EXPLANATIONIST REBUTTALS
(COHERENTISM DEFENDED AGAIN)

William G. Lycan

ABSTRACT: An explanatory coherence theory of justification is sketched and then defended against a number of recent objections: conservatism and relativism; wild and crazy beliefs; reliability; warranted necessary falsehoods; basing; distant, unknown coherences; Sosa's "self- and present-abstracts"; and Bayesian impossibility results.

These days we do not hear much about coherence theories of justification.[1] I do not think that is because any particular form of foundationalism reigns triumphant, except so far as reliabilism is one. Probably it is because coherentism is just considered implausible. Certainly Hegel remains out of fashion.

But there have been a few recent objections deserving of comment. In this paper, I shall defend my own specifically explanatory coherentist view against those.

1. EXPLANATORY INFERENCE AND EXPLANATIONISM

An explanatory inference, or inference to the best explanation, proceeds from an *explanandum* or a set of data to a hypothesis that explains the data better than would any available competing hypothesis (Harman 1965; Quine and

William G. Lycan is William Rand Kenan, Jr., Professor at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. His books include *Logical Form in Natural Language* (Bradford Books/MIT Press, 1984), *Knowing Who* (with Steven Boër, Bradford Books/MIT Press, 1986), *Consciousness* (Bradford Books/MIT Press, 1987), *Judgement and Justification* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), *Modality and Meaning* (Kluwer, 1994), *Consciousness and Experience* (Bradford Books/MIT Press, 1996), and *Real Conditionals* (Oxford University Press, 2001).

[1] This paper is not the one I delivered at the conference in 2009, hosted by Ted Poston. My paper from that conference is scheduled to appear in *Routledge Companion to Epistemology*, ed. S. Bernecker (London: Routledge), under the title "Epistemology and the Role of Intuitions." In this paper, secs. 5 and 7 have been reworked from my "Plantinga and Coherentisms" (1996). I would like to extend my thanks to Ted Poston for helpful comments on the penultimate draft of this paper.

Ullian 1978). The germ theory of disease is accepted because it explains striking epidemiological facts as well as patients' symptoms. A detective solves a murder case by reflecting on the various clues and arriving at the best explanation—the story that makes the best sense of the clues, given the constraints. (Notice that contra Sherlock Holmes, this is never a matter of strict deduction; there could always have been invisible Venusians, etc.) An auto mechanic diagnoses your car trouble by inferring the best explanation of the car's symptoms. The last slice of pizza has unexpectedly disappeared from the refrigerator, and I infer that my daughter has stopped at home after school instead of proceeding directly to her orchestra rehearsal. And we make these explanatory inferences with some confidence, whether or not we go on to check their conclusions more directly.

The features that make one hypothesis a better explanation than another are the specifically explanatory virtues: simplicity, power (explaining more than does its competitor), testability, fecundity or fruitfulness, neatness (leaving fewer unanswered questions behind), and conservativeness (fitting with what we already reasonably believe)—in some complex combination of such factors.

Explanatory coherentism ('explanationism' for short) is roughly the doctrine that what justifies an ampliative inference—or more generally the formation of any new belief—is that the doxastic move in question improves the subject's explanatory position overall and/or increases the explanatory coherence of the subject's global set of beliefs.[2] In particular, the explanationist holds that some beliefs are indeed justified by explanatory inference as just described. The view comes in several grades of strength, but those differences do not matter for the purposes of this paper.

What is coherentist about the view is that any doxastic move, including accepting a perceptual belief, can be normatively judged only by reference to the subject's entire belief system.

2. LEHRER'S PROBLEM

Explanatory coherentism is constrained by the asymmetry of the explaining relation and so is subject to the problem of what Keith Lehrer (1974) calls "explained unexplainers": some data propositions that justify explanatory hypotheses are themselves justified by explaining more primitive data in their turn. But many other data propositions, such as spontaneous perceptual beliefs or memories, are not so justified, because they do not explain anything

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[2] See Harman 1965, 1986; Quine and Ullian 1978; Thagard 1978, 1989; Lycan 1988; and Lipton 1991.

else. Yet (i) an explanatory hypothesis is justified by the data it explains only if the data propositions are themselves justified, and, presumably, (ii) the data propositions are justified by being explained only if the explanatory hypotheses are themselves justified; and so there is nowhere for justification to get an initial foothold. Since an *explanans* presupposes an *explanandum*, how does the whole explanatory enterprise get started in the first place? It seems the explanationist must appeal to something besides coherence entirely and, hence, no longer qualifies as a coherentist.

