong on the latter's claim that having access to the relevant conditions or elements that make a belief a candidate for a basic belief is irrelevant to the justification of that belief. Bonjour rather claims that without one being aware of these relevant conditions or elements, one's belief cannot be said to be justified (Bonjour, 1985: 37ff.). In BonJour's view, Armstrong's account of 'basic beliefs' only serves as a 'pseudo solution' to the regress problem that was encountered by the 'internalists'.⁴⁶ That is, Armstrong only manages to halt the regress problem by discarding the 'internalist' supposition that we—epistemic agents—ought to possess all the elements that make our basic beliefs viable (BonJour, 1985: 43).

⁴⁶ Refer to section 2.1.2 for details on the internalist approach to epistemic justification and the related epistemic regress problem that it faced.

BonJour uses some hypothetical cases to reject Armstrong's view. And in what follows, I have formulated similar hypothetical cases to help me evaluate Armstrong's standard of epistemic justification in light of the 'regress problem'. However, there arises a question against the alleged necessary, sufficient and reliable 'law-like relation'. Does it always obtain between empirically true belief and its respective state of affairs? This question will be my guide when I employ my modified hypothetical cases to evaluate Armstrong's theory.

We will first suppose, for argument sake, that the reliability of the relation always obtains between empirically true belief and its respective state of affairs. This assumed answer is meant to investigate whether a person can be said to be justified in a situation where the law-like relation never fails to obtain though the person involved has no idea of this relation. What happens in this scenario is that anytime a cognitive agent acquires an empirical belief, it will necessarily hold that that belief is true as per the requirement put forth by Armstrong. That is, since Armstrong's law-like relation will always hold, when an agent obtains the belief that 'I can presently see a yellow book on my study desk,' that belief will be true. But will the agent involved be justified in claiming that his belief is true without being aware of why his belief in question is true?

Let us consider a situation where a problem could arise even if we assume that any belief obtained by an agent is a true belief. For instance, a hypothetical situation wherein an epistemic agent, 'A', is suffering from visual illusion and is aware of his defect. More specifically, whenever the agent visually perceives the colour green, it is presented to him as rather the colour blue. But unconsciously, he correctly perceives the colour blue whenever he sees one. He has no means of distinguishing between the two colours due to his visual defect. On one occasion, another epistemic agent 'B', who is also aware of the visual defect of the first agent, presents a blue-coloured card to agent 'A'. Agent 'A' is

asked to identify the colour of the card. Unbeknownst to the two agents in question, on that particular occasion, agent 'A's' visual defect is corrected. Now agent 'A' says to agent 'B' that 'I presently see that the card in your hand is blue.' There is no doubt that agent 'A's' belief in question is true, that is, agent 'A' has a true belief. But can agent 'A' or 'B' claim that agent 'A' has an epistemically justified belief?

I suppose that, in Armstrong's view, agent 'A's' belief that the card in agent 'B's' hand is blue will be said to be justified. Thus, Armstrong will argue that the condition that obtains between agent A's belief-state and the state of affairs at the time that the question was asked was reliable or conducive, though agent 'A' was once a victim of visual illusion. But who is to point out to the agent that his supposed belief is true if Armstrong were to be any of the above agents who had no grasp of the corrected visual defect (ignorant of the corrected visual illusory condition)? It is largely impossible for any of them to grant that agent 'A' indeed has an empirically justified belief since the condition that links the two states is not conceived of by any of agents involved. The case just stipulated is a clear instance of a situation whereby Armstrong's reliable law-like relation may obtain between a belief and its respective state of affairs but the agent involved cannot be said to be justified in believing that his empirical belief is true. Thus, agent 'A' will not be credited with holding a justified belief but will only possess a belief that is coincidentally true. My point here is that although agent 'A's' true belief helps in truncating the regress involved in belief justification, the belief cannot be a sufficient basis for supporting itself and other beliefs as justified. The reason is that the agent involved has no basis why he accepts his belief as true though he still holds that a basis exists yet not available to him. I think that the existence of such a basis makes the belief true and accounting for the basis involved, in the first person point of view, makes the belief

justified. Hence, although, an agent may have a true belief, if he is unable to account for the reason why the belief is true, his belief will not be considered as justified.

Alternatively, one may respond that 'B' could apprise 'A' of the fact that 'A' had the answer right after 'A's' identification exercise. This response comes with its own problem. Now, 'B', who is unaware of 'A' corrected visual sense, will have to give a reason in support of his claim that, in fact, the colour of the card is blue. 'B' himself is unaware of the relation that exists between his own visual sense and the card that he perceives. How would he know whether or not he is also himself involved in illusion? Once agent 'B' himself cannot tell whether or not the right relation holds between his own belief and the said blue card, he cannot claim his belief to be justified let alone use his belief to justify the belief of 'A's'. For 'B' to be certain that he is justified in holding that the card is blue, he may likewise seek the assistance of another agent, say, 'C' and 'C' would also have to seek the assistance of 'D' ad infinitum. This trend of establishing one's own knowledge by recourse to another agent will go on indefinitely, that is, leading Armstrong into a different form of the infinite regress problem that Armstrong deemed untenable. Hence, 'A's' belief will be unjustified since the justificatory basis will be unending and 'A' may not be in the possession of all these justificatory reasons.

We have seen from the forgoing discussion that even in situations whereby a person's belief can be said to be true, the person's belief will still not be justified if he cannot give an account of why his belief is true. Now let us consider a situation whereby a person's beliefs are not always true and examine if any of such beliefs will be justified under the terms of Armstrong. So let us now suppose that Armstrong's answer to the question 'Does the condition always exist?' to be 'No'. That is, the relation may obtain in certain situations and fail to do so in others. We will here also use the hypothetical

situation employed in the above argument, though with a little modification.⁴⁷ In this situation, agent 'A' is aware that his visual apparatus is functioning appropriately and has almost never failed him in the past. On one occasion agent 'B', who is in blue shirt, approaches agent 'A'. On this occasion, unbeknownst to any of the agents, agent 'A' has fallen victim to visual hallucination whereby all green items in his immediate surroundings have turned blue to him. Agent 'A' now perceives these metamorphosed green colours together with agent 'B's' shirt as blue. In this scenario, can agent 'A' or 'B' claim that 'A' has epistemically justified belief when 'A' claims that agent 'B' is in blue dress? I suppose Armstrong's answer will be 'no'. And his answer will be based on the reason that the relation that ought to obtain between the belief state and the state of affairs is unreliable or not conducive for knowledge acquisition. I must confess that, in relation to the interpretation of Armstrong's theory above, Armstrong is right to give a negative answer. But the question is how does agent 'A' or 'B' know that agent A's empirical belief is not supported by adequate reasons though the belief is true? Put differently, how do these agents determine that the law-like relation that obtains in the above case is unreliable? This is a problem because none of these agents has any epistemic apprehension of the relation that exists between the two states (belief state and state of affairs). Hence, they will not be in the position to claim the veridical status to the belief in terms of adequateness of the law-like relation that exists between the two states.

By way of summary, it must be acknowledged that Armstrong temporarily halts the regress by claiming that a grasp of the supposed law-like relation by any human mind, is not a necessary condition for epistemically justifying one's empirical belief. This is because the agent involved is not required to provide reason after reasons why the law-like

⁴⁷ In the early hypothetical situation, the agent involved is not aware that he is a victim of visual illusion whereas in the latter situation the agent is aware of this defect. This modification shows that as humans we are sometimes aware of our perceptual shortfalls and sometimes ignorant of them. The modification is to help prove that in both situations the agent cannot be said to be justified in holding a belief if we go by Armstrong's standard.

relation obtains. But what is problematic about his view is how one will know that the relation that obtains between a belief and its state of affairs is conducive. Armstrong has made it clear to us that the agent need not necessarily know the condition under which one forms a belief. I must say that if we go by Armstrong's claim with respect to the two hypothetical situations above, our empirical beliefs will be cases of unjustified beliefs. Thus, almost all empirically true beliefs of cognitive agents will be cases of epistemic luck and nothing more. I therefore reaffirm and support Bonjour's claim that Armstrong's view is insufficient as an epistemic justification theory.

3.2 Internalist Foundationalism

In opposition to Armstrong's perspective, Bonjour points out another group of philosophers. These philosophers hold the view, Bonjour claims, that though there are special individual beliefs (basic beliefs) which serve as the basic unit of belief justification, the reasons that give these basic beliefs this special effect ought to be accessible to the agent who attempts to justify his empirical belief. This roughly presented view is termed 'internalist foundationalism'. C. I. Lewis (1946) and the *later* Bonjour (2003) are both advocates of this view.⁴⁸ In this section, Lewis' 'internalist foundationalism'—which is primarily underpinned by his notion of basic belief—will be the item of focus. Precisely, I will analyse Lewis' notion of a basic belief. My purpose is to evaluate Bonjour's critique of Lewis's notion of basic belief in relation to 'the regress problem'.

⁴⁸ The term 'later' is used in qualifying the name 'Bonjour' to indicate that at different epochs in Bonjour's writings, he held two contrasting views. In his 1985 book, he advocated for coherentism as against his 2003 internalist foundationalism perspective. The former view of his will be examined in Chapter Four whereas his latter view will be examined in Chapter Five. It is vital to point out that the fabric of internal foundationalism has its antecedent from Rene Descartes' writings (1971). In his projects, Descartes endeavoured to establish a rock bottom foundation upon which both empirical (e.g. the mango tastes sweet) and a priori beliefs (e.g. the sum of three and two is five) can firmly be instituted as knowledge. In his search, he finally stops on the supposition that the foundation of all knowledge—a priori and empirical—stems from a sort of cognitive or conscious state called the 'I'. He claims this 'I' to be a thinking or conscious thing (p. 77, 79).

‘Internalist foundationalists’ reject Armstrong’s claim that for a basic belief to be justified, it is irrelevant for an agent to be aware of the reason (elements) that makes it justified. The internalists assert, on the contrary, that such beliefs possess special elements that are ‘cognitive’ or ‘conscious’ in character. An element is ‘cognitive’ or ‘conscious’ in nature, in Bonjour’s view, if an epistemic agent can have a mental grasp or apprehension of that element. An example of a cognitively held element is when an epistemic agent claims that his visual belief ‘There is a red book lying on the green grass’ is substantiated by his basic belief that he is presently seeing a red book lying on the green grass. This example, roughly, supposes that the epistemic agent in question has had a sensation or sensory content from his direct experience of the red and green pattern, and not only that, he also understands these experiences. It is based on the agent’s grasp of these elements (sensations from red and green pattern) that the agent claims that his initial belief qualifies as a case of a justified belief.⁴⁹

3.2.1 Lewis’ Notion of a Basic Belief

Lewis (1946) holds the proposition that a prerequisite requirement of adequately justified empirical beliefs, such as, ‘I can presently see a red book lying on the green grass,’ is that the reason that makes the belief in question adequately justified must possess ‘cognitive’ characteristics. This simply requires that an epistemic agent ought to be able to give the reason why the above belief is justified (pp. 264, 254). Aside from the elements being ‘cognitive’ in nature, the justified belief must either be an inferential belief or deduced from a non-inferential (basic) belief (p. 203).⁵⁰ The latter requirement is meant to stop the ‘regress problem’ whereas the former opposes Armstrong’s disregard for the need

⁴⁹ Problems pertaining to this view will be discussed in the next section when we are examining Lewis’ version of foundationalism.

