

Chapter Three

A Contextualist Theory of Personally Justified Belief

Abstract: The question of whether a person has 'adequate' or 'strong enough' evidence to believe and ultimately know an empirical proposition is a problem for the traditional definition of knowledge, and it remains a question for the predominately externalist definition of knowledge. How much evidence (e.g., quantity and quality) must one possess before one can claim to *know p* is true? When is evidence 'sufficient' to rule out the existence of defeating facts (and to eliminate doubt, and retain a strong belief that *p* is true)? What stops a skeptical regress in the demand for reasons to support a belief and the beliefs that support it? I advocate a contextualist theory of personally justified belief similar to the ideas proposed by David Annis (1978), Robert Hambourger (1987), Michael Williams (2001), and Adam Leite (2005). A contextualist theory better explains 'personal justification' than does foundationalism or coherence theories.

In this chapter we explore the normative dimension of knowledge that is captured in condition 4a of the PE definition of knowledge. Let us repeat condition 4a:

In situations of critical doubt, *S* must have 'adequate evidence' (i.e., strong reasons *e1*, *e2*, *e3*, etc.) for believing *p*, and *S* must be able to resolve (i.e., rule-out, discard) any actual or logical possibilities that would undermine (or defeat) the evidence possessed for *p*.

When is evidence *e* 'sufficient' to affirm the truth of *p*? How do pragmatic and normative factors contribute to how much evidence one must possess before claiming to know *p*?

A 'regress of reasons' can occur when a skeptic continually demands reasons for why *p* should be believed, and then questions why supporting evidential reasons *e1*, *e2*, *e3* should be believed, and beyond. Suppose that *S* is seeing a chair in a classroom. In an ordinary situation, *S* might assert '*I see a chair in this room*' as a spontaneous perceptual claim without conscious inference from other beliefs. And if we were to ask *S* for his reasons for this perceptual belief *p*, we can imagine that *S* will be able to produce several premises such as (1) I am having the visual experience of a chair, (2) I am in close proximity to the object, (3) I have previous experience seeing and utilizing chairs, (4) it is normal for a chair to be in a classroom, (5) my vision is good, (6) the room lighting is normal, (7) I am well-rested and alert, (8) I have no reason to suspect that someone is

trying to deceive me, (9) I understand the concepts of 'see' and 'chair,' (10) I am not under the influence of strong hallucinogenic drugs, and so on.¹

Let's assume that these ten premises are relevant (i.e., truth-connecting) for **S**'s belief that there is a chair in this room. Also, assume that there exist no unconsidered physical factors that would lead **S** to doubt that a chair is being seen. What happens if someone should ask, with respect to premises 5, 6, and 8, how does **S** know his eyesight is normal, the room lighting is normal, and there are no pranksters around? These kinds of questions start a regress of reasons problem. Does **S** need to state why he believes that the lighting and his eyesight are normal and why it is unlikely a joker is deceiving him, in order to be personally justified in believing that he sees a chair? Must **S** respond with his beliefs about optics, his eyesight, and probable human behavior? In a case when **S** attempts to defend a belief **p** with evidential reasons **e1**, **e2**, **e3** and this leads to a request to defend each individual evidential premise, the possession of a sufficient or justifiable set of premises becomes seemingly impossible. Justification will depend on still other justified beliefs, and so on, seemingly *ad infinitum*.

Louis Pojman (1995a, p. 94) provides the following regress:

Suppose that you believe that eating vegetables will promote your health. I ask you why you believe that? You answer that your belief is based upon your beliefs about nutrition. Vegetables have the kind of vitamins necessary for the proper maintenance of the human body. But suppose I ask you why you believe that vegetables contain the kind of vitamins necessary for the nutrition of the human body? Well, you'd appeal to 'common knowledge' or start discussing chemistry and physiology. Where would the demand for justification stop?

¹ Besides the regress of reasons problem, three related questions emerge: (1) Is this set of ten premises *adequate* or *sufficient* to justify **S**'s belief that he sees a chair in the room? (2) Is there a *truth* to this previous question independent of what person(s) think? and (3) Is it possible that **p** is false in this chair-in-a-room situation? We will discuss these *first two questions* in this chapter. (We have *already discussed* the third question at length in the first two chapters. Let's reiterate the problem involved with the third question. It is clear that when apparently viewing a chair in a classroom, this perceptual belief could be false. A defeating factor might be present (e.g., the apparent chair is a laser projection). **S** can possess the *same premises* for believing **p**, but **p** *may be either true or false*, depending upon whether **S** is in a normal or unusual situation. Instances of apparent knowledge can be introspectively indistinguishable from cases of actual knowledge. How can **S** claim to possess knowledge, when it is both physically and logically possible that **not-p**? Does the (subjective) inability to infallibly dismiss the possible (objective) existence of defeating evidence (for any empirical **p**) prevent **S** from knowing? We have fully discussed how knowledge is possible. If these skeptical issues are still a concern, the reader should review the first two chapters, and additional knowledge examples found in the Appendix).