In *Judgement and Justification* (1988), I identify an independent entry into the circle of being-justified-by-explaining and being-justified-by-being-explained in a particular application of what I call the Principle of Credulity: "Accept at the outset each of those things that seems to be true." At any given time, we find ourselves involuntarily holding any number of beliefs, at least those produced by perception and by memory; however, unlike the reliabilist, I do not make any primary appeal to those faculties as justifying. Call such unconsidered beliefs "spontaneous beliefs"; they are mostly about our immediate environment, past events, sometimes our own mental states, and more.[3] Now, since all their contents are things that seem true to us, the Principle of Credulity tacks those propositions in place long enough for them to serve as data for an explanation. Once they are justly available for explaining, they soon acquire a kind of coherence that is constituted by a proposition's being explained. (I shall say more about this shortly.)

Jonathan Kvanvig initially characterizes coherence theories as "claim-[ing], minimally, that not all knowledge and justified belief rest ultimately on a foundation of noninferential knowledge or justified belief" (2007, 1). More strongly, William Roche (2006) insists that for a coherentist, all justification is inferential (by which he does not mean that justification requires actual inferring, but only that no belief is justified except by its support relation to other beliefs). But as Kvanvig appreciates, I am a coherentist who does not hold that all justification requires inferring or even support relations to other beliefs; my spontaneous beliefs are very slightly justified but are noninferential. This subjects me to Ted Poston's (2012) "basic reasons dilemma": if an epistemology sanctions basic reasons, it is a form of foundationalism and is subject to critique as such; but if it does not sanction basic reasons, it falls prey to the sort of circularity that my slightly justified spontaneous beliefs serve to avoid.

The solution, as both Kvanvig and Poston observe, is to distinguish between mere noninferentially justified beliefs and "basic reasons" in the

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[3] A reviewer has shrewdly asked what happens if *inconsistent* things spontaneously and equally seem true. Think of an Escher print. I shall address this in sec. 3 below.

foundationalist sense: my spontaneous beliefs cannot by themselves justify other beliefs. They participate in such justification only in the context of other beliefs of varying grades of theoreticity, indeed relative to the subject's entire belief system. (Thus, my coherentism is, in Pollock's [1986] terms, "holistic" rather than "linear.") Of course, to be justified to any significant degree at all, the spontaneous beliefs must be well explained.

But why should anyone accept the Principle of Credulity? As Lehrer observes, any "innocent until proven guilty" principle of this kind stops sounding like just plain good sense as soon as we consider cases in which very good consequences or very bad ones hang on whether the belief in question is true or false.

Yet the Principle of Credulity is defensible, for it is a consequence of the more general, characteristically explanationist claim that conservativeness is a theoretical virtue (Quine and Ullian 1978): hypothesis H_1 will and should be preferred to H_2 if H_1 fits better with what we already believe. If this in turn sounds dogmatic or bigoted, notice that, inescapably, we never even consider competing hypotheses that would strike us as grossly implausible. No detective addresses the hypothesis that the crime was committed by invisible alien invaders from the planet Werdna, or by violations of the laws of nature, etc.; often real detectives do not even consider the proverbial and less outlandish "bushy-haired stranger" theory.

Epistemic conservatism is itself controversial and in need of defense against those who find it unmotivated, arbitrary, politically disgusting, and the like. But I have argued for it at considerable length (Lycan 1988, chs. 7 and 8). The key contention is that whatever epistemic or justifying status inheres in the other standard explanatory virtues listed above, conservativeness shares that same status. Some philosophers have doubted whether any of the virtues *eo ipso* justifies beliefs at all (van Fraassen 1980; Hacking 1982), but the present point is that whether or not the other virtues have that power, conservativeness stands or falls with the rest of them.