⁵⁰ By ‘immediate’ terminating belief, I mean that a belief that is self-justified and need no other belief for its justification, that is, the belief itself is a non-inferential belief. But ‘mediate’ terminating belief depends on immediate terminating belief for the latter’s justification.

of an agent to have access to the special elements (reason) that supports the belief involved as the foundation of justifying other beliefs.

At this juncture, there is the need to investigate what is constituted by Lewis' notion of a non-inferential belief.⁵¹ What is the basic characteristic that Lewis ascribes to this type of beliefs? And how does this type beliefs serve as a terminating point in belief justification, hence resolving the 'regress problem'? Lewis posits that a non-inferential belief is a belief that expresses or conceptualises the 'given' or sensory contents which are derived through direct experience. The 'given' or sensory content, according to him, is what is immediately obtained during the procedure that characterises sense perception (the means of getting information from our environment by virtue of our five senses—tongue, skin, ears, eyes and nose) (Lewis, 1946: 203). For example, during an agent's visual perception of a red book, what is 'given' to or obtained by the agent is the sensory content or sensation of 'redness'. For that matter, Lewis claims that in the process of sense perception one has no direct apprehension of the respective external object—red book. He further asserts that it is these sensory contents that aid the epistemic agent in formulating non-inferential beliefs, or to borrow his own term, "terminating judgements" (Lewis, 1946: 204). He firmly establishes his position by asserting the following

The existence of a thing, the occurrence of an objective event, or any other objective state of affairs, is knowable only as it is verifiable or confirmable. And such objective facts can be verified, or confirmed as probable, only by presentations of sense. Thus all empirical knowledge is vested, ultimately, in the awareness of what is given and the prediction of certain passages of further experience as something which will be given or could be given. It is such

⁵¹ Before we consider the response that Lewis submits, it is vital to point out that Lewis (1946), somewhat, concedes that certainty of empirical knowledge is impossible. He rather argues that our sensory apparatus at best can endow us with a high probabilistic or degree of empirical knowledge, though, without certainty (p. 255). Put differently, Lewis claims that our best beliefs of the external world which are derived through sense perception fall short, if not at a great extent, then at least 0.1 percent of certainty. This re-echoes the point I earlier noted about the relation between 'Bayesian' probability and 'internalism'. It was argued that both theories evaluate empirical beliefs (in the case of 'Bayesianism', an outcome of an event) based on the strength of the agent's belief system. The view elaborated in this paragraph opposes the externalists' view (especially Armstrong's) that our empirical knowledge obtained in the absence of any abnormal conditions gives us much certainty about the external world.

predictions of possible direct experience which we have called terminating judgments; and the central importance of these for all empirical knowledge will be obvious... It is not this physical event which, in my terminating judgment, I intend to predict, but merely the passage of experience itself. And this prediction of experience is something which at the moment of stepping will become completely certain or certainly false (Lewis, 1946: 203-204).

Although Lewis acknowledges that the sensory contents we acquire are not hundred percent representations of their respective objects, they are enough, he asserts, to facilitate the formulation of terminating beliefs or non-inferential beliefs. Another point he adds is that such formulation is possible because these sensory contents are directly grasped by the epistemic agent. He thus asserts, "As has been pointed out, objective 'things' are apprehensible at an instant only in the sense of being signalled by such and such sensory clues (Lewis, 1946: 261)."⁵² And since the 'given' is directly apprehended by the agent, it (given) is what we conceptualise into a terminating belief. The resulting terminating belief becomes the ground for supporting other empirically true beliefs, such as, If you enter my home, you will find a red book on my green grass, without itself (terminating belief) needing any justification from elsewhere (Lewis, 1946: 262). This, therefore, means that terminating beliefs are self-justifying beliefs that also serve the basic purpose of adequate justificatory ground for other empirical beliefs. Considering the argument Lewis gives in support for terminating beliefs, can it be asserted that Lewis has proposed a tenable standard of epistemic justification in light of the 'regress problem'?

3.2.2. BonJour's Critique of Lewis' Notion of a Basic Belief

There is a critical point that can be inferred from Lewis' proposition about terminating beliefs as adequate justificatory ground for empirical beliefs. This point states that there exists a distinction between the sensory contents (i.e. the given) of our perceptual experiences and the conceptualisation or linguistic expression, or as Lewis will

⁵² The term 'objective things' used in this extract, refers to the objects (trees, pens, mountains etc.) located in our physical environment. And we become aware of these things, according to Lewis, through the sensory contents we acquire during sense perception.

put it, the “judgement” on this sensory content (Lewis, 1946: 203-204). If his interpretation of the terminating beliefs is accepted then it will mean that since the terminating beliefs are judgements about their respective sensory contents, say, redness, these judgements are considered either true or false depending on how they reflect the actual nature of their respective contents. A serious problem that Laurence Bonjour associates with this way of construing the terminating beliefs or judgements is that such beliefs will not be after all self-justified as Lewis would want us to accept (Bonjour and Sosa, 2003: 18). Bonjour makes this deduction on the basis of the answer Lewis is likely to give to the following questions:

Even if it is somehow not strictly a belief, is it still a conceptualisation or classification of the experiential element in question? Is what is directly apprehended or ‘given’ something like the truth of the conceptually formulated *proposition* that there is a red and triangular experiential element present (rather than no such element at all or only one that is green and square or blue and oval or some other combination of colour and shape) (Bonjour and Sosa, 2003: 18)?

Lewis’ likely answer to the above questions is as follows

It is not this physical event which, in my terminating judgment, I intend to predict, but merely the passage of experience itself. And this prediction of experience is something which at the moment of stepping will become completely certain or certainly false. In making this judgment I assert nothing of objective reality but only, for example, what could still be tested if I should be a paralytic with the delusion that he still walked; and tested with positive result if that delusion were sufficiently systematic (Lewis, 1946: 203-204).

The response given by Lewis in the preceding extract substantiates the point that he draws a demarcation between the judgement— the linguistic expression or conceptualisation of the ‘given’—and the ‘given’, in that, the ‘given’ is the content of its respective terminating judgement or belief. What then happens is that the justification of the veracity of the (visual) terminating judgement, for instance, ‘I am at the moment seeing a red book on the green grass,’ ceases to be self-justified. What justificatory reason does an agent have in support of his claim that his judgement about his sensory content, in fact, reflects the actual nature of the content predicted by the judgement? As Bonjour

suggests, the terminating judgement would have to depend on other reasons (other supposed terminating judgement) such as, ‘I have a good mental capacity to grasp my sensory contents and hence my current judgement actually reflects its predicted content,’ for adequate justification. The agent can therefore be asked to justify his belief that he has a good mental capacity for grasping his sensory content. In this case, it is likely that one will be found in a position where he would need an infinite series of beliefs to justify the above belief once interrogation of each preceding belief goes on and on; hence, the ‘epistemic regress problem’ may threaten. And since the agent may not be able to provide all these justificatory beliefs (because his mind is finite and can only apprehend a finite number of reasons or beliefs), it would therefore mean that his visual terminating judgement above is unjustified and so it does not qualify as an instance of a justified belief.

Alternatively, in order for Lewis’ terminating judgement in the above paragraph to escape this supposed vicious regress, it would have to seek justification from the sensory content of the belief involved. This alternative suggests that one should hold his judgement about the content as true on the assumption that the condition under which the sensory content was obtained was conducive, though one has no grasp of this condition. In this scenario, Lewis’ account will be no different from Armstrong’s account given in the earlier section. For both will hold that grasping the condition under which a belief (specifically the content of a belief) is obtained is not a necessary requirement for justifying that belief. This position has already been proved to be misleading.⁵³ The analysis given in this section has also proved Lewis’ theory as an insufficient solution to the ‘regress problem’ of epistemic justification, therefore, Bonjour’s rejection of Lewis’ standard of justification as untenable is plausible from my point of view.

⁵³ Refer to the previous sections of this chapter.

3.3 The Problem of Origin-Justification Distinction

From the forgoing discussions in this chapter, I examine two distinct views in relation to the notion of basic beliefs and how they purport to resolve ‘the regress problem’, viz. Armstrong’s and Lewis’ respective views. Armstrong holds the position that there are relevant elements that ought to immediately obtain between a belief and its external object before that belief can be considered as a basic belief—a self-justified belief for that matter. Nonetheless, he claims that it is not imperative for the agent involved to know these elements before the agent’s beliefs can be termed self-justified. On the other hand, Lewis argues that an agent cannot claim his belief to be a basic belief without the agent involved knowing the relevant elements that make that belief a basic belief or self-justified. I discussed the problems that each of these positions on the notion of basic beliefs faces.⁵⁴

Notwithstanding the differences in views between Armstrong and Lewis on the nature of a basic belief, there is a point of agreement between them on this same basic belief. They accept that basic beliefs are directly acquired from the sensory contents of our experiences. For instance, out of an agent’s sensory experience, redness and shinny patch, he can formulate a basic belief, such as, ‘I can visually see a red light from across the road.’ Furthermore, Armstrong and Lewis agree on the ground that a basic belief is self-justified because of its immediate relation with sense experience. According this latter agreement, supposing the belief ‘I, presently, see a red light from across the road,’ is a basic belief—i.e. it is obtained directly from the sensory content, redness and a shinny patch, then it will mean that any belief, such as, ‘There is a red light across the road,’ inferred from that basic belief will be justified by virtue of the inferred belief standing in a

⁵⁴ This section is not concerned with the disagreement between Armstrong and Lewis with regard to the nature of basic beliefs. So, refer to the previous sections in this chapter for detail on the peculiar challenges faced by Armstrong’s and Lewis’ respective notions on basic beliefs.

‘right relation’ with the basic belief involved. This section centres on the general ‘foundationalist’ claim that the origin of a basic belief sufficiently makes it (basic belief) self-justified. The problem that will preoccupy this section is: is a basic belief’s direct derivation from sensory contents enough to make them self-justified and even serve as the point of truncating the regress which is involved in belief justification?