In the literature, there are four responses for how an epistemic regress terminates:

(a) Belief **p** owes its justification to belief **e1**, based on **e2**, and so on *ad infinitum*.

(b) Belief **p** is itself inferred directly from some belief(s) which are *assumptions*, where no further reasons are needed. A regress is ended by *persons*, not by other foundational or coherent beliefs.

(c) Belief **p** owes its justification to belief **e1**, which is based on belief **e2**, which is based on belief **p**, doubling back in a circle. A justification is based upon beliefs and premises that form a coherent holistic circular web-like structure.

(d) Belief **p** owes its justification to beliefs that are ultimately based upon sensual foundations which are non-inferential premise(s) and need no further justification. A regress of justification is linear and terminates with a 'basic' non-inferential foundational assertion about self-evident sense experience (or is an *a priori* truth).

The chain of justificatory reasons for believing **p** is finite.²

The oldest and most entrenched theory is foundationalism (d), where it is claimed that there exist non-inferential 'basic' empirical beliefs that are self-justified. It is upon these self-evident basic perceptual beliefs that complex beliefs (and inferences) can be formed. For coherence theorists (c), the personal justification of a belief resides in how well a belief coheres with other beliefs, as part of a large explanatory system. Not only must beliefs be consistent about a given subject, but the whole belief system needs to have an interlocking explanatory 'coherence' for scientifically describing various phenomena. The first response (a), that there is an infinite number of reasons for defending a proposition is rarely accepted among philosophers, but has been defended by Peter Klein (1999), who believes that all justification is provisional and that there are always additional reasons for defending a belief. *All three of these theories maintain that the 'personal justification' of a belief p is a function of other beliefs.*

² Option (b) stated here, differs (in detail) from the 'skeptical' option offered by Daniel Greco (2017). Greco acknowledges (a), (c), and (d), but offers 'justification is impossible' as the fourth option. Greco claims that the problem with option (b) is that an explanation that regresses are just ended by persons, is that such endings would be arbitrary or *ad hoc*. Since no chain of reasoning (beliefs) legitimately stops a regress, any chain of justificatory reasoning is unjustified. Since epistemic justification is impossible, "skepticism" is the result. Greco argues for a "flexible foundationalism" (a variation of d).

A Contextualist Theory of Personal Justification

I am going to advocate option (b) as the best reply to the regress problem. Since I believe that the other three options are all false, and because there is voluminous philosophical literature about foundationalism and coherentism, I just discuss their basic deficiencies in a footnote.² The position advanced here is named as a 'contextualist theory of personally justified belief.' It is argued that when **S** asserts (or claims) to possess 'adequate' evidence (i.e., strong enough evidence, sufficient reasons) to satisfy knowledge condition 4a, that this is a *prescriptive* assertion. Consequently, there is neither factual nor literal 'propositional truth' to what constitutes 'sufficient' (i.e., quantity and quality) of propositional evidence **e** that halts a regress.

With the advocacy option (**b**) it is maintained that it is *not only beliefs* (i.e., a set of evidential propositions) that end a regress, but that a *normative-pragmatic judgment* of what constitutes 'adequate' evidence also plays a crucial role in ending a regress. This judgement of adequacy is best understood as a 'prescription.'³ It is *persons* (and not solely a relationship of beliefs) that ultimately ends a conversational (or professional-technical) regress. Persons *prescribe* the norms (and tests) that determine what kinds of evidence, how much evidence, and what sorts of reasoning is sufficient for **p** to be believed. A regress of reasons ends when it is *agreed among persons*, sometimes dogmatically, that no further evidential propositions are needed in order to believe **p** (and satisfy PE condition 4a). When we critically examine whether **S** is justified in believing **p**, and request reasons, we can ask: 1) What are **S**'s evidential premises? 2) Are the premises true? 3) What is the structure of the inference? 4) Does the structure of the