This comparative claim can be made good so long as (i) any plausible defense of the other explanatory virtues as justifying applies to conservativeness as well and (ii) there is no special objection to conservatism that does not also impugn the other virtues. So far as I know, both of these conditions hold. My own defense of each of the virtues is a kind of epistemic rule-utilitarian argument—an appeal to cognitive efficiency and good design. That defense applies to conservativeness in particular, as I argue specifically, and so does every other defense that occurs to me. Nor have I heard a special objection directed against conservatism that lacks force against the other virtues. David Christensen (1994) offers the most compelling critique I know of. But his objections to conservatism itself are essentially that a belief's seeming to be

true is not *evidence* in that belief's favor (71) and that we have no reason to think that a conservative policy "will increase the probability of having true beliefs" (i.e., is truth-conducive) (73). Each of those charges has often been made against simplicity, fruitfulness, and the rest.[4]

3. MORE ON THE COHERENCE PART

I maintain that, in effect, a belief is justified by the bare fact of its seeming to be true. But it is so only to the smallest degree. For justification in the fuller sense that we normally ask of beliefs, considerably more coherence is required.

There are at least four kinds of coherence that support justification of a spontaneous belief: consistency with other spontaneous beliefs; consistency and fit with the wider belief system; being explained; and holding metabeliefs about the source of the belief.

The first kind of coherence is consistency with other spontaneous beliefs. Conflict between two spontaneous beliefs themselves is statistically rare, but it happens. Consider the case of flatly inconsistent memories (which I am here to tell you multiply with age). But, first, does the Principle of Credulity require us to accept the impossible? At the outset, "yes." We should accept each of the inconsistent propositions, however briefly. Psychologically, at least, this is what we do. But wider considerations of explanatory coherence will soon cut in (see below) and either knock out one of the propositions for failing to cohere with our wider belief system or mandate suspending judgment between the two.

A second and more demanding kind of coherence is consistency (and perhaps looser explanatory fit) with the subject's larger belief structure, having to do with her current environment, recent past, and mode of access to those things. Some spontaneous beliefs will be nearly instantaneously rejected as misperceptions, miscalculations, inaccurate memories, and the like, because of their failure to square with the empirical predictions proceeding from other, firmer bodies of perceptual and memory data under logical pressure from fairly low-level justified explainers. But when a spontaneous belief does cohere in each of the two ways just mentioned, it may be called "tenable."

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[4] Christensen gives one putative direct counterexample: you flip a coin, and on the basis of no reason at all I "decide" that it has landed tails up. "Now, it seems to me that the fact that I now believe that it landed 'tails' up does not justify me—in any measure at all—in maintaining my belief that it landed 'tails' up" (1994, 74). I am not sure whether this case has a parallel for that of simplicity; I think it does for that of fruitfulness (think of the joke about the drunk who looks for the lost cufflink on the north side of the street because the light is better there). In any case, I agree that if the subject merely "decided" to "believe," continuing to do so would be irrational. But if she *found herself with* the spontaneous and genuine belief that the coin had so landed, then I say she would be justified to a very small degree and for a very short time, until coherence factors revoked that license; see sec. 3 below.

A third and still more robust kind of coherence is, of course, when the spontaneous belief is explained. (Many of our beliefs are tenable in the sense just defined but are unexplained.) The more thoroughly explained a proposition is for the subject, the higher its degree of coherence and so the higher its degree of justification.

Fourth, the subject's total belief system may yield at least a tacit metabelief as to how the first-order belief in question was produced in her and that its source is generally reliable. I understand this phenomenon in a very undemanding way (Lycan 1988); it is exemplified, not only by professional philosophers and adult laypersons, but by most young children. A four-year-old knows by its snuffling sounds that the dog is coming around the corner, and she knows that she hears with her ears.

Note that such metabeliefs need not be true.[5] A brain in a vat might have a maximally coherent belief system and be maximally justified in all its beliefs, even though all or nearly all its metabeliefs are false. Less fancifully, if a subject's own metabeliefs are themselves well justified, it does not detract from the overall reasonableness of her belief system (though it might make her a Gettier victim if *knowledge* were at issue).

In the foregoing ways, a spontaneous belief gets taken up into a larger coherent explanatory structure. The belief is incorporated into a system of beliefs connected by logical and explanatory relations, (typically) containing metabeliefs about the source of beliefs.

It is the third and fourth kinds of coherence that are not exhibited by what we may call "wild" spontaneous beliefs—superstitious forebodings, *déjà vu*, mild hallucinations, and the like. Such beliefs may be tenable in my sense, but normally they are soon ruled out by their failure to be explained and/or by our having reason to think that they have no reliable source.

I now turn to the contemporary objections to coherentism.

4. CONSERVATISM AND RELATIVISM

Stephen Stich (1988, 1990) and others have complained that reflective equilibrium and other such coherentist methods are objectionably conservative, privileging what we already believe and in effect insisting that other views be brought in line with that. And some theorists fear a kind of relativism: practitioners who begin with sharply different sets of initial beliefs may converge into different coherence equilibrium states, with nothing to choose between them.