BonJour agrees with Armstrong and Lewis on their claim that there are beliefs that are non-inferentially derived or acquired from external objects without deducing the origin of these beliefs from other beliefs (BonJour, 1985: 113). Notwithstanding the above, BonJour contests Armstrong’s and Lewis’ supposition that non-inferential beliefs are epistemically justified on the ground that these beliefs’ origin is ‘unquestionable’. To refer to a belief’s origin as ‘unquestionable’, in Armstrong’s case, will mean that an ‘appropriate relation’ or ‘condition’ obtains between that belief and its physical object regardless of the agent’s awareness of the relation or condition involved. But BonJour argues that it is a mistake for one to argue that the origin of specifically ‘observational beliefs’, can sufficiently stand as the justificatory grounds of those beliefs (BonJour, 1985: 112).⁵⁵

In BonJour’s view, there are two senses wherein a belief can be considered as either inferential or non-inferential, namely, the origin sense and the justification sense (BonJour, 1985: 112).

But this seeming powerful argument, implicit in many versions of foundationalism, is in fact much less compelling than it seems.⁵⁶ It rests on a conflation of two quite different senses in which a belief may be classified as “inferential” or “non-inferential.” In the first place, there is the question of how the belief was *arrived*

⁵⁵ BonJour (1985) objects that any notion of basic belief is an adequate premise to justify all other beliefs, hence, he rather refers to these supposed basic beliefs as observational beliefs. So any where an observational belief is mentioned or criticised in this section, indirectly, it is a criticism which is directed to any of the notions of basic beliefs referred to in previous sections.

⁵⁶ The ‘seeming powerful argument’ referred to by BonJour in this extract is that it is implausible to infer the justification of beliefs that are derived directly from experience from other belief. The point that this argument seems to suggest is that beliefs that are obtained immediately from experience ought to be justified immediately by experience but not by other beliefs.

at, of its origin or genesis in the thinking of the person in question: was it arrived at via a process of inference (explicit or implicit), relying on other beliefs as premises, or was it arrived at in some other, nondiscursive way...? But, second, there is also the quite distinct issue of how the belief in question is epistemically *justified* or *warranted* (if it is): is it justified by virtue of standing in appropriate inferential relations to other beliefs and ultimately by forming part of a coherent system of beliefs (whether or not such inferences have actually been rehearsed), or is it justified in some other, non-inferential way (BonJour, 1985: 112)?

He asserts that a belief can be obtained or originated either inferentially or non-inferentially. To obtain a belief inferentially, according to BonJour, means that the belief involved is derived from further beliefs (BonJour, 1985: 112). For instance, out of the belief ‘I, presently, see a shiny red light from across the road,’ one may infer the belief ‘the light that is located from across the road is red and shiny.’ The origin of the second type of belief requires that there be a prior belief that causes the second belief’s existence—in this case, the existence of the belief ‘the red light that is located from across the road is red and shiny.’ On the other hand, BonJour argues that non-inferentially derived beliefs are those beliefs which are originated directly from sense experience. That is, non-inferential beliefs are acquired when our sensory receptacles come into contact with objects in our external environment (BonJour, 1985: 112-113).

In BonJour view, the non-inferential means of originating beliefs is done through a process that does not involve an agent’s reflection on other beliefs. Stated differently, they are acquired directly from sensory contents of our experiences (BonJour, 1985: 112). Also, he claims that these beliefs are obtained without the deliberate intent of epistemic agents. They are rather imposed on the agent by his external environment. BonJour asserts

...a cognitively spontaneous belief: one that simply “strikes” the observer in an involuntary, coercive, non-inferential way, rather than arising as a product of any sort of inference or other discursive process, whether explicit or implicit. The suggestion is that ordinary observational beliefs that are a causal result of sensory experience in fact have this sort of status... (BonJour and Sosa, 2003: 49).

For instance, if an agent, knowingly or unknowingly, sits on a chair and the chair is in fact cold, all things being equal, he, against his will, may obtain a belief, such as, ‘The chair I

am sitting on presently feels cold.’ That is, this belief is derived without the agent involved giving a second thought or reflection to it.

On the other hand, Bonjour claims that when it comes to justifying one’s observational beliefs, there can only be one way of justifying them. He maintains that observational beliefs are justified in an inferential manner but not non-inferential manner (Bonjour, 1985: 113). Stated differently, these beliefs are epistemically justified as a result of how they fit into the beliefs held by the agent involved. Bonjour further asserts that “Indeed, there is no reason to think that all or necessarily even most cognitively spontaneous beliefs are justified... (Bonjour and Sosa, 2003: 49).”⁵⁷ The point that I can deduce from this extract is that since an agent is not involved in any form of reflection when obtaining the belief involved, he will not be in a position to tell whether such a belief is as a result of a genuine perceptual experience or one that results from a hallucinatory or illusory defect. Once the agent has no means of distinguishing his genuine belief-state from a hallucinatory or illusory belief-state, that agent cannot consider his observational beliefs (basic beliefs) as self-justified or non-inferentially justified. What Bonjour is in effect saying is that the justification of such beliefs has to be inferred from other beliefs since the experience source from which a belief is immediately derived may not be a favourable source of belief acquisition (Bonjour, 1985: 113).⁵⁸

The implication of the origin/justification distinction, in Bonjour’s perspective, is that although observational beliefs are by necessity non-inferentially derived from sensory experience, its justificatory ground is rather inferential but not non-inferential (Bonjour,

⁵⁷ Bonjour makes this remark initially in 1985 when he was preparing the grounds to defend the supposition that beliefs are said to be justified only when they fit into a set of beliefs an agent already holds to be true. This position is termed ‘coherentism’. His 1985 coherentist view is not the item of discussion in this paper, hence, for details on his defense of this view refer to pp. 87 ff. of his 1985 and pp.42 ff. of his 2003 works.

⁵⁸ Donald Davidson ([1983] 2001) also supports and reiterates this point as follows: A relationship between a sensation and a belief cannot be logical, since sensations are not beliefs or other propositional attitudes. What then is the relation? The answer is, I think, obvious: the relation is causal. Sensations cause some beliefs and in this sense are the basis or ground of those beliefs. But the causal explanation of a belief does not show how or why the belief is justified p.143.

1985: 113). This claim objects to Armstrong's and Lewis' characterisation of how observational beliefs are justified. That is, BonJour claims that what serves as the justificatory ground for observational belief (i.e., system of belief) is distinct from what serves as the belief's origin (i.e., sensory experience) (BonJour, 1985: 112-113).⁵⁹

I am in consonance with BonJour on his claim that observational beliefs cannot be considered as self-justified. My agreement is on the premise that these observational beliefs which are acquired involuntarily could be as a result of abnormal circumstances that are either caused by our sensory receptacles or our external environment. For instance, an observational belief obtained from visual illusion could misinform an agent about the real nature (colour) of an object in his external environment, especially when the agent is unaware of his illusory defect. That is, even when the colour of this object (car) in his environment is pink, he may misinterpret the colour to be blue or any other colour due to the fact that he is a victim of visual illusion. This case suggests and also affirms BonJour's point that the origin of observational beliefs (basic beliefs) does not suffice to justify these observational beliefs as self-justified or as instances of a justified belief. In other words, observational beliefs can be arrived at non-inferentially, though its justification cannot necessarily be non-inferential. Hence, basic beliefs are not a sufficient basis in resolving 'the regress problem' that befalls the issue of epistemic justification.

⁵⁹ This is a proposed solution that the earlier BonJour (1985) suggested in order to resolve that 'the regress problem'. This proposed solution is termed 'coherentism'. But in my view is problematic. Granted that observational beliefs are justified by 'a system of beliefs', then, how is 'the system of beliefs' justified? Is it justified by recourse to the same observational beliefs? If yes, then such justification will be circular in nature and the problem will be that because both sets of beliefs (observational and 'the system of beliefs') are not justified, they will not be adequate to lend justification to each other. But if the answer is no, then probably, it will mean that the system of belief is 'internally' justified without any recourse to observational belief or experience for its (the system) justification. But this alternative will also seem problematic since people formulated a system of beliefs which are not genuine to experience and yet because it's 'internally consistent' will be considered as justified. But the point is that a genuine basis of empirical justification cannot be devoid of element of experience. Since, the discussion of this view is not the focus of this study; I will not go into detail. Refer to BonJour (1985, 2003) for further discussion on the detail and problems of 'coherentism'.

CHAPTER FOUR

An Examination of BonJour's Internalist Foundationalism

Notwithstanding BonJour's 1985 objections to basic beliefs as adequate ground for justifying empirical beliefs, his 2003 view on justification reconsiders basic beliefs as the basic unit for justification, and for resolving 'the regress problem'. He, thus, roughly supports the claim that in seeking for justification for our empirical beliefs such as 'There is a yellow book on my writing desk,' we have to take recourse to basic beliefs such as 'I can, presently, see a yellow book on my writing desk.' In his view, the basic beliefs which serve as the justificatory foundations for the former beliefs 'There is a yellow book on my writing desk' are in themselves justified without needing justification from other beliefs.

There is a fundamental issue that BonJour tackles in order to argue for his stance that empirically true beliefs are adequately justified by basic beliefs. Central and also peculiar to his notion of a basic belief is the issue of the nature of what is referred to as 'immediate apprehension of the "given"'. The nature of 'immediate apprehension of the "given"' is the primary issue that BonJour concentrates on in order to distinguish his version of 'internalist foundationalism' from that of Lewis'. Primarily, in this chapter I will discuss in detail BonJour's notion of a basic belief and also consider some challenges that Alvin Goldman (2001) levels against BonJour's construal of basic beliefs. All these will be done with the aim of making clearer BonJour's notion of basic beliefs, hence, preparing the grounds for the evaluation of his notion of basic beliefs in relation to the 'regress problem' in the next chapter.

4.1 BonJour's Notion of a Basic Belief

Laurence BonJour (2001) argues, just as Lewis does, that all the necessary elements that make a basic belief an adequate warrant for an agent's other empirical beliefs ought to be available to the awareness of at least the agent himself if not to his

fellow agents. He, thus, argues that the agent must always be aware that the basic beliefs which support his empirical claim are true or obtain (p. 54). This claim suffers from the ‘regress problem’.⁶⁰ What is important, which will be discussed later in this chapter, is how BonJour, whilst defending the above argument, resolves the ‘regress problem’.

BonJour further asserts that the constituents of a basic belief are not entirely ‘mental’ in character. He rather asserts that although a basic belief is partly constituted by a ‘mental element’, it also has a ‘non-mental element’. He maintains that the ‘non-mental element’ that forms part of a basic belief must also be within the mental grasp of the agent involved (BonJour, preprint: 7, 12; Goldman, 2001: 462). Since the beliefs we are concerned with are obtained through sensory experience, the ‘non-mental element’ identified above, must be that which is produced out of our sensory contact with objects in our external environment. BonJour refers to this ‘non-mental element’ as the sensory content of our experiences or the ‘given’ (BonJour and Sosa, 2003: 70). BonJour terms this view “access internalism” (BonJour, preprint: 3). This states that all the elements—both mental and non-mental—that are involved in belief justification must be ‘internalised’ by the agent involved (BonJour, preprint: 3, 7-8). By the term ‘internalised’, BonJour means that the mind must have as its content the ‘mental’ and ‘non-mental elements’ that is constituted by a basic belief.