² Most introductory epistemology textbooks will discuss foundationalism and coherentism, (e.g., Lemos (2007), Pojman (1995a), and Steup (1996)). In response to these positions, option d (foundationalism) has been the most-accepted option. It suggests that a regress of reasons ends on a foundation of 'basic' self-evident perceptual observations that are indubitable. Even if there exist 'basic' perceptual beliefs, which is doubtful, it is difficult to see how these sensory beliefs could transmit a personal justification for higher level and abstract scientific theories. Option c (coherentism) seems false because any theory that is composed of coherent, holistic, and consistent beliefs can still be challenged as true or false. Any number of belief-circles can be used to explain a phenomenon, but this doesn't show that any one coherent system is better than another. What 'coherence' amounts to, is also a matter of debate.

³ A 'prescription' is defined as an assertion that purports to express a stipulation (or rule) upon a practice, where its correctness (or incorrectness) is *dependent* upon its acceptance (or non-acceptance) by particular persons. See the Introduction and chapter five for details of this definition.

inference and content of the premises make it likely (or deductively necessary) that **p** is true? 5) Are the concepts and distinctions employed helpful in understanding a phenomenon? 6) What background information is assumed true? 7) What training does **S** possess? 8) Is **S** in a normal (or optimal) physical situation to know **p**? Not only must **S** and an objector group *believe* that **S** is in an advantageous epistemic situation (i.e., possessing strong and relevant evidence to believe **p**) *they* must also *agree* that **S**'s reasons are 'strong enough' to halt a justificatory regress.

Similar philosophical views that are labeled as 'contextualist' have been developed by David Annis, Robert Hambourger, Michael Williams, and Adam Leite. I am in agreement with most of what these authors say about personal justification. To support the contextualist position, I will summarize viewpoints suggested by these other authors.

David Annis: A Contextualist Theory of Justification

Annis (1978) suggests that a personal justification for one's beliefs is a function of meeting one's own sufficiency standards for the defense of a belief, as well as other occasions where one must meet the demands of a truth-seeking peer group. A belief **p** or evidence **e** is 'contextually basic' when the belief is not doubted by truth-seeking persons and there is no demand for additional premises for its support. A contextualist theory of justification as described by Annis contends that there are *no* objective rules, algorithms, or weighing mechanisms to describe the sufficient conditions to guarantee that **S** has substantially relevant evidence to support **p**. Instead, there are values, norms, and prescribed tests of a scientific objector group that determine what kinds of evidence, how much evidence, and what sorts of reasoning is sufficient for **p** to be believed. Even if an objector group adopts non-arbitrary and truth-conducive norms for evaluating whether **S** has adequate or enough evidence in support of **p**, these norms are not independent truths.⁴

⁴ Historically, a major objection to Annis' contextualist theory of personal justification and the concept of a 'contextually basic belief' is that this practice alone doesn't in anyway guarantee that **p** is true. It is conceivable that *persons can agree* that there is *sufficient evidence* for believing **p** is true, and there is no doubt among concerned participants that a belief is true, and all of the epistemic norms are followed for ending a regress; but despite a lack of blame among the truth-seekers, **p** is false. It is objected that the concept of 'justification' requires something more than responsible and blameless belief, and that contextualism implausibly relativizes a personal justification to an objector group or conversational participants. Paul Moser (1986) states this worry. We discussed this problem in chapter one with a distinction between personal justification (PJ) and belief justification (BJ) and will consider it again below.

Robert Hambourger: The Pragmatic Dimension of Personal Justifications

A journal article by Robert Hambourger (1987) follows the lead of William James (1907) in arguing that whether a belief is epistemically justified depends not only on the amount of evidence that we have, but also on its practical consequences. Hambourger argues that the truth of knowledge claims is (in part) relative to *standards of caution*. A person with a given body of evidence might know a proposition relative to a relaxed standard of caution, but not know the same proposition relative to a more rigorous one. Standards of caution vary depending upon a host of pragmatic considerations (p. 242). The 'strength of evidence' a person needs in making any particular affirmation is not fixed once and for all, but with different circumstances and different purposes, different standards of caution are needed.

To back up his claim, Hambourger mentions the varying circumstances under which he would assert that he knows that 'Augustus Caesar died in 14 A.D.' For example, if knowledge of this proposition was needed for helping a friend solve a crossword puzzle, Hambourger would call upon his memory to unhesitatingly say that he knew that Caesar died in 14 A.D. based upon his memory of ancient studies in high school. However, if the same person asked for the same information when working on a scholarly paper, Hambourger would not be satisfied with his memory, and would advise the questioner to also look up the answer from a more reliable source. Hambourger thinks that there are not just two standards of caution, but that there is an indefinitely large number involved in daily life, and standards of caution can change flexibly within a single conversation. He offers this example:

S: Do you know what time it is?