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[5] But contrast Roche 2006.

Yes, of course we privilege what we already believe, or at least what we already justifiedly believe. Conservatism is on record as an explanatory virtue, as documented in section 2 above. Even if its status as such is disputed,[6] the present objection is redundant.

The threat of relativism might have been a more serious worry when coherence theories of justification were imperfectly distinguished from coherence theories of truth. But, of course, even if there are different equilibrium states with nothing to help choose between them, it does not follow that there is no fact of the matter. More to the point, inquiry is intersubjective, and inquirers must deal with each other, accepting challenges to the early beliefs formed on the basis of the initial data. The recent literature on disagreement is most pertinent here.[7] Does the awareness that an epistemic peer disagrees with you *eo ipso* diminish the coherence status of the relevant belief? This is a question that should be addressed by coherentists, though I cannot digress to do so here.[8]

5. WILD AND CRAZY BELIEFS

A lunatic who has some bizarre initial beliefs may bring them into coherence with other loony things he believes, yet that would not lend any justification to any member of the resulting set of loony beliefs. Alvin Goldman (1990) has asked: what if a certain person's "wild" spontaneous belief does happen to achieve coherence of my third and fourth kinds?[9] Suppose that person's other experiences are consonant with the wild belief and that the person's meta-beliefs happen to fall nicely into place and yield a coherent story as to the source of the wild belief, without internal implausibilities or loose ends. According to my theory, this process could end up justifying wild beliefs that are crazy—bizarre religious visions, paranoid fantasies, utopian fantasies, or the like.

First, for what it is worth, this scenario is very unlikely. In the real world (the environment and human minds being as they are), suitably weird spontaneous beliefs are not going to find holistic support of this kind. But let us continue to suppose that, however improbably, our loony's spontaneous belief actually does get resolved without mess and does achieve at least the same degree of explanatory coherence exhibited by your belief system or mine. Then, I say, the loony is justified in accepting the wild belief and the system that goes with it.

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[6] See especially Christensen 1994.
[7] For a survey, see Christensen 2009.
[8] No doubt there are other issues in social epistemology that similarly demand attention from coherentists, an obvious example being the ongoing debate over testimony.
[9] Similar examples have since been pressed by Plantinga (1993).

There are two interestingly different subcases. (1) Suppose the wild belief is grafted onto otherwise normal perception. That would be a very tricky thing for any environment to engineer, but if the internal display featured some extra form of perception, say, backed by a coherent explanatory account of its mechanism that (*per impossibile*) fit well with all the subject's normal beliefs about the physical world, the subject would be crazy not to accept it.

(2) The loony's experience is not at all normal but is magical throughout, all the day long. If it were chaotic and confusing, of course, the subject would not be justified in believing much of anything; but we are supposing that it is as coherent and as explanatorily watertight as is our own realistic experience, though magical and radically different from ours. If it really is all that coherent and convincing, then it seems to me quite wrong to deny that the subject is reasonable and justified in accepting his magical world as it presents itself. You or I would have accepted it, after all, knowing no better. If a Cartesian evil demon could give an otherwise normal subject a completely justified but false belief in a world like ours, then he could give a subject an equally coherent and regular but magical world with the same credentials.

Bruce Russell pursues this sort of objection, focusing on cases of type (1). In rebuttal of my earlier responses to it, he complains that the loony "lack[s] . . . *relevant confirmation of his beliefs by his experiences*" (2012, 103). Though the loony may have the right metabeliefs, those beliefs are not true, and his first-order beliefs are not grounded in his experiences of the world.[10] Spontaneous belief is *per se* not good enough to get the system moving—or at least, no amount of further coherence will justify the spontaneous belief if the belief is empirical but does not have empirical confirmation.

But why not? Perhaps a reliabilist intuition is at work here (though Russell himself is no reliabilist), in which case see my next section below. But also, Russell does not argue against the Principle of Credulity, and if the principle is correct, then spontaneous beliefs do justify even if they do not arise from particular experiences.

However, if Russell's intuition about the loony case is felt to be compelling, I could accommodate it. The problem is that the loony's beliefs are of a type that we think would normally require empirical confirmation. That means there is an explanatory virtue they conspicuously lack: they explain no observations, even though, given their respective topics, they would be expected to. A ramified explanationism could condemn that as a failure of explanatory coherence.