From the discussion above, it can be inferred that BonJour’s notion of a basic belief can be understood as having two component parts. These component parts are the ‘mental element’ and the ‘non-mental element’.⁶¹ BonJour, as noted above, argues that for a basic

⁶⁰ Refer to Sections 2.2.1 and 3.3.0 for further discussion on the infinite regress problem.

⁶¹ Although response to this question is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is important I point out that Richard Feldman and Earl Conee (2001) disagree with BonJour on his (BonJour) claim that the elements that comprise an adequate reason (basic belief) are not entirely mental in nature. Rather, in Feldman’s and Conee’s perspective, elements that qualify to form part of a basic belief are totally mental in nature (pp.3-5). Their claim is made on the premise that once elements such as sensory content of our experience are internalized—cognitively grasped—that element becomes mental in nature. This means that they credit mental elements as the only legitimate factors to justify our empirical beliefs (p.5). This view is called “mentalism”. The conflict (the problem of whether basic beliefs are entirely mental in nature or not) that

belief to be accepted as adequate to justify our beliefs as cases of justified beliefs, the basic belief must contain, at least, an appropriate sensory content (non-mental) from the external world. Thus basic beliefs are non-inferentially derived from our external environment. Bonjour's view that basic beliefs are sufficient basis for justifying other empirical beliefs stands in opposition to his 1985 claim that the origin of a belief cannot necessarily stand as the justificatory ground of that belief or the justification for any other belief (Bonjour, 1985: 112-113).⁶²

We saw in Chapters Two and Three that any attempt to justify one's belief from its non-inferential origin (sensory content) will be indefensible. For instance, there may be certain unfavourable conditions (such as poor visual perception which may be as a result of either a defect in one's eyes or poor lighting system) under which we obtain non-inferential beliefs, though as epistemic agents we may wrongly think that these conditions are favourable. And in such unfavourable condition, the belief that results will be a misrepresentation of the respective physical objects they aim at describing.

The important issue here is about how Bonjour resolves the related problem of basic beliefs that I have identified above since he now advocates the claim that a non-inferential belief suffices to credit itself and other inferred beliefs as justified. To appreciate the extent to which Bonjour succeeds in dealing with this problem, it will be helpful if we analyse his interpretation of the nature of an agent's grasp of the content of the agent's own basic beliefs.

ensues between Bonjour on the one hand and Feldman and Conee on the other hand is not essential to the progress of this thesis. This is because Feldman and Conee are not objecting to Bonjour's claim that there is the need for experiential content to be embraced in formulating basic beliefs. The problem is, simply, how this experiential or sensory content is to be construed—mental or non-mental. Hence, the evaluation of Feldman's and Conee's objection to Bonjour's claim above will add very little, if at all, to the purpose of this thesis—the examination of Bonjour's standard of epistemic justification.

⁶² Refer to Section 2.3.1 for details on Bonjour's objection to basic beliefs as adequate unit for epistemic justification.

4.1.1 The Notion of Immediate Apprehension

The ‘mental element’ of a basic belief identified in the preceding section plays an essential role in Bonjour’s notion of immediate apprehension. For that matter, we will first analyse what Bonjour takes to be the entailment of this ‘mental element’. By ‘mental element’ he is referring to an epistemic agent’s ‘act of apprehending’ the sensory content of his experience with his mind. In Bonjour’s perspective, the mind’s ability to ‘apprehend’ things that are outside it is distinct from the thing—the sensory content of experience—that it (mind) apprehends (Bonjour, preprint: 8). Put differently, the ‘act’ is distinct from the ‘object’ apprehended. He further claims that the agent’s ‘act of apprehension’ is “directly” and “unproblematically” available to the agent involved (Bonjour, 2001: 54). What does Bonjour mean by his claim that the ‘act of grasping’ or ‘apprehension’ is a direct and unproblematic activity? Alvin Goldman (2001) raises a similar problem about how Bonjour interprets the “directness” and “unproblematicness” characteristics of the ‘act of grasping’ (p. 462). Goldman argues

A bit later Bonjour says that the things to which the justification may appeal must be “direct” and “unproblematic”, so directness and unproblematicness are crucial to his conception of the internal. The internal should not be restricted to conscious mental states and their properties... To fix what Bonjour means by “internal,” then, we must fix what he means by “direct and unproblematic” access or availability. Claims to which a person has direct and unproblematic access, he says, are claims that do “not depend on other claims that would themselves have to be justified in some more indirect way (p. 462).”

In Goldman’s view, Bonjour’s explanation of the notion of “directness” is circular. Goldman’s contention is based on the fact that Bonjour alludes to the term “indirectness” in explaining the notion of “directness” (Goldman, 2001: 462). In my point of view, Goldman’s contention is tenable. My reason is that to resort to the term “indirectness” in explaining “directness” presupposes that one already knows the meaning of “indirectness”. But Bonjour does not explain what “indirectness” means. In other words, I do not understand what Bonjour means by “indirectness” which, in my view, makes “directness”

still unexplained and unclear. Hence, inasmuch as the meaning of “directness”, as Goldman argues, comes with obscurity, the meaning of “indirectness” is also obscure. It is, thus, untenable for Bonjour to explain “directness” by referring to its opposite term “indirectness”. Goldman argues that such explanation is not illuminating; it gives us no information about what “directness” means. It is on the basis of the above argument that I concur with Goldman’s objection.

As argued above, it is evident that Bonjour does not really provide us with any better explanation of what the terms “directness” and “unproblematicness” mean in relation to his assertion, “Claims to which a person has direct and unproblematic access are claims that do ‘not depend on other claims that would themselves have to be justified in some more *indirect* way’ (Bonjour, 2001: 54).” But one way to rescue Bonjour from the difficulty of explaining what he means by his claim that the ‘act of grasping’ is ‘directly’ and ‘unproblematically’ accessible to the agent involved is to resort to Rene Descartes’ conception of a person as a thinking being. Put differently, Bonjour’s claim above, though obscured in meaning, reminisces Descartes’ notion of thought and other mental activities like doubting and dreaming.

In Descartes’ view, the act of thinking is self-evident to the agent who is involved in that act (Descartes, 2000: 108-109).⁶³ According to Descartes, the act of thinking is self-evident if the agent involved knows that he is thinking without inferring his knowledge of this act from anything except the act itself (Descartes, 2000: 108-109). The point is that the agent himself cannot even doubt that he is thinking at a particular moment since for Descartes to even doubt that he is having a particular thought is in itself a form of thought. I am tempted to think that this is what Bonjour means when he asserts that the mental state (the act of grasping) is direct to the agent involved in such activity. For instance, when an

⁶³ The act of thinking, just as the act of grasping, is an a priori notion since this act is undertaken without recourse to the sensory organs.

agent possesses the belief that ‘There exist horse-like creatures called unicorns that can fly like birds,’ the agent’s ‘act of grasping’ the content of this belief is not inferred from anything except the ‘act of grasping’ itself. It is rather the content—horse-like creatures called unicorns that can fly like birds—which the agent might have inferred from, say, his visual experience of a horse and a bird. In this sense, it can be said that the content of the belief above is inferential whereas the ‘act of apprehension’ itself is non-inferential.

It should also be noted that, in my view, once an agent’s awareness of his participation in the ‘act of grasping’ is direct, it will be indefensible and unacceptable for him to also claim that his ‘awareness of this ‘act’ is false. On the contrary, the agent can only doubt (claim to be problematic) the content of his belief, what his ‘act of grasping’ is about. As shown above, the agent can have doubt about the content of his belief, that is, unicorns exist, or perhaps fail to even have a vivid grasp or understanding of what unicorns are. It is in this light that I think Bonjour asserts that mental states, that is, the ‘act of grasping’, aside from it being a ‘direct’ awareness of the agent involved, is also “unproblematically” ascertained. I do not foresee any other way to redeem or make sense of Bonjour’s conception of “directness” and “unproblematicness” with respect to the ‘act of grasping’ except likening his notion to Cartesian conception of thought as I have elucidated above.

4.1.2. Direct and Unproblematic Awareness of Sensory Contents

Granted that my defence of Bonjour’s interpretation of the “directness” and “unproblematicness” of the ‘act of grasping’ is legitimate, I will now move on to another claim of Bonjour which is of primary concern to this thesis, though this claim is also related to his notion of “directness” and “unproblematicness”. Bonjour asserts

The other side of this point is that, contrary to what Goldman supposes, there is ‘nothing at all’ about the fundamental rationale for internalism that automatically limits what is available for and relevant to internalist justification to facts about

conscious mental state and their properties as such. If there are facts of some other sort that are directly and unproblematically available from a person's first-person cognitive perspective, then these are equally acceptable for this purpose. Thus, to take the most important case, if some facts about logical and probabilistic relations among propositions can be directly discerned via *a priori* insight in a way that does not depend on claims that can only be justified indirectly, then these facts would also be available from the first-person perspective in which the global epistemological issue is raised (BonJour, 2001: 55).

What is important, at this moment, from this extract is Bonjour's further claim that mental elements, in this case the 'act of grasping', are not the only elements that are 'directly' and 'unproblematically' available to epistemic agents with regard to the justification of beliefs. In other words, the non-mental element (sensory contents) of a basic belief is also directly and unproblematically apprehended. I will restrict myself to the sensory content of our experience as one of the "other facts" that BonJour refers to in the above extract. This is because this study is basically concerned with beliefs which are obtained through sensory experience (The mango tastes sour) but not through any other medium.⁶⁴ Is it defensible for BonJour to claim that the sensory contents of our experience are directly and unproblematically accessible to us?

Goldman objects to this claim made by BonJour, namely, sensory contents are 'directly' and 'unproblematically' accessible to the mind of the agent involved. In Goldman's view, "facts" are things that are located in our external environment. They are acquired through sense perception, and in his view, during sense perception it is only the 'given' (sensory contents) which are perceived by epistemic agents but not the "facts" themselves. He, thus, claims that these facts cannot be accessed directly since what is directly accessed during sense perception is only the 'given' (Goldman, 2001: 436).

Goldman writes

⁶⁴ I must acknowledge that the kind of belief in question determines the kind of non-mental element that will serve as the "other fact" required for the internalist approach to justification aside from the mental element—the act of grasping. For instance, if the kind of belief in question is obtained a priori, then these "other facts" will be logical or probabilistic in nature. Refer to BonJour (2001) p. 55.