S1: Yes, I do; it is two minutes after five.

S: Look, do you *know* what time it is? I want to make a long-distance phone call and don't want to pay full rates. (Phone companies charged more fees for phone calls made during 'business hours' 9AM to 5PM, than after-hours after 5PM, when this article was written).

S1: Well, I could be wrong. But my watch is quite accurate, so it *probably* is.

Hambourger notes that **S1** initially claims to know the time, but when asked again, she doesn't claim to know, but only have *probable belief*. **S1** has not been given any new evidence, to weaken her belief, she has just been asked a question. Hambourger's

diagnosis of the situation is that **S1** has 'sufficient evidence' to claim to know when there is no need for great accuracy, but she does not have 'sufficient evidence' to claim to know relative to a higher standard when **S** is trying to avoid a more expensive phone call.

In terms of the PE definition of knowledge, **S1** knows when first asked (assuming the other conditions are satisfied) as condition PE 4a is satisfied. But **S1** doesn't know (or may not know) under more stringent circumstances if condition 4a is not satisfied. In the more stringent circumstance, the weakening of **S**'s belief is because her evidence isn't that strong to discard the possibility that her watch could be wrong. Pragmatic considerations enter into whether **S** has knowledge.

Michael Williams: The Need for Motivated Reasons for a Skeptical Inquiry

Williams (2001) emphasizes that the “practice of justifying is only activated by finding oneself in the context of a properly motivated challenge” (p. 150). The regress skeptic seems to assume that the question ‘How do you know that?’ or ‘Why do you believe that?’ can always be reasonably asked. Williams responds that the skeptic isn't entitled to have unrestricted entitlement to additional reasons as an arbitrary challenge. Williams says that “entitlement to enter a challenge must be earned by finding specific reasons for questioning either the truth of the target belief or the claimant's challenge to hold it, which means that naked challenges are out of order” (pp. 150-151).

Adam Leite: A Local-Contextualist Theory of Personal Justification

Leite (2004, 2005) acknowledges his allegiance to the contextualist tradition of Annis. He proposes a solution to the regress problem by describing how regresses end in ordinary conversational contexts. Leite uses the term 'localist' in his article, "A Localist Solution to the Regress of Epistemic Justification" (2005) to set it apart from the word 'contextualism' that has become the name of a theory about the semantics of 'knowledge' (advocated by DeRose, Cohen, Lewis, among others). Examples of conversational contexts show how prescriptive elements enter into the personal justification of a belief.

Leite says that we generally take the justificatory status of a person's belief to be a function of how the person defends the belief. When formulating reasons, **S** is making it

the case that a belief is held for particular reasons rather than others. The activity of justifying a belief has a local structure. It requires a person to defend a single belief (or a limited number of beliefs) with non-circular reasons drawn from one's background beliefs and present circumstances. If a person cannot offer any reason whatsoever to defend a belief, we may conclude that the person is not justified in having the belief. Our ordinary evaluations of a person's beliefs are guided by a norm requiring the ability to provide good reasons for believing a given **p**.

Leite suggests that the description of conversational practices makes the 'regress problem' and 'personal justification' not so puzzling. He describes points at where a regress should end in ordinary conversations. Consider the following justificatory conversation between a wife and her husband, conducted under normal conditions:

Stage I:

S: (coming out of her study): 'My sister is unhappy with her job.'

S1 (spouse): 'Why do you think that?'

Stage II:

S: 'I just talked to my mother on the phone, and she said so.'

S1 (spouse): 'Why do you think that it was your mother?'

Leite observes:

S1's (the spouse) second question is obviously inappropriate, even ridiculous, given that the conditions are of the usual sort. If **S1** had some reason to suspect falsehood, unreliability, or irresponsibility in **S**'s recent conversation, then some such question would be acceptable. But **S1** has no such reasons. Correspondingly, **S** could legitimately respond by shrugging off the request for further reasons or dismissively saying such things as 'There's no reason to doubt it,' or 'Is there some reason to think otherwise?' (p. 404).