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[10] This is closely related to BonJour's (1985) "input objection," to which I replied in sec. 6 of Lycan 1996. I continue to take no official position on the question of whether the coherence relation on beliefs extends to perceptual states as well, but my sympathies are with Kvanvig and Riggs (1992) for the affirmative. For a good discussion of that issue, see Pryor 2005.

6. RELIABILISM

Writing specifically about the method of reflective equilibrium, Michael DePaul (1998) argues that (i) there is no reason to think that the method is truth-conducive (i.e., that when a set of beliefs has been brought into reflective equilibrium, its individual members are then more likely to be true); (ii) to abandon truth-conduciveness as a requirement is in effect to fall back on a general coherence theory of justification; but (iii) mere coherence is too weak a standard for justification.

Guess what: I am not a reliabilist, and I do abandon the truth-conduciveness requirement (Lycan 1988). I have already put forward and defended my coherentist model of justification. *If* we can agree that the Principle of Credulity is a correct epistemological norm, that is, that appearances are considered innocent until *at least some slight reason* is given for suspecting them guilty, then by the principle, spontaneous beliefs are evidence—quite apart from having been produced by reliable processes or having any other property associated with truth-conduciveness. Note, there is no need to ask what produces them or to ask for any independent connection between spontaneous beliefs and truth. I shall return to this point below.

7. WARRANTED NECESSARY FALSEHOODS

Alvin Plantinga (1993) points out that an individual might be justified in believing a necessary falsehood, say by reasonably taking the word of an expert mathematician whose arithmetical proof is impressive but (unbeknownst to anyone) is subtly fallacious. But presumably a contradiction cannot cohere with the rest of anyone's belief set.

I do not see incoherence in every inconsistency.[11] There are at least three ways in which a belief system can be inconsistent while still exhibiting a high degree of coherence, indeed a considerably higher degree than is possessed by your belief system or mine right now. First, the system may be compartmentalized. Perhaps there is a side to the subject's life that is comparatively self-contained: its characteristic data do not interact with the rest of the subject's data and it has its own fairly modular explanatory structure. Somewhere in that structure is a proposition that distantly (or not so distantly) contradicts something the subject believes in the mainstream of her cognitive life. (For a scientific analogue, consider someone who accepts both general relativity and quantum mechanics.) But the subject never has occasion to conjoin the two conflicting beliefs (and so never actually believes a

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[11] On this topic, see also Kvanvig's (2012) subtle discussion.

contradiction itself), and each of the two explanatory structures, the mainstream one and the compartmentalized one, is highly coherent in itself. In such a case, I think the subject may be very well justified in believing each of the two conflicting propositions.

This scenario abandons a standard slogan version of coherentism: that what justifies a given belief is simply the coherence of the entire belief set of which it is a member.[12] What I have suggested is compartmentalization (Lycan 1996): a belief is justified accordingly as it coheres in a sufficiently large functional subset of the subject's global belief system. No doubt this idea would be tricky to formalize, but it is made intuitive by actual cases.[13]

The second sort of nondamaging inconsistency that occurs to me is the one to which all normal natural-language speakers are subject throughout their lives. They believe the axioms of a Tarskian truth definition for their native languages, and those languages contain ordinary unrestricted truth predicates—which of course gives rise to Liar contradictions within those speakers' belief sets, for example, "(α) is true iff (α) is false." Compartmentalization will not help here. But this hardly matters at all; some version of paraconsistent logic is needed, and it exists and is well worked out. Similar points can be based on epistemic paradoxes, such as the Lottery and the Preface.

Third, departing briefly from the real world, a person might start with a highly coherent belief system, say vastly better than yours or mine, and for whatever reason add to it a single contradictory proposition, say that aliens from the planet Nacyl are both round and square in shape. If (again) this person has built in or has also internalized a paraconsistent logic (a prudent policy), she will infer nothing from the contradiction. The contradiction is itself a horrible anomaly, demanding yet defying explanation, but we may suppose that, standing alone, it is outweighed by the total coherence in the subject's belief system; and most of her beliefs are still better justified than ours. I am assuming that although no one's total belief set is free from contradiction, contradictions differ in the degree of damage they do; an isolated, walled-off contradiction is not a significant failure of coherence, although it is a failure of coherence.[14]

But what about Plantinga's arithmetical falsehood? The whole business of believing necessary truths and necessary falsehoods is vexed in several ways.