According to standard forms of internalism, facts that make perceptual beliefs true are external facts. Because of this, such facts could not qualify as justifiers under orthodox varieties of internalism. One expects Bonjour to maintain that introspection and rational insight yield direct and unproblematic access to certain facts, and that these types of facts are the internal ones. Perception, on the other hand, is a resource that presumably discloses external facts. So perception had better be a resource that yields at most indirect and problematic access to facts. But this is not what Bonjour says. What he actually says is: “if a direct realist view [of perception] should turn out to be correct, then, at least on some versions, perceptual beliefs might be directly justified in a way that would satisfy the basic rationale for the internalist view”... This strikes me as a rather bizarre conception of internalism, sharply at variance with most epistemologists’ uses of the term (Goldman, 2001: 463).

Bonjour denies that he holds any view that roughly claims that external facts are directly apprehended without any medium called the ‘given’ or sensory content (Bonjour, 2001: 56). Any view that conforms to the claim that external objects, such as, trees and mountains are perceived unmediated by mediums like sensory content or the ‘given’ is generally termed as ‘direct realism’. Bonjour remarks that his own view “is that no direct realist view genuinely succeeds in achieving *this result*... (Bonjour, 2001: 56).” He means that to claim that external facts are perceived without any intermediaries (the given or sensory content) and that such perception is the basis of ‘internalism’—the view that the elements that justify our sensory beliefs are internal to us—is untenable. Though Bonjour does not give any explanation why any ‘direct realist view’ about ‘internalism’ will not hold, I think Bonjour claims so because such account of ‘internalism’ will consider ‘external facts’, such as, physical trees, pens etc. instead of ‘internal facts’ (images of trees, pens etc.) as the primary elements of epistemic justification. If this happens, ‘the internalist’ thesis that the elements that justify our empirical beliefs are ‘internal’ to us will relapse into the claim that the elements that justify our empirical ‘beliefs’ are rather in the external world—‘externalism’. My main concern is not about whether or not ‘direct realism’ can give an accurate account of ‘internalism’; I rather aim to disprove Goldman’s attribution of ‘direct realist’ view to Bonjour. As earlier presented, Bonjour acknowledges

the role that the sensory contents of our experiences, but not their respective external objects, play in our formulation of basic beliefs.

Let us turn our attention to Goldman's contention against Bonjour's claim that 'facts', that is, the sensory contents of our experience, are directly apprehended by us (Goldman, 2001: 463). In my view, Bonjour's claim is right on point in the sense that when an agent perceives an external object, what that perception presents to the agent is nothing other than the 'given' (sensory content of his experience) of what is perceived. The point is that an agent's access to these sensory contents is not inferred from the external object. Rather, it is through the sensory content that the agent infers that there is an external object that corresponds to the characteristics of his sensory content. For instance, during a visual perception such as, 'I can see a red car from across the road,' an agent might come to possess a sensory content with the following characteristics: redness and shiny pattern. As per these characteristics, the agent might infer that there is a red car in the external world that has come into contact with his sense of sight. Hence, Bonjour is right in maintaining that the sensory contents of our experiences, just as the 'act of apprehension', are not inferred from external materials and that they are directly accessible to us.

It is also unjustified for Goldman to object to Bonjour's assertion that we become aware of facts, the sensory contents of our experience, without any obstacles or hindrances (Goldman, 2001: 463). My claim is not to be taken to support Bonjour's assertion above; it is rather because Goldman's objection is informed by his (Goldman) misinterpretation of Bonjour's 'internal facts' as 'external facts'. Goldman's misinterpretation supposes that during sensory perception agents perceive external objects in themselves. I have, in the preceding paragraphs, argued that Bonjour holds no such view as Goldman persuades us to accept. Notwithstanding my objection to Goldman's claim, I also object to Bonjour's

claim that our sensory contents are always apprehended without any distortions. In my view, unlike the ‘act of apprehension’ itself, our apprehension of the sensory content of our experiences—though is direct—sometimes presents us with distorted images or representation of their external objects. My argument is that to have an apprehension of one’s sensory content, one’s psychological makeup plays a vital role. My point is that one may not have the psychological aptness in ascertaining the real characteristics of his sensory content. For instance, an agent who is facing financial, family or societal problems may end up wrongly apprehending the content of his experience. That is, out of frustration, the agent may apprehend a ‘yellow patch’ as a ‘green patch’. The agent, at that moment, may not be psychologically capable to identify the characteristics of his sensory content. It is in the light of this that I disagree with BonJour’s claim that our sensory contents are apprehended ‘unproblematically’. My argument against BonJour’s claims will be clearer as we turn to examine his response to the following question: Is our awareness of the sensory content conceptual (descriptive or judgemental) or non-conceptual? In other words, what is the nature of our apprehension of sensory contents?

4.1.3. The Nature of Immediate Apprehension of Sensory Contents

BonJour repudiates the supposition that if an agent’s sensory content is, for example, redness and shiny, then his immediate awareness of this content involves a description of the sensory content in question. Such description could be, ‘I can see a red car from across the road.’ C. I. Lewis and David Rosenthal defend the supposition objected to by BonJour.⁶⁵ In BonJour’s standpoint, construing our immediate apprehension as describing what is contained in the agent’s own sensory experience is a mistake. BonJour further claims that such supposition is what causes the agent to parade

⁶⁵ Refer to Section 3.2.1 for detail on Lewis’ defence of the supposition that our immediate apprehension of our sensory content is constituted by a description of the content therein.

endless justificatory reasons in support of the agent's claim that his description correctly depicts his sensory content (BonJour and Sosa, 2003: 62). Stated differently, interpreting our immediate awareness of sensory contents in this manner amounts to the 'regress problem' that was identified and discussed in Chapter Two.

On the other hand, Bonjour claims that an agent's immediate apprehension of the agent's own sensory content must be understood as that which does not involve any judgement of any kind or characterisation of the content involved. Rather, this immediate apprehension is non-judgmental or non-conceptual—it does not state or describe the characteristic of an agent's sensory content (BonJour and Sosa, 2003: 62-63, 72). Let us assume an agent has an immediate apprehension of a (visual) sensory content of 'red patch,' the agent is not in any way, in BonJour's view, describing the content of his experience. The agent, thus, is not making a claim that his sensory content is of 'red patch' description, neither is the agent asserting that 'I can see a red car from across the road'. But I find it difficult to see how such an interpretation of immediate apprehension can serve as the justificatory basis for other empirical beliefs. If an agent's immediate apprehension of his sensory content is non-judgmental, then such apprehension will lack truth-value. And thus, will not be viable to serve as justificatory premise for other beliefs. Wilfrid Sellars (1975) points out this problem as follows

Might not apprehending occur without any fact being apprehended?... If so, to know that we have apprehended a fact, we would have to know that the criteria which distinguish apprehending from seeming to apprehend were satisfied. In short, I suspect that the notion of a non-conceptual 'direct apprehension' of a 'fact' provides a merely verbal solution to our problem. The regress is stopped by an ad hoc regress-stopper (Section V para. 23 and 25).

From the above extract, Sellars iterates that not all cases of the act of apprehension contain the appropriate sensory contents. And in cases where the immediate apprehension involved is devoid of characterising its sensory content, that apprehension cannot be ascribed with any truth-value. This is because merely obtaining a sensory content does not

qualify that content as a belief of any kind—it is neither a categorical belief nor non-categorical belief.⁶⁶ Hence, such apprehension of a sensory content (red patch) can neither be true nor false. For instance, an agent cannot justify his belief ‘there is a red car across the road’ on the basis of the belief, ‘I appear to see a red car across the road,’⁶⁷ let alone justifying the initial belief on the mere sensory content, ‘red patch’. Sellars’ reason is that beliefs that serve as justificatory basis for other beliefs must have truth-value and since the latter beliefs have no truth-value (neither truth nor false), they cannot epistemically justify any other beliefs (Sellars, 1963: 134). Once, it has no truth-value, one will be totally uncertain or very less certain about the genuineness of his sensory content and it will be erroneous to justify a belief on a content whose genuineness from your own perspective is in doubt.

In a manner similar to the critique from Sellars, BonJour (1985) with his origin/justification distinction also discounts the claim that the origin of a belief can necessarily stand as the justificatory ground for that belief and even for other beliefs (pp. 112-113). How, then, does BonJour’s 2003 account of immediate apprehension as non-conceptual or non-descriptive survive his earlier critique against basic beliefs as final justificatory premise and Sellars’ above mentioned critique? To discuss this question, we need to consider how BonJour substantiates his assertion that immediate apprehension of sensory content is non-descriptive yet adequate to resolve the ‘regress problem’.

BonJour’s account of how his supposition—the immediate awareness of sensory content is not descriptive in nature—avoids the above mentioned challenges is underpinned by how he construes the relation between ‘consciousness’ and beliefs.⁶⁸ He

⁶⁶ Refer to Chapter One-Section 2.0.0. for the distinction between categorical beliefs and non-categorical beliefs.

⁶⁷ Although, ‘I appear to see a red car across the road,’ is a belief, this belief is not a categorical one since the belief in question gives room for the possibility of error.

⁶⁸ There is the need to prompt my readers on the contentious nature of the concept of consciousness in philosophy, especially Philosophy of Mind. I must admit, it is equally contentious and important as the

discounts the claim that an agent can be aware or conscious of his sensory content only via another belief or a “higher-order thought” to borrow the term of David Rosenthal (1986). The claim objected to by Bonjour is master-minded by David Rosenthal. Rosenthal’s claim is that for an agent to have an awareness of his (visual) sensory content (e.g., red patch and a square pattern) the agent must possess another belief (i.e., I am at the moment having a visual perception of red pen on a square-shaped table) that reflects the above content. He thus holds that one cannot be aware of his sensory content unless one possesses a belief about the content. Rosenthal’s fundamental claim can be formulated as: ‘consciousness’ is not a core property of any belief, be it an ‘occurrent’ or ‘dispositional’, but a property given to a belief by another belief (p. 335-336).⁶⁹ Thus, it is only when an initial belief is realised by a “higher-order” belief that the initial belief can be termed as being ‘consciously’ held. Rosenthal asserts

Conscious states are simply mental states we are conscious of being in. And, in general, our being conscious of something is just a matter of our having a thought of some sort about it. Accordingly, it is natural to identify a mental state’s being conscious with one’s having a roughly contemporaneous thought that one is in that mental state. When a mental state is conscious, one’s awareness of it is, intuitively, immediate in some way (p. 335).

