**Epistemic Circularity and Virtuous Coherence**

**DRAFT – DO NOT QUOTE WITHOUT PERMISSION**

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In his most recent book, *Knowing Full Well*, Ernest Sosa presents a comprehensive virtue epistemology, and argues that it can solve a number of philosophical problems.[[1]](#footnote-1) In the final chapter of his book, Sosa argues that his virtue epistemology can solve the problem of epistemic circularity. But what is the problem of epistemic circularity, and what would count as a solution to it?

What epistemologists call “the problem of epistemic circularity” is often described as the problem of understanding how it is possible for us to rely upon our own epistemic faculties in establishing the reliability of those very same faculties. But, put this way, it’s not clear just what the “problem” is supposed to be. In establishing the reliability of any measuring instrument, it is necessary to use other measuring instruments – but it doesn’t seem to follow from this that one can never establish the reliability of measuring instruments. Why then, should there be a problem about relying on our own epistemic faculties to establish the reliability of those very faculties?

To see just what is apparently problematic about epistemic circularity, it might help to focus on some specific cases of epistemically circular inferences, and to contrast them with inferences that are not – at least not in the same way – epistemically circular. By doing this, we will be able to isolate what I will call the “problem of single-case circularity”. Once we’ve isolated that problem, and discovered how to solve it, and then confirmed our solution by applying it successfully to the solution of another related problem, we will then be in a position to spell out what Sosa (along with many other philosophers) takes the problem of epistemic circularity to be.

**I. The Problem of Single-Case Circularity**

Consider the following hypothetical cases:

(Normal Thermometer)

Your child complains of body aches, so you take her temperature. You find a thermometer in the cupboard, you use the thermometer to take her temperature, and it reads 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit. Now you make the following inference, which I call “Normal Thermometer”:

(Normal Thermometer – 1) The thermometer indicates that her temperature is 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit.

(Normal Thermometer – 2) The thermometer reading is accurate on this occasion. (We can suppose that this premise is justified by inference from the long prior track record of accuracy that you have found your thermometers to possess, and so independently of Normal Thermometer – 1.)

(Normal Thermometer – 3) Therefore, her temperature is 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit.

Obviously, Normal Thermometer is a good inference. Its premises are credible in the situation I’ve described, and the conclusion follows from the premises. Normal Thermometer is a kind of inference by means of which you might gain justification for believing its conclusion (Normal Thermometer – 3).

Compare the situation just described with another situation:

(Indirect Thermometer)

Your child complains of body aches, so you take her to the doctor. The doctor takes her temperature, and tells you that it is 101.5. You bring her home, put her to bed, and then find that you have a thermometer at home. Wondering whether this thermometer is accurate, you use it to take her temperature. Your own thermometer also reads 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit. Now you make the following inference, which I call “Indirect Thermometer”:

(Indirect Thermometer – 1) The thermometer indicates that her temperature is 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit.

(Indirect Thermometer – 2) Her temperature is 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit. (We can suppose that this premise is justified by the doctor’s temperature reading, and so independently of Indirect Thermometer – 1.)

(Indirect Thermometer – 3) Therefore, the thermometer reading is accurate on this occasion.

Once again, Indirect Thermometer is a good inference. Its premises are credible in the situation I’ve described, and the conclusion follows from the premises. Like Normal Thermometer, Indirect Thermometer is a kind of inference by means of which you might gain justification for believing its conclusion (in this case, Indirect Thermometer – 3).

Now contrast the two situations above with a third:

(Easy Thermometer)

Your child complains of body aches, so you take her temperature. You find a thermometer in the cupboard, you use the thermometer to take her temperature, and it reads 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit. Now you make the following inference, which I call “Easy Thermometer”:

(Easy Thermometer – 1) The thermometer indicates a temperature of 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit.

(Easy Thermometer – 2) Her temperature is 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit. (Let’s suppose that this is justified, but not on the basis of anything that does not include Easy Thermometer – 1.)

(Easy Thermometer – 3) The thermometer gives an accurate reading on this occasion.