By offering dismissive responses **S** does not abandon the justificatory form of conversation altogether (e.g., 'Look I'm busy' or 'Don't be rude'). Rather she offers an appropriate response within that form of conversation. Leite continues:

The appropriateness of these responses indicates that the burden has shifted within the justificatory conversation. If **S1** is now to press the demand for justifying reasons without being ridiculous, he must supply what he takes to be reasons of an appropriate sort. To do so, he can't simply state a hypothesis incompatible with the truth, reliability or responsibility of **S**'s belief...

Instead, **S1** must provide something which he takes to tell in favor of the truth of some alternative hypothesis. And if **S1** can supply no such considerations, then-- even though **S** is sincerely engaged in the activity of justifying-- **S** is not required to offer any further reasons. (p. 404).

Leite uses this example to show that there are *norms* in ordinary justificatory practice that *forbid* demanding justifying reasons if the parties in question each responsibly believe that there is no reason to think that a belief is false. The demand for justification ends in this case when the wife **S** has no reason to doubt that she was talking to her mother, and the husband **S1** has no reason to doubt this either. The persistent questioner pursuing a regress of reasons "either violates the norms governing the activity of justifying or else he displays incredible ignorance about the world. He does not reveal an incoherence in our justificatory practice" (p. 409).

Leite also maintains that it is false that if one stops providing reasons for defending a belief, then one just stops arbitrarily. The structure of our justificatory practice is not entirely shaped by considerations of convenience and culture. We can imagine two ideally *rational* individuals who accept that the stated reasons for believing a proposition are fully adequate and given that there is no further point for continuing the justificatory conversation, the regress of justificatory reasons ends (pp. 417-418).

Why Would Someone Ask for a Speaker's Reasons in an Ordinary Context?

What are the reasonable circumstances when someone **S1** actually invites a speaker **S** to defend (or give reasons for) a belief? From the above considerations, it appears that a request for reasons is 'normal' under the following circumstances:

1. The questioner *may think* that the speaker's *belief is false*. The questioner has a reason to doubt the truth of the belief, or suspects that there may be an error in reasoning.
2. The questioner wants to determine *whether the speaker is qualified* (e.g., having expertise, background experience) for having the belief, and together with the speaker's reasons, decide whether one should accept the speaker's belief.

3. The questioner explicitly *acknowledges the qualifications (and expertise)* of the speaker but wants to learn the detailed reasons for the belief. The *questioner is curious about the exact grounds* for a belief.
4. The questioner may have an important pragmatic interest (e.g., in knowing the exact time of day) in confirming that the belief is true and *wants to make sure* that the speaker has *reliable reasons* for holding a belief.

The Role of Scientific Communities and Values in Scientific Research

The local-contextualist theory of personal justification recognizes the existence of scientific communities (i.e., peer groups, objector groups) that function to adjudicate regress problems. Three philosophers of science; Thomas Kuhn, Harold Brown, and Richard Rudner provide descriptions of scientific justification that are intrinsically social. Kuhn (1977) states:

A scientific community consists... of the practitioners of a scientific specialty. Bound together by common elements in their education and apprenticeship, they see themselves and are seen by others as the (persons) responsible for the pursuit of a set of shared goals, including the training of their successors. Such communities are characterized by the relative fullness of communication within the group's judgment in professional matters. To a remarkable extent the members of a given community will have absorbed the same literature and drawn similar lessons from it (p. 296).

Brown (1988) says that:

... a research community comes into existence when a group of researchers adopts a successful piece of problem-solving as a model for its own research, and trains new scientists to work in terms of that model. Scientists learn their trade by working through standard problems, both in the laboratory and on paper, and in doing so they acquire a body of cognitive and manipulative skills (p. 189).

... 'rational' beliefs arise out of informed judgments made by a community of individuals that has expertise to make judgments in a given discipline based upon evaluation and criticism... regresses are broken by communally mediated judgments (p. 194).

Kuhn also discusses broadly shared values among physical scientists as to what constitutes a good scientific theory:

First, a theory should be accurate: within its own domain, that is, consequences deducible from a theory should be in demonstrated agreement with existing experiments and observations. Second, a theory should be consistent, not only internally or with itself, but also with other currently accepted theories applicable to related aspects of nature. Third, it should have broad scope: in particular, a theory's consequences should extend far beyond the particular observations, laws, or sub-theories it was initially designed to explain. Fourth, and closely related, it should be simple, bringing phenomena that in its absence would be individually isolated, and as a set, confused. Fifth-- a somewhat less standard item, but one of special importance for actual scientific decisions-- a theory should be fruitful of new research findings: it should, that is, disclose new phenomena or previously unnoted relationships among those known. These five characteristics-- accuracy, consistency, scope, simplicity, and fruitfulness-- are all standard criteria for evaluating the adequacy of a theory (pp. 321-322).