Rosenthal’s account of the relation between ‘consciousness’ and a belief is a semblance of C. I. Lewis’ analysis of immediate apprehension. This is because by Lewis’ account, during immediate apprehension, we reflect on our sensory contents and this reflection is what confers ‘consciousness’ on that very sensory content. This suggests that

concept of epistemic justification—the focal issue of this thesis. The contention on consciousness pertains to whether or not it is tenable to reduce consciousness to physical properties. Thomas Nagel (1974) iterates the contentious nature of consciousness by claiming that the presence of it in *Philosophy of Mind* has made it difficult for philosophers to bring to a resolution (p.435). Rosenthal (1986) also alludes to this comment of Nagel (pp. 330-331). But since the resolutions of the challenges that the concept of consciousness pose lie beyond the scope of this thesis, I will not attempt any solution to these challenges. Notwithstanding the challenges that surround the concept of consciousness, consciousness when used in this thesis will be in reference to an agent’s awareness of or knowing his own state of mind or his own sensory contents.

⁶⁹ Occurrent beliefs can generally be explained as beliefs that manifest at particular times in relation to the circumstances that prompt them. By contrast, dispositional beliefs refer to the sort of beliefs that an agent possesses, though they are currently not in manifestation primarily due to the fact that the circumstances to prompt them are not due.

our reflection on this content aims at describing the characteristics of the content involved. It is this account of immediate apprehension that, as seen from preceding chapters, gives rise to the argument that our description of the ‘given’ or sensory content need to be supported by a reason if we are to accept the description as appropriately representing its respective sensory content. And for each supporting reason to be accepted there will be the need for further reasons, hence, the ‘regress problem’ ensues. Due to the semblance in view, Rosenthal also faces a similar problem that Lewis’ account encounters. Bonjour argues, as Rosenthal himself acknowledges, if a belief is consciously held only when there is another belief that realises or confers ‘consciousness’ on the former belief, then no belief (both the former and the latter) can be construed as conscious. This is because, in Bonjour’s view, making ‘consciousness’ a ‘relational property’ (property conferred on) to all beliefs (but not as an inherent property of some beliefs) leads to an unceasing series of “higher-order beliefs” (Bonjour and Sosa, 2003: 66-67). I agree with Bonjour on this critique since any “higher-order belief” that attempts to confer ‘consciousness’ on a preceding belief would have to be first a conscious belief. This will mean that “higher-order belief” would have to receive its consciousness from preceding beliefs and so on and on.

An example will help to substantiate Bonjour’s point. Let us assume that, as Rosenthal will claim, a (visual) sensory content shows ‘red patch and a square pattern.’ This content is consciously apprehended, according to Rosenthal, only if there is a belief (B), say, ‘I am at this moment seeing a red pen on the square-shaped table.’ But it will be a mistake to claim that one is ‘consciousness’ of one’s sensory content, though the sensory content under discussion is an object of the above belief (B). This is because the belief ‘B’ itself must be consciously held before it can lend consciousness to the sensory content involved. Therefore, the belief ‘B’ will also have to be an object of another belief ‘B₁’.

This means that (B_1) will not be a conscious state unless there is $B_2, B_3, B_4 \dots B_n$ to confer ‘consciousness’ on each other sequentially. The implication of this argument is that unless we get to a final belief-state that is conscious in its own right, ‘consciousness’ cannot be assigned to the sensory content involved or to any of the beliefs listed in the series above. But since Rosenthal claims that no belief can in its own right be a ‘conscious state’, then none of the above beliefs together with the sensory contents can be interpreted as being ‘conscious state’.

On the other hand, BonJour is of the view that there are certain beliefs that possess inherent ‘consciousness’. In this way, he claims the regress problem faced by Rosenthal will come to a halt with respect to the relation between consciousness and a belief. What is the nature of the beliefs that truncate this regress of beliefs? BonJour argues, the regress ends with our immediate apprehension of the sensory contents of our experiences. In defence of his claim, BonJour makes a distinction between two categories of awareness. One of these categories stipulates the characteristics of other beliefs (BonJour and Sosa, 2003: 61-63, 69-70). In other words, this category indicates, for instance, that a certain belief is of a certain characteristics—There is a red pen on the square-shaped table. This category of beliefs could be judged as either true or false as per the real nature of the content of the belief, ‘I am at this moment seeing a red pen on the square-shaped table.’ He terms this category of beliefs as “apperceptive”. The “apperceptive” belief refers to a belief that is inferred from other beliefs. In the example above, the former which is “apperceptive” in nature is inferred from the latter (I am at this moment seeing a red pen on the square-shaped table).

In contrast to the “apperceptive” belief is the category of beliefs that is derived from the immediate awareness of the sensory contents of our experiences. BonJour asserts, this latter category of beliefs, unlike ‘the apperceptive’ category, is non-inferential in

nature and does not describe its respective sensory content of experience (BonJour and Sosa, 2003: 69-70). In other words, if an agent obtains a visual sensory content of ‘red and square-shape,’ with respect to the latter category of beliefs, the agent’s awareness of this content is not deduced from any further beliefs about that particular content. Thus, the agent need not involve himself in a reflective exercise over other beliefs in order to become aware of the above content. This is what he means by claiming that the latter category of beliefs is non-inferential. Also, by claiming that the latter category of beliefs is non-descriptive, he means that such beliefs do not assert that their sensory contents are of such-and-such characteristics. So such beliefs can be judged neither as true nor false. BonJour refers to this category of beliefs as “first-order beliefs” or “constitutive awareness beliefs”. For instance, from a first-order belief (visual perception) ‘red and square-shape’ can be inferred the apperceptive belief, ‘I can see a red pen on a square-shaped table.’ According to BonJour, the latter is descriptive while the former is not.

It is unclear to me how the awareness of our sensory content can be non-descriptive in nature. Being aware of a certain sensory content, say, red and square-shape, is being aware of the characteristics of that sensory content, though one may not explicitly describe that content. For a person to claim that he is aware of a particular sensory content but his awareness identifies no character of that content implies that one’s awareness is empty (i.e. it has no content). Such a claim reduces our immediate awareness of sensory contents into absurdity, since every awareness ought to be about the characteristics of its content—whether or not the content is as a result of genuine perception. I, thus, do not think it is non-descriptive as BonJour is claiming at the moment. So I do not appreciate clearly how the immediate awareness of one’s sensory content is completely devoid of the description or characterisation of that content.

CHAPTER FIVE

Criticisms of BonJour's Internalist Foundationalism

Let us grant that BonJour's first-order belief qualifies to be an intrinsically conscious belief only for the purpose of argument. In brief, his claim is that since first-order beliefs are non-inferential and make no description of any kind about its sensory content, it is the terminal point of the regress involved in belief justification. He, thus, holds that first-order beliefs are the basis upon which apperceptive beliefs are derived and justified (BonJour and Sosa, 2003: 64, 70). I partly agree with BonJour on his aforementioned claim. It will be better if I substantiate my support with the following scenario: An agent becomes conscious of his visual sensory content, 'redness'. This awareness, as termed by BonJour, is a first-order belief. From this belief, an apperceptive belief, 'I am currently having a visual experience of red car from across the road,' is inferred. He argues that the truth of the apperceptive belief depends on how the description it makes fits the sensory content of the first-order belief. Thus, since the purpose of the apperceptive belief is to get the nature of the content of the first-order belief right, the truth-value of the description the former belief makes is determined by the real content of the first-order belief. Hence, BonJour is right in supposing that an agent's first-order belief causes and also serves as the basis of justification for its respective apperceptive belief.

On the other hand, I disagree with BonJour's answer to the question: how can an agent justify his apperceptive belief as an appropriate reflection of his sensory content?

BonJour's response to this question is as follows:

Here again there is no reason to think that mistake is impossible and thus no reason to think that such an apperceptive belief is itself infallible. But as long as there is no special reason for suspecting that a mistake has occurred, the fact that such a belief seems to accurately characterise the conscious experience that it purports to describe provides, I suggest, an entirely adequate basis for thinking that the description is correct, and thus an adequate basis for justification (BonJour, 1999: 235).

For BonJour, it is legitimate for an agent to claim that his apperceptive belief is adequately justified by his first-order belief if the agent has no counter-reason to the effect that his former belief misrepresents the content of his latter belief (BonJour and Sosa, 2003: 64-65, 73-74). One may object that BonJour's response is misleading. The reason for such response being misleading is that when an agent lacks reasons that could dispel his apperceptive belief as inadequately representing the content of his first-order belief, it could possibly be that the agent is ignorant of his poor reflections over most of these contents. It might mean that the agent mostly gets the descriptions of these contents wrong, though he may unintentionally deceive himself to have these descriptions right.⁷⁰ The point is that such claims cannot be a case of knowing that such descriptions are accurate.

In my view, the aforementioned objection is appropriate, in that, the supposition that BonJour makes leads BonJour himself into committing the mistake that was associated with D. M. Armstrong's account of epistemic justification. Armstrong holds that for an agent's belief, 'I see a red light,' to be justified, there ought to be a law-like connection between the belief and the external situation that the belief describes. Armstrong lands himself into trouble by claiming that to make the agent's true belief as a case of knowledge, the agent does not have to necessarily know that this connection obtains. All that is needed is that this law-like connection obtains. The problem with this view is that an agent who is unaware of his (visual) hallucinatory or illusory defect may misconstrue his beliefs stemming from such defects as justified. In Chapter Three, I dispelled this account as misleading, since cases of hallucination or illusion do not involve the kind of law-like connection that must obtain before a belief can be said to be an instance justified.

⁷⁰ This objection is put forth by Ernest Sosa (2003) against BonJour's response above, pp. 219-220. But to this objection, Sosa proposes a way out for BonJour. This proposed solution will be discussed in subsequent paragraphs.

Similarly, BonJour's response above deprives his agent from being justified that his apperceptive belief, 'I see a red light,' accurately describes his sensory content 'redness and shiny patch.' This is because having no counter-reason to the accurateness of one's apperceptive description does not guarantee the truth of this description. For instance, an agent may be in psychological or mental distress which may result in mental illusion, and of which he is not aware. In this case, the agent must also possess a reason why his sense of judgement or his psychological makeup was reliable when he obtained the apperceptive belief in question. Without any such reason, I see no way the agent can claim that his apperceptive description about his sensory content, as given in the above example, is a case of justified belief. Even if his judgement depicts the content of the first-order belief, the best we can say is that the agent was merely lucky to have had his apperceptive belief depict exactly the sensory content it (apperceptive) describes. Hence, it will be rather an instance of epistemic luck but not a justified belief.⁷¹

Ernest Sosa (2003) suggests a way out for BonJour with respect to the above critique. Sosa asserts

It might be objected that simply the fact that one is so highly unreliable about that many speckles already constitutes a reason for suspecting that a mistake has occurred, even if one does not take it in. So there is after all a reason for one to suspect that a mistake has occurred, and this blocks one from qualifying as foundationally justified, according to the conditions of BFP (p. 221).