In contrast to Normal Thermometer and Indirect Thermometer, Easy Thermometer does not seem to be a good inference. Of course, the conclusion follows from the premises, since the premises and the conclusion are the same in Easy Thermometer as they are in Indirect Thermometer. And of course, the premises and conclusion are all credible in the situation that I’ve described, since that situation is not different from Normal Thermometer, in which all of three of the propositions at issue have credibility. So why, then, is Easy Thermometer not as good an inference as Normal Thermometer or Indirect Thermometer?

This is one specific version of the problem of single-case circularity: it is the problem of understanding why Easy Thermometer is not a good inference – is not the kind of inference by means of which we could come to be justified in believing its conclusion – even though Normal Thermometer and Indirect Thermometer both are good inferences. If we can rely on a particular thermometer reading to find out what someone’s temperature is, and we can also rely on information about someone’s temperature to find out that a particular thermometer reading is accurate, then why can’t we do both at once? Why can’t we rely on a particular thermometer reading to establish the accuracy of that very reading?

The problem, of course, doesn’t arise only for thermometers, or even measuring instruments more generally. Consider:

(Normal Memory)

You bring your sick child to the doctor, who asks how high her temperature was last time you took it (which was yesterday). You seem to recall taking her temperature, and its being 101.5. Now you make the following inference, which I call “Normal Memory”:

(Normal Memory – 1) I seem to recall that her temperature was 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit.

(Normal Memory – 2) My apparent recall is accurate on this occasion. (We can suppose that this premise is justified by inference from the long prior track record of accuracy that you have found your recall to possess, and so independently of Normal Memory – 1.)

(Normal Memory – 3) Therefore, her temperature was 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit.

Obviously, Normal Memory is a good inference. Its premises are credible in the situation I’ve described, and the conclusion follows from the premises. Normal Memory is a kind of inference by means of which you might gain justification for believing its conclusion (Normal Memory – 3).

Contrast the situation just described with another situation:

(Indirect Memory)

You bring your sick child to the doctor, who asks how high her temperature was last time you took it (which was yesterday). You seem to recall taking her temperature, and its being 101.5. Then your child responds to the doctor herself, and announces that her temperature was 101.5. Now you make the following inference, which I call “Indirect Memory”:

(Indirect Memory – 1) I seem to recall that her temperature was 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit.

(Indirect Memory – 2) Her temperature was 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit. (We can suppose that this premise is justified by my child’s testimony, and so independently of Indirect Memory – 1.)

(Indirect Memory – 3) Therefore, my apparent recall is accurate on this occasion.

Once again, Indirect Memory is a good inference. Its premises are credible in the situation I’ve described, and the conclusion follows from the premises. Like Normal Memory, Indirect Memory is a kind of inference by means of which you might gain justification for believing its conclusion (in this case, Indirect Memory – 3).

Now contrast the two situations above with a third:

(Easy Memory)

You bring your sick child to the doctor, who asks how high her temperature was last time you took it (which was yesterday). You seem to recall taking her temperature, and its being 101.5. Now you make the following inference, which I call “Easy Memory”:

(Easy Memory – 1) I seem to recall that her temperature was 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit.

(Easy Memory – 2) Her temperature was 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit. (Let’s suppose that this is justified, but not on the basis of anything that does not include Easy Memory – 1.)

(Easy Memory – 3) My apparent recall is accurate on this occasion.

In contrast to Normal Memory and Indirect Memory, Easy Memory does not seem to be a good inference. Of course, the conclusion follows from the premises, since the premises and the conclusion are the same in Easy Memory as they are in Indirect Memory. And of course, the premises and conclusion are all credible in the situation that I’ve described, since that situation is not different from Normal Memory, in which all of three of the propositions at issue have credibility. So why, then, is Easy Memory not as good an inference as Normal Memory or Indirect Memory? This question is yet another version of the problem of single-case circularity. If we can rely on an apparent memory to find out what someone’s temperature was, and we can also rely on information about someone’s past temperature to find out that an apparent memory is accurate, then why can’t we do both at once? Why can’t we rely on an apparent memory to establish the accuracy of that very same apparent memory?