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[12] Notice also that on that simple view, it would be hard to explain how beliefs held by the same subject at the same time could differ in their respective degrees of justification.

[13] See Roche, forthcoming.

[14] A referee has asked whether this concession does not require a reframing of the Principle of Credulity. I see no obvious connection, except for those cases in which contradictory propositions are directly endorsed by the principle, on which see again note 2 above and the ensuing discussion in sec. 3.

One important thing to note is that, like any other proposition, a necessary falsehood is believed or disbelieved only under a propositional mode of presentation and may be believed under one such guise but not under another. Under one mode of presentation, the necessary falsehood may not be recognizable (perhaps by anyone) as such, and it may have inferential connections to other beliefs that are in every psychological way like those that relate consistent beliefs.

Philip (Quine told us) is unaware that Tully denounced Cataline, although he knows that Cicero did (Quine 1953/1963). Let us suppose that on the basis of misleading evidence, he actively disbelieves that Tully denounced Cataline, and he accepts the following conjunction: "Cicero denounced Cataline but Tully never did." Though necessarily false, this belief is entirely reasonable and warranted, given Philip's evidence. Plantinga's arithmetical example may be tougher, in that while Philip has no way whatsoever of computing the necessary falsehood of his belief and so cannot be blamed in any way for holding it, the arithmetical belief may be provably contradictory and might in time be discovered to be false by its subject were she to compute long and carefully enough. But I am inclined to think the point about coherence-like inferential connections to other beliefs holds here as well: under one mode of presentation, that associated with Tully, Philip's predication is not recognizable by him as such, and it may have inferential connections to other beliefs about Cicero and other beliefs about Cataline that preserve consistency everywhere; no contradiction can be inferred.

8. BASING

There is a problem about the basing relation that afflicts holistic coherentism in particular (Pollock 1986; Kvanvig 2007). As is well known, a subject's belief is justified by reasons only if it is held in part *for* those reasons and not for others. But it would seem that for the holistic coherentist, every justified belief is based on the subject's entire belief system, and so is every unjustified belief. How, then, can we distinguish between properly and improperly based beliefs?

Remember that explanationism is founded on the notion of explanatory *inference*. Beliefs are inferred from other beliefs, even though in the holistic rather than the linear manner. To say that a belief is justified only in the context of the subject's global belief set is not to say that the belief is inferred from every other proposition in the set. It is to say only that whatever inference did produce it was always in principle subject to defeat by *possible* collateral information or by this or that consideration of explanatory virtue.

An inferential belief is based in a substantive way on another belief from which it has been inferred. It is not based in the same substantive way on the absence of a defeater.

9. DISTANT, UNKNOWN COHERENCES

Richard Fumerton argues as follows:

> Suppose I believe twenty-eight very complex propositions. Suppose further that I reached those conclusions in an extraordinarily silly way. I was reading a book far too difficult for me and to amuse myself I decided to believe every fifth proposition I encountered. As it turns out, by a remarkable coincidence there is an extremely sophisticated proof that interrelates all these different propositions, a proof that only a handful of logicians in the world would be able to grasp. Is there any plausibility at all in holding that my beliefs are rational? (1995, 155)

Good question. It is the analogue of the old Kornblith–BonJour examples used to embarrass completely externalist reliabilism (BonJour 1980; Kornblith 1980). Does the *de facto* but nearly unknowable, mutual coherence of the twenty-eight propositions justify them? Intuitively not, I agree.

But the explanationist need not be so radical an externalist. My own view requires that the subject at least tacitly have *performed* the relevant explanatory inferences, a condition that is not satisfied in Fumerton's case. For that matter, the subject might not even be capable of discerning the explanatory relations or of having the required metabeliefs.[15]

10. SELF- AND PRESENT-ABSTRACTS

Sosa (1991, 203) offers an ingenious argument against coherentism. Consider your entire belief set at a particular time. As it would be expressed in a list of sentences, the sentences would contain first-person and present-tense indexicals of various kinds. Delete those and the corresponding elements from the original propositions believed. Call the result, now a set of propositions and propositional functions, the "self- and present-abstracts of" your actual belief set. Now Sosa argues that, intuitively, any arbitrary instantiation of that abstract, using other singular personal and singular temporal concepts, such as (his example) "the holder of the lowest mean Social Security number exactly ten years from now," would be "nearly enough as coherent and comprehensive as the original without being cognitively justified in the sense relevant to knowledge" (203). (The reference to knowledge is inessential; it seems the new instantiation of the abstract would very probably not be

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[15] Thanks to Ted Poston here.

justified for the subject at all.) So the mere coherence and comprehensiveness of your actual belief set do not, *per se*, justify it either.