This extract can be interpreted as that the agent's reason for claiming that his apperceptive belief 'I see a red light' accurately describes the sensory content 'red and shiny patch' of his first-order belief is that he has a highly reliable sense of judgement or psychological makeup. Properly stated, the agent may believe, 'My reason for construing my belief, I see a red light, about the content, red and shiny patch, as not a mistaken description is that I

⁷¹ It is considered as an epistemic luck because although the person involved is not justified for holding the belief in question, his aim for possessing the belief is to get to the truth. This is unlike the non-epistemically unjustified beliefs where the person may accidentally believe in what is true though his aim for holding the belief is not to attain the truth about the physical environment.

have a highly reliable psychological makeup.’ In this sense, the agent produces a reason why he claims that his apperceptive belief is justified. I think that this implicates BonJour the more assuming he (BonJour) subscribes to Sosa’s suggestion. This is because the moment the agent accepts that his apperceptive belief is justified on the basis of the reliability of his psychological makeup, there will be the need for him to supply further reason why his psychological makeup is reliable. And if he attempts a reason for the reliability of his psychological makeup, he will be again required to substantiate that reason with yet another reason. And this trend will go on and on till infinity—leading to the ‘regress problem’—except that he gives up and says that he has no further reason. In either of these options, the implication will be that the agent’s apperceptive belief cannot qualify as a justified belief.⁷²

Another major problem that BonJour’s interpretation of ‘immediate apprehension’ poses relates to how an agent can ascertain that the content of his first-order beliefs accurately reflects the external world of which the content represents. How does the epistemic agent involved get to know that his first-order belief is an appropriate representation of its corresponding physical object? At least, if an epistemic agent is able to know that the sensory content of his first-order belief is one which exactly depicts its external object, the agent will then be confident to derive and justify other empirical beliefs (apperceptive beliefs as BonJour will call them) on the ground of the first-order belief. And as it runs through this thesis, to grant that one’s empirical belief (be it apperceptive or first-order) is justified, there is the need for an adequate reason why his belief is true.⁷³ It is, thus, one’s ability to provide sufficient justification in support of the genuineness of some of his sensory contents that one will be able to separate his actual

⁷² Refer to Chapter Two, Section 2.3.0 for detail on the implication of the ‘regress problem’.

⁷³ Wilfrid Sellars makes remarks that emphasise that there are situations whereby our sensory contents may not depict the exact nature of their external objects; hence, there is the need to justify our beliefs that are aimed at depicting the characteristics of these external objects, Section V, paragraph 23 and 25.

instances of sense perceptual from instances where the perception is as a result of hallucination or illusion.

In my view, BonJour provides no explicit proposition of how an agent can account for his sensory content as appropriately reflecting its external object. Perhaps, his response to this challenge can be deduced from his statement

Thus contrary to many recent critics of foundationalism, the idea that *reality* is in some circumstances simply *given* to the mind in a way that makes the truth of claims about it directly and unproblematically apparent is, after all, not a myth (BonJour and Sosa, 2003: 75)!

“Reality” as used in the above extract, in BonJour’s purview, refers to the constituent of our first-order belief—our ‘constitutive awareness’ of our sensory contents (BonJour and Sosa, 2003: 74). Though a conscious state, BonJour claims that the “reality” is an accurate representation of the agent’s external environment. What the above extract presupposes is that we, epistemic agents, must presume that in certain circumstances we are presented with the exact images or sensory contents of the external objects we perceive. And it is upon this presumption about our sensory contents that, in my view, BonJour makes sensory contents the basis for inferring and warranting other beliefs as justified beliefs. But his use of the phrase “some circumstances” indicates that he accepts that there are other circumstances wherein the sensory contents obtained are not “reality”. That is, they do not exactly represent their respective external objects. Hence, the question ‘what reason does an agent have to suppose that a particular sensory content obtained represents, appropriately, its external object?’ cannot be oversimplified.

To put the above question differently, how does the agent defend that the occurrence of a certain circumstance during the acquisition of a particular sensory content is appropriate or reliable? I am tempted to think that BonJour implicitly acknowledges that the elements that necessarily connect an agent’s sensory content to the external world are not that which are available to the mind of the agent (BonJour and Sosa, 2003: 82).

Whether or not these elements are appropriate are not in the grasp of the agent involved since BonJour only requests us to presume that we ‘sometimes’ possess genuine sensory contents; hence, BonJour’s presumption that what is termed “reality”—his sensory content of experience—is the only thing the agent is aware of. But if this presumption is accepted, one will not know which acquired sensory content is “reality” and which one is not. BonJour’s proposition, thus, appears to lead us into the same difficulty that Armstrong’s account leads us into.

As recounted in preceding chapters, Armstrong does not emphasise the need for an agent to defend the elements that connect his beliefs to the external world. The implication is that it leaves an agent with no means of claiming his particular belief as true or false since he has no reason for claiming either of them. In a similar way, it will be misleading if BonJour claims that an agent’s sensory contents—red and shiny patch—should be presumed as representing the exact nature of the external world. My point is that if the agent is not aware of the external factors such as the lighting system and the conditions of his sensory receptor, he cannot claim that his beliefs (particularly first-order beliefs) are acquired under conducive circumstances, though the belief may be acquired under, in fact, a conducive circumstance. That is, there can be instances of hallucination (also illusion) or poor weather conditions under which an agent can be led to acquire beliefs that misrepresent their external objects. And once the agent involved is unaware of the sort of condition under which his sensory contents were obtained, he will not be in the right position to determine which of his beliefs stems from genuine sensory contents and which ones are from sensory contents obtained under hallucinatory or illusory situations. So I think that the mere grasp of the ‘given’ or sensory content is not enough to serve as justificatory grounds for other beliefs. It also requires that the agent involved becomes

aware of all the relevant factors—possesses the reasons—that contribute to the acquisition of his supposed genuine sensory contents.

But I must admit that if my suggestion (that to be justified in possessing a first-order belief one must be justified in possessing beliefs about the factors that influences his belief perception) is accepted, two major problems may occur. The first of these problems is that if the grasp of ‘external factors’ is required in substantiating a sensory content as rightly representing its external object, then Bonjour’s ‘internalist’ purview may collapse to some extent into ‘externalism’. For, factors like the lighting condition and the distance between an agent and a perceived object are, arguably, outside the mind of the agent involved. But one may respond, as Bonjour does, that once these ‘external factors’ are apprehended, they cease to remain ‘external properties’; rather they become ‘internalised’ (Bonjour, preprint: 8). This means that these ‘internalised’ ‘external elements’ have metamorphosed into ‘internal properties’ since they are now captured into the agent’s mind. Granted that this response is tenable, it will also presuppose that once the factors are ‘internalised’, the agent is now in the position to judge whether or not these factors are reliable. In judging the reliability of these factors, in my view, the agent will need a reason why, for instance, he holds that the lighting condition under which he acquires the sensory content, red and shiny patch, is relatively normal to his sense of sight. In doing so, the agent involved will be required to provide reasons for the justification of every preceding reason given in support of his claim that the lighting system under which his sensory content, red and shiny patch, was acquired is favourable for perceptual activities. Therefore, it is likely that ‘internalising’ elements or factors in the physical environment, in my opinion, will land us in our much familiar ‘regress problem’ that Bonjour endeavours to resolve.

The last of these two problems that I associate with my suggestion—an agent needs to have access to external factors that influence his belief formation—is that such suggestion compromises the ‘foundationalist’ claim that the basic unit of sensory justification is individual “self-justified” beliefs (basic beliefs). The basis for my claim is that the justification of an apperceptive belief, ‘I, at this moment, see a red pen on a square table,’ will not be dependent on only the nature of the sensory content, red patch and square pattern, but also other factors within or outside the mind of the person involved. Some of these factors are the lighting, the condition of one’s perceptual organs, the condition of one’s psychological makeup and the likes.

Thus, to claim that the belief, ‘I am, presently, seeing a red light from across the road,’ is true, one has to ask whether the lighting system is relatively normal for perception. He must also ask whether his perceptual organs are functioning appropriately and also the agent must make sure that he is psychologically apt to infer correctly beliefs from their appropriate sensory contents. This presupposes that one’s beliefs are justified on the basis of a host or network of factors (whether external or internal) but not only on the basis of what is ‘given’ or the sensory contents of the agent involved.⁷⁴ Hence, it is quite difficult to appreciate how Bonjour’s sole reliance on our ‘consciousness’ of the sensory contents of our experiences (basic beliefs) can be defended as a appropriate ground of empirical justification without recourse to other factors as stated above.

⁷⁴ This argued out view is what is roughly termed ‘coherentism’. If my analysis is right, it will mean that the justification of empirical beliefs has both ‘coherentist’ and ‘foundationalist’ twists.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

The issue that has been the main item of examination in this study is BonJour's claim that the basic unit of justification is a basic belief. That is not all; he also argued that all the necessary constituent elements of this basic belief ought to be known by the agent involved. He proposes the above view as an attempt to resolve the issue of epistemic justification and its related 'regress problem'. But before I examined BonJour's proposal, I first evaluated his criticisms of Armstrong's and Lewis' proposed solutions to the epistemic justification and the 'regress problem'.

Armstrong proposed that empirical beliefs are sufficiently warranted by basic beliefs that stand in a 'right relation' with their external objects that cause them (basic beliefs). He further claimed that the relevant relation need not necessarily be apprehended by the mind of the agent. He maintains this latter claim on the grounds that since the agent would have no grasp of this relation, there will be no need for the agent to adduce reasons in support of why he (the agent) believes the relation obtains or not. In this case, the agent does not fall into the challenge of providing an indefinite chain of justificatory beliefs (be it circular or linear) in support of his original belief. This, he claims, resolves 'the regress problem' that threatens any attempt to justify one's belief as a candidate of knowledge. But there was an issue that BonJour construed to be a challenge to the plausibility of Armstrong's view. The issue is that, though Armstrong's notion of a basic belief avoids the regress problem, it fails to adequately account for the justification of our knowledge claim. This is because Armstrong's view makes it difficult for an agent to distinguish between a belief obtained under hallucinatory or illusory conditions and a belief obtained under a favourable condition since the agent involved need not be aware of the relation that holds between his belief and the external world.

The next account of the notion of a basic belief with respect to ‘the regress problem’ that was considered came from Lewis. His account also credited basic beliefs as the terminal point of belief justification. He held that what makes a basic belief special from other empirical beliefs is that it directly describes our immediate awareness of the sensory contents of our experience. There is no doubt that new empirical beliefs could be inferred from basic beliefs since the latter beliefs, according to Lewis, directly describe the character of our sensory contents. The challenge faced by Lewis is how an agent will account for his (agent) claim that the description made by the basic belief either reflects or does not reflect its sensory content. Stated differently, an agent would be required to give reasons after reasons to ground his claim that the description given by the basic belief actually represents the sensory content involved. And the problem associated with this manner of justification is what has been termed ‘the regress problem’. And since such justification has no end, it presupposes that none of the justificatory beliefs is justified enough to serve as justification for other beliefs. This therefore reaffirmed Bonjour’s critique that Lewis’ notion of basic belief is implausible.