In sum, the existence of scientific communities and shared values in scientific research supports a 'local contextualist' theory of personal justification.

A comment from Rudner (1954) similarly affirms the viewpoint suggested here:

Since no scientific hypothesis is ever completely verified, in rational acceptance of a hypothesis on the basis of evidence, the scientist must make the decision that the evidence is *sufficiently* strong or that the probability is *sufficiently* high to warrant acceptance of the hypothesis. Obviously, our decision with regard to evidence and how strong is 'strong enough' is going to be a function of the *importance*, in the typically ethical sense, of making a mistake in accepting or rejecting the hypothesis (p. 153).

A Definition of Local Contextualism

In accordance with the PE definition of knowledge, let us stipulate the following definition of an 'optimally justified' or 'fully justified' personal belief.

Local contextualism- **S** is 'fully personally justified' in believing **p**: If PE knowledge condition 4a is satisfied for **S**, and in situations of critical doubt, **S** is able to present reasons (i.e., propositional evidence) that terminates with **S**'s peer group accepting belief **p** without a demand for further reasons or evidence.

Let us return to the example of seeing a chair in a classroom in a normal situation, among a number of persons as described earlier. Suppose that we are asked to confirm that we see a chair, and that we are asked to give reasons to justify this belief. Suppose that we give the same ten reasons. These reasons constitute strong evidence that a chair is seen.

Let us now assume that all ten reasons go *unchallenged* in our group. In other words, there is no regress-of-reasons skeptic challenging these premises. Assuming that it is judged that there is 'sufficient evidence' (and cogent reasoning) for believing that we see a chair; we should notice that we accept this adequacy not as a matter of foundational perceptual certainty, nor because the belief is coherent with our other beliefs. Rather the assertion of adequacy is a *prescription* that the ten reasons (or some subset) *justify* the belief that there is a chair in the room. Justification is granted to individual persons and to groups. *We* as perceivers (i.e., experts in ordinary perceptual situations) *agree* that these premises do not require additional defense, and that they are a sufficient set for believing that we see a chair. A regress is terminated by the judgments of persons.

Responding to an Objection

A major objection to the contextualist theory of personal justification as advocated here (and by Annis), is that this 'practice' doesn't in any way guarantee that a belief is true. It is very conceivable that persons can agree that there are strong reasons that are sufficient evidence for believing a **p** is true, and all of the norms are followed for ending a regress; but as it turns out, despite a lack of blame among truth-seekers, the belief **p** is false. How can we say **S** is 'justified' in believing a proposition **p** when in fact it may be false? This seems to conflict with the JTB definition of 'knowledge' as a 'justified true belief.' To many philosophers, it seems counter-intuitive that **S** can have both 'justified true beliefs' ('knowledge') as well as 'justified false beliefs' ('not knowledge'). This doesn't leave any function for the term 'justified' in the JTB definition. How can it be that **S**'s possessing strong reasons (i.e., a justification for believing **p**) doesn't add anything to what knowledge is?

The response here acknowledges that a regress-ending community agreement doesn't guarantee that **p** is true. For example, persons once believed that 'the world is flat,' and 'the sun revolves around the earth.' Persons were personally justified in believing these propositions, given their evidence. But this absence of truth in situations of personally justified beliefs doesn't undermine the claim that justificatory regresses and claims of 'sufficient evidence' are terminated by persons. The objection shows that

'knowledge' requires **p** to be a truth-connected 'justified belief' as well as a 'personally justified' belief. The PE definition of knowledge requires both senses of justification, while the JTB account is deficient, only including 'personal justification' as necessary for knowledge.

Summary and Conclusion

Two positions have been presented to explain how a regress of reasons ends:

- 1) A local contextualist theory of personal justification has been offered as an epistemic solution to the regress of reasons problem. This is opposed to foundationalism, coherentism, and an *ad infinitum* regress as other solutions.
- 2) A theory about the speaker meaning of assertions that attribute an 'overall sufficiency' to **S**'s set of reasons for believing **p** (ending the regress) has been postulated. It is maintained that such assertions are 'prescriptions.' The concept of a 'prescription' is discussed in detail in other chapters.

In claiming that 'sufficient evidence assertions' are prescriptions (i.e., person-dependent), this doesn't imply that these assertions are made arbitrarily or on pure convention.