It is tempting to reply that since Sosa's believer S would continue to have first-person beliefs that would soon result in massive incoherence with the beliefs about the future number-holder, S's belief system would not be even faintly coherent. But that would be an *ignoratio*; Sosa's argument is directed to a given belief system *at a time*, and his hypothesis eliminates all first-person beliefs from that system.

My own rebuttal should be obvious. Though S would exhibit coherence of my fourth kind (having metabeliefs about the sources and reliability of his first-order beliefs), those metabeliefs would radically conflict with S's folk epistemology, in particular with the knowledge that he has no legitimate way of forming beliefs about future Social Security numbers or their bearers. S would be forced to ask, "why on earth am I believing things like *that*?" and would immediately doubt his own sanity.

Sosa anticipates such a response (1991, 204–05). He replies that on his understanding of coherence theories, coherence involves only relations "of logic, probability, or explanation" (205) between the very propositions believed, not any metabeliefs or attitudes directed toward the first-order beliefs. To appeal to the latter would be to "revise our conception of coherence" (205). Well, it is not to revise mine. Mine was there first and was independently defended. There is nothing *ad hoc* about it. (I shall not try to adjudicate Sosa's objection vs. simpler forms of coherence theory.)

11. PROBABILITY

There is a body of literature that attempts either to vindicate or to disparage less formal notions of coherence by, in one way or another, testing them against probability theory. I will briefly address that issue.

There is a very simple version, often put in the form of the challenge question, "why does a belief's cohering with others make it more likely to be true?" The same is asked of the explanatory virtues, as in "why does a hypothesis' being the simpler make it more likely to be true?" Such questions are ambiguous. 'Likely to be true' might mean only "reasonable," "justified," "warranted," etc. Or more strongly it might mean "probable" in a sense that satisfies the Kolmogorov axioms; for example, what is demanded may be a formal probability-raising property, such as $Pr(H \mid E) > Pr(H)$. In the former, weaker sense, the alleged challenge question is not a challenge at all; if I have already defended a coherence theory of justification, the question amounts to asking redundantly why I think coherence makes for justification.

Taken in the stronger sense, the question does count as a challenge, though I shall argue that it is a misguided one. If coherence allegedly justifies, how does it make a given belief probable in the Bayesian or any other formal probabilistic sense? More specific versions of this demand are occasioned by the recent "impossibility" results of Luc Bovens and Stephan Hartmann (2003) and Erik Olsson (2005).[16]

The reason I take the demand to be unreasonable is that explanationists, at least in my case, take explanatory inference as fundamental. Every episte-mology takes some norm or norms as epistemologically basic, and the result of the explanationist's wide reflective equilibrium (whether or not it convinces everyone) is that explanatory inference is basic. It is not derived from or justified by or to be tested against some more fundamental norm; as Jeremy Bentham said, "That which is used to prove everything else . . . cannot itself be proved" (1789/1961, 19). As well ask a logician what justifies &-elimination, or a utilitarian what is good about happiness, or a Kantian what is good about rational agency. In particular, probability theory is not to be accepted as a more fundamental norm; so far as it is normative at all, it is a special-purpose tool that serves the more general and fundamental norms of explanatory coherence.

The same applies to critics who demand that we exhibit the explanatory virtues' "connection to truth." On our view, there is no more fundamental connection to truth toward which explanatory coherence is a means. Of course, explanationism may not be the correct epistemology, but the species of objection I am now considering could not show that, for it straightfor-wardly begs the question.

Similarly, if it be protested that wide reflective equilibrium is itself an explanatory coherentist method and so cannot noncircularly justify explana-tionism, we answer that of course it is. We use basic logical reasoning when we do soundness proofs, too.

12. CONCLUSION

Explanationism—at least my version of it—is a coherence theory. If expla-nationism remains unrefuted, as I claim to have shown, then so does coher-entism. If an excellent case can be made for explanationism, as I and others have argued, then that case can be made for one species of coherentism. The general ignoring of coherentism is indefensible.

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[16] See Schubert and Olsson 2012 and the references therein; but see also Huemer 2011.

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