Both of the questions I’ve raised above – the question why Easy Thermometer is not as good an inference as Normal Thermometer or Indirect Thermometer, and the question why Easy Memory is not as good an inference as Normal Memory or Indirect Memory – both of these questions are versions of the problem of single-case circularity. But the problem of single-case circularity doesn’t arise only for empirically justified beliefs: it can also arise for a priori justified beliefs. Consider:

(Normal Calculation)

You need to compute the sum of several positive numbers. You perform the calculation, you arrive at the answer x. Now you make the following inference:

(Normal Calculation – 1) My calculations indicate that the sum of these numbers is x.

(Normal Calculation – 2) My calculations on this occasion are correct. (We can suppose that this is justified by the long track record of accuracy that you have found your calculations of the relevant kind to possess.)

(Normal Calculation – 3) The sum of these numbers is x.

Obviously, Normal Calculation is a good inference. Its premises are credible in the situation I’ve described, and the conclusion follows from the premises. Normal Calculation is a kind of inference by means of which you might gain justification for believing its conclusion (Normal Calculation – 3).

(Indirect Calculation)

You need to compute the sum of several positive numbers. You perform the calculation, you arrive at the answer x. Someone else also performs the same calculation, arrives at the same answer x, and tells you so. Now you make the following inference:

(Indirect Calculation – 1) My calculations indicate that the sum of these numbers is x.

(Indirect Calculation – 2) The sum of these numbers is x. (We can suppose that this is justified by someone else’s testimony concerning their own calculations.)

(Indirect Calculation – 3) My calculations on this occasion are correct.

Again, Indirect Calculation is a good inference. Its premises are credible in the situation I’ve described, and the conclusion follows from the premises. Indirect Calculation is a kind of inference by means of which you might gain justification for believing its conclusion (Indirect Calculation – 3).

Now compare the two inferences I’ve described above with a third:

(Easy Calculation)

You need to compute the sum of several positive numbers. You perform the calculation, you arrive at the answer x. Now you make the following inference:

(Easy Calculation – 1) My calculations indicate that the sum of these numbers is x.

(Easy Calculation – 2) The sum of these numbers is x. (Let’s suppose that this is justified, but not on the basis of anything that does not include Easy Calculation – 1.)

(Easy Calculation – 3) My calculations on this occasion are correct.

In contrast to Normal Calculation and Indirect Calculation, Easy Calculation does not seem to be a good inference. Of course, the conclusion follows from the premises, since the premises and the conclusion are the same in Easy Calculation as they are in Indirect Calculation. And of course, the premises and conclusion are all credible in the situation that I’ve described, since that situation is not different from Normal Calculation, in which all of three of the propositions at issue have credibility. So why, then, is Easy Calculation not as good an inference as Normal Calculation or Indirect Calculation? This question is yet another version of the problem of single-case circularity. If we can rely on a calculation to find out what the sum of some numbers is, and we can also rely on information about the sum of the numbers to find out that the calculation is accurate, then why can’t we do both at once? Why can’t we rely on a calculation to establish the accuracy of that very calculation?

I have now raised the problem of single-case circularity using three different sets of cases. In general, this is the problem of understanding why Easy inferences are not as good at establishing their conclusions as Normal or Indirect inferences are, despite having the same premises and conclusion as the latter and occurring in the same epistemic situations as the former. Notice that, in all of the Easy inferences above (Easy Thermometer, Easy Memory, and Easy Calculation) the second premise was justified on the basis of the first premise. The second premise did not provide any corroboration of the information given in the first premise. Indeed, in each inference, there was no corroboration of the information given in the first premise, and this seems to be at least one problem that afflicts all of the Easy inferences. Could this absence of corroboration be what explains why the Easy inferences are not as good as the Normal inferences or the Indirect inferences?

No. Consider the following inferences, in each of which the second premise is justified solely on the basis of the first premise:

(Easy Calculation\*) This case is just like Easy Calculation, except for the conclusion reached.

(Easy Calculation\* – 1) My calculations indicate that the sum of these numbers is x.

(Easy Calculation\* – 2) The sum of these numbers is x. (Let’s suppose that this is justified, but not on the basis of anything that does not include Easy Calculation\* – 1.)

(Easy Calculation\* – 3) The sum of these numbers is greater than x/2.