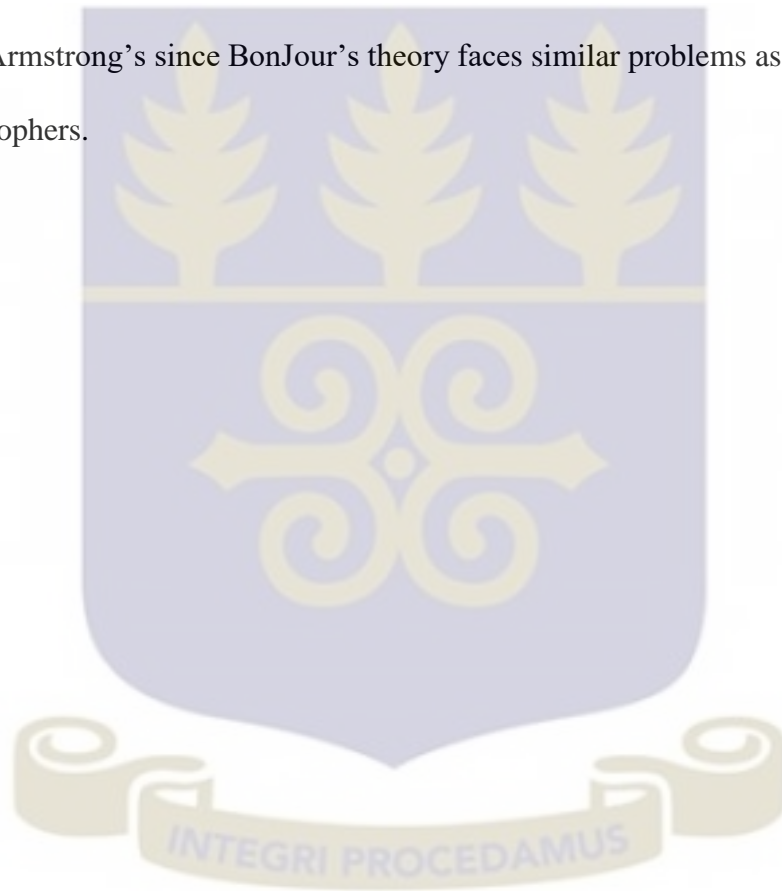
Due to the inadequacies that Bonjour identified in the respective views of Armstrong and Lewis, Bonjour modified the notion of a basic belief in an attempt to resolve the regress problem. Bonjour’s view, just as Lewis argues, is that basic beliefs are the basic units for justifying our beliefs about the world. His proposal differs from that of Lewis’ on the ground that the former holds that our immediate apprehension of sensory contents does not involve the description of the content. But the latter holds that our immediate apprehension describes its content. According to Bonjour, by claiming that our immediate apprehension is devoid of description of its content, he resolves ‘the epistemic regress problem’ faced by Lewis since the agent does not have to justify how an initial

description matches the content it describes. He argues that it is rather another belief (apperceptive) that describes the content of our immediate apprehension.

BonJour claimed that the description made within an apperceptive belief will either be true or false in relation to the content of the first-order belief. He argues that once an agent has no reason to debunk his own claim that such description matches the content of his first-order belief, the description will be considered justified. I argued that if we grant his latter claim, BonJour's account will somewhat be no different from that of Armstrong's. My point was that having no counter-beliefs to disprove one's apperceptive belief does not, in fact, mean that one's apperceptive belief is justified. The reason is that there could be counter-beliefs which are beyond the agent's cognitive grasp. Thus, an agent who is an incompetent judge of his sensory content, though ignorant of his incompetence, will claim that his apperceptive belief is justified since he can think of no counter-beliefs against it. In this case, the agent cannot claim his apperceptive belief to be justified since the counter-beliefs that defeat his apperceptive belief are beyond his apprehension. Regardless of this flaw, I granted, just as Sosa did, that the agent may claim that his sense of judgement is reliable. Thus, the reliability of his sense of judgement serves as the basis for his claim that there were no counter-beliefs to his apperceptive belief. This means that the agent will be required to justify his claim that his sense of judgement is reliable. This will in the long run lead the agent into the much talked about 'epistemic regress problem'.

In addition, BonJour also claimed that in certain circumstances, "reality" is presented to us. This suggests that in other circumstances what we are presented with is unreal. It will mean that we have to identify which circumstances provide us with reality and which ones do not. To make such identification requires that we adduce reasons after reason to support why in a particular circumstance the sensory content we obtain reflects

its external object. This also led us into ‘the regress problem’. To escape the regress problem, it will mean that we will not have any basis for claiming that a particular circumstance is conducive for sense perception. Thus, we, epistemic agents, will not have any reason to back our claim that a certain circumstance presents us with “reality”. Hence, our true beliefs will be mere luck but not cases of justified beliefs or knowledge if in a particular situation the sensory content we obtain reflects its physical object. This analysis showed that Bonjour’s theory of epistemic justification is not a better option to that of Lewis’ and Armstrong’s since Bonjour’s theory faces similar problems as that of the above philosophers.



Bibliography

- Aikin, Scott. 2011. *Epistemology and the Regress Problem*. New York: Routledge.
- Alston, William Payne. 1976. "Two Types of Foundationalism." *The Journal of Philosophy*. LXXIII. VII. 165-185.
- Alston, William Payne. 1985. "Concepts of Epistemic Justification." *The Monist*. LX. I. 57-89.
- Ariew, Roger. (Ed.). 2000. *Rene Descartes: Philosophical Essays and Correspondence*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.
- Aristotle. 1928. *Posterior Analytics*. G. R. G. Mure (Trans.). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Armstrong, David Malet. 1968. *A Materialist Theory of the Mind*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Armstrong, David Malet. 1973. *Belief, Truth and Knowledge*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Audi, Robert. 2011. *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*. Routledge: New York.
- BonJour, Laurence. 1985. *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- BonJour, Laurence. 1999. "Foundationalism and the External World." *Philosophical Perspectives*. XXXIII. XIII. 229-249.
- BonJour, Laurence. "Goldman against Internalism." University of Washington, Seattle.
- BonJour, Laurence. 2001. "The Indispensability of Internalism." *Philosophical Topics*. XXIX. I & II.
- Bonjour, Laurence, and Sosa, Ernest. 2003. *Epistemic Justification: Internalism vs. Externalism, Foundation vs. Virtues*. Melbourne: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Cohen, Jonathan L. 1989. *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Induction and Probability*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Davidson, Donald. 1984. *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Davidson, Donald. [1983] 2001. *Subjectivity, Intersubjectivity, Objective*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Descartes, Rene. 1971. "Meditations on the First Philosophy in which the Existence of God and the Distinction between Mind and Body are Demonstrated." *Great Books of the Western World*. R. M. Hutchins (ed.). London: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc.

- Dretske, Fred. 1969. *Seeing and Knowing*. London: Routledge.
- Empiricus, Sextus. 1996. *Outlines of Pyrronism*. M. Benson (trans.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Feldman, Richard and Earl Conee. 2001. "Internalism Defended." *American Philosophical Quarterly*. XXXVIII. I. 1-18.
- Foley, Richard. 1984. "Epistemic Luck and the Purely Epistemic." *American Philosophical Quarterly*. XXI. II. 113-124.
- Foley, Richard. 2004. "A Trial Separation between the Theory of Knowledge and the Theory of Justified Belief." Ernest Sosa and his Critics. (ed.) John Greco. New York: Wiley retrieved, October 20, 2013, from, as.nyu.edu/docs/IO/1161/trialseparation.pdf
- Goldman, Alvin. 1967. "A Causal Theory of Knowing." *The Journal of Philosophy*. LXIV. XII. 357-372.
- Goldman, Alvin. 1993. "The Psychology of Folk Psychology." *Readings in Philosophy and Cognition Science*. A. Goldman (ed.). Massachusetts: Mit Press. 347-380.
- Goldman, Alvin. 2001. "Replies to the Contributors." *The Philosophy of Alvin Goldman*. XXIX. I/II. 461-511.
- Hobbes, Thomas. (1651) 1968. *Leviathan*. C. B. Macpherson (intro. and ed.). Middlesex: Penguin.
- Horwich, Paul. 2010. "Truth, Theories of." *A Companion to Epistemology*. J. Dancy, E. Sosa, and M. Steup (eds.). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hume, David. (1748) 1999. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. T. L. Beauchamp (ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- James, William. 1956. *The Will to Believe: and other Essays in Popular Philosophy*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc.
- Klein, Peter David. 1999. "Human Knowledge and the Infinite Regress of Reasons." *Nous*. XXXIII. XIII. 297-325.
- Lewis, Clarence Irvin. 1946. *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation*. Illinois: The Open Court Publishing Company.
- Nagel, Thomas. 1974. "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" *The Philosophical Review*. LXXX. IV. 435-450.
- O'Brien, Daniel. "The Epistemology of Perception." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved on: September 1, 2015, retrieved from: <http://www.iep.utm.edu/epis-per/>
- Peirce, Charles Sanders. 1868. "Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man." *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*. II. 103-114.

- Plato. 1956. "Meno." *Plato: Protagoras and Meno*. W. K. C. Guthrie (trans.). London: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Plato. 1992. *Theaetetus*. M. J. Levett (Trans.). B. Williams (ed.). Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company.
- Putman, Hilary. 1994. "Sense, Nonsense, and the Senses: An Inquiry into the Powers of the Human Mind." *The Journal of Philosophy*. LXLI. IX. 445-517.
- Quine, Willard Van Orman. 1960. *Word and Object*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Quine, Willard Van Orman. (1969) 1994. "Epistemology Naturalized." *Naturalizing Epistemology*, (2nd ed.) H. Kornblith (ed.). Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Rosenthal, David. 1986. "Two Concepts of Consciousness." *Philosophical Studies*, XLIX. III. 329-359.
- Sellars, Wilfrid. 1963. *Science, Perception and Reality*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Sellars, Wilfrid. 1975. "The Structure of Knowledge." *Action, Knowledge, and Reality: Critical Studies in Honor of Wilfrid Sellars*. H. Castaneda (ed.). Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill. 295- 347. Retrieved from, <http://www.ditext.com/sellars/sk.html>
- Steup, Mathias. 1988. "The Deontic Conception of Epistemic Justification." *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in Analytic Tradition*. LIII. I. 65-84.