(Easy Thermometer\*) This case is just like Easy Thermometer, except for the conclusion reached.

(Easy Thermometer\* – 1) The thermometer indicates a temperature of 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit.

(Easy Thermometer\* – 2) Her temperature is 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit. (Let’s suppose that this is justified, but not on the basis of anything that does not include Easy Thermometer\* – 1.)

(Easy Thermometer\* – 3) She is running a fever.

Although each of the two inferences above is such that its second premise is justified solely on the basis of its first premise, neither Easy Calculation\* nor Easy Thermometer\* is a bad inference: each of them provides a way of gaining justification for believing its conclusions to be true. So absence of corroboration of the support that the first premise gives to the second premise cannot be what is wrong with the Easy inferences, since that feature is shared by the perfectly good Easy\* inferences. What, then, could be wrong with the Easy inferences?

One plausible answer to this question is suggested by Crispin Wright’s discussion of transmission failure[[2]](#footnote-2): in the Easy inferences, in order to justifiably believe the second premise on the basis of the first premise, one must justifiably believe the conclusion on some basis that is independent of the first premise, and so the inference from the first and second premise to the conclusion cannot be what justifies one’s belief in the truth of the conclusion. More generally, for any premise set:

**Transmission Failure (TF)**: Necessarily, S’s competent deduction *P therefore Q* fails to transmit doxastic justification from S’s belief that P to S’s belief that Q if S justifiably believes that P at least partly in virtue of S’s justifiably believing that Q on some basis independent of P.

Could TF provide a good explanation of what’s wrong with the Easy inferences?

Not as it stands. To see why it won’t work, consider these cases:

(Easy Calculation^) This case is just like Easy Calculation, except for the conclusion reached.

(Easy Calculation^ – 1) My calculations indicate that the sum of these numbers is x.

(Easy Calculation^ – 2) The sum of these numbers is x. (Let’s suppose that this is justified, but not on the basis of anything that does not include Easy Calculation^ – 1.)

(Easy Calculation^ – 3) If there is some error in my calculations, that error is compensated for by some other error, to produce a correct result.

(Easy Thermometer^) This case is just like Easy Thermometer, except for the conclusion reached.

(Easy Thermometer^ – 1) The thermometer indicates a temperature of 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit.

(Easy Thermometer^ – 2) Her temperature is 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit. (Let’s suppose that this is justified, but not on the basis of anything that does not include Easy Thermometer^ – 1.)

(Easy Thermometer^ – 3) Even if my thermometer is systematically unreliable, still, on this occasion, it somehow managed to produce an accurate reading.

Neither of the inferences above can provide one with a way of gaining justification to believe that its conclusion is true. And yet in neither case must one justifiably believe the conclusion in order justifiably to believe the premises: indeed, one need not even have the conceptual resources necessary to believe the conclusion in order to justifiably believe the premises. How can we explain what goes wrong in the Easy inferences and the Easy^ inferences listed above, without falsely predicting a similar fault in the Easy\* inferences?

Here is a proposal that alters the transmission failure proposal bruited just above, so that it applies not to doxastic but rather to propositional justification. Let’s call it “propositional transmission failure”:

**Propositional Transmission Failure (PTF)**: Necessarily, S’s competent deduction *P therefore Q* fails to transmit (doxastic) justification from P to Q if S is justified in believing that P at least partly in virtue of something E, such that E is what makes S justified in believing Q.[[3]](#footnote-3)

PTF differs from TF by focusing not on S’s doxastic justifications, but rather on the source of S’s propositional justifications. By doing so, it promises to explain what goes wrong in the Easy^ inferences above: in each of the Easy^ inferences, even if one doesn’t believe the conclusion at all, what gives one justification to believe the conclusion must be something that is independent of the premises, and in virtue of which the first premise supports the second premise. Could PTF, then, be the correct explanation of what goes wrong in the Easy inferences?

Again, the answer is no. To see why not, consider the following cases:

(Easy Calculation#) Again, this case is just like Easy Calculation, except for the conclusion reached.

(Easy Calculation# – 1) My calculations indicate that the sum of these numbers is x.

(Easy Calculation# – 2) The sum of these numbers is x. (Let’s suppose that this is justified, but not on the basis of anything that does not include Easy Calculation# – 1.)

(Easy Calculation# – 3) My calculations are correct on this occasion, and the sum of these numbers is greater than x/2.

(Easy Thermometer#) This case is just like Easy Thermometer, except for the conclusion reached.

(Easy Thermometer# – 1) The thermometer indicates a temperature of 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit.

(Easy Thermometer# – 2) Her temperature is 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit. (Let’s suppose that this is justified, but not on the basis of anything that does not include Easy Thermometer# – 1.)

(Easy Thermometer# – 3) My thermometer reading is accurate on this occasion, and she is running a fever.

Neither of the inferences above can provide one with a way of gaining justification to believe that its conclusion is true. And yet in neither case must one have a justification for believing the conclusion that is independent of one’s justification for believing the premises in order for one to be justified in believing the premises. In fact, while it is possible in each case to be justified in believing the premises, we may suppose that it is not possible to have a justification for believing the conclusion that is entirely independent of one’s justification for believing the premises, and that is because, in each case, one’s justification for believing the second conjunct of the conclusion derives from one’s justification for believing the second premise. In each case, being justified in believing the premises requires no more than that one have independent justification for believing *the first conjunct* of the conclusion. PTF will not do.

But a principle very similar to PTF will work.

**Generalized Transmission Failure (GTF)**: Necessarily, S’s competent deduction *P therefore Q* fails to transmit (doxastic) justification from P to Q if there is some E such that

1. E is part of what makes S justified in believing Q, and
2. S is justified in believing that P in virtue of (i), but
3. (i) does not obtain in virtue of S’s being justified in believing that P.

GTF is not simple to state, but it is easier to picture. Think of a structure in which one part (Q) is supported by another part (E), and perhaps also by other things as well. Furthermore, E’s support for Q helps to support a third part (P), which may or may not be supported by other things as well. But while E supports Q, and E’s supporting Q helps to support P, the support that P has does not in turn help E to support Q. The support relation goes from E to Q to P, and does not go in reverse. That is a way of picturing the situation that, according to GTF, results in the epistemic badness of inference from P to Q (even when the inference from P to Q is sound).

GTF explains what goes wrong in all of the Easy, Easy^, and Easy# inferences above. In each of those inferences, your justification for believing the premises depends upon there being something (E) that is at least part of what justifies your believing the conclusion, where the fact that E is part of what justifies your believing the conclusion does not depend upon your being justified in believing the premises. Let’s go through the examples one at a time to see this.

(Easy Thermometer – 1) The thermometer indicates a temperature of 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit.

(Easy Thermometer – 2) Her temperature is 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit. (Let’s suppose that this is justified, but not on the basis of anything that does not include Easy Thermometer – 1.)

(Easy Thermometer – 3) The thermometer gives an accurate reading on this occasion.

Here, you are justified in believing (Easy Thermometer – 2) on the basis of (Easy Thermometer – 1) only in virtue of your having some independent source of justification for believing (Easy Thermometer – 3). Let that independent source of justification be E. Then E is what makes you justified in believing (Easy Thermometer – 3), you are justified in believing (Easy Thermometer – 2) partly in virtue of E’s making you justified in believing (Easy Thermometer – 3), but it is not the case that E makes you justified in believing (Easy Thermometer – 3) in virtue of your being justified in believing (Easy Thermometer – 2).

(Easy Memory – 1) I seem to recall that her temperature was 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit.

(Easy Memory – 2) Her temperature was 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit. (Let’s suppose that this is justified, but not on the basis of anything that does not include Easy Memory – 1.)

(Easy Memory – 3) My apparent recall is accurate on this occasion.

Here again, you are justified in believing (Easy Memory – 2) on the basis of (Easy Memory – 1) only in virtue of your having some independent source of justification for believing (Easy Memory – 3). Let that independent source of justification be E. Then E is what makes you justified in believing (Easy Memory – 3), you are justified in believing (Easy Memory – 2) in virtue of E’s making you justified in believing (Easy Memory – 3), but it is not the case that E makes you justified in believing (Easy Memory – 3) in virtue of your being justified in believing (Easy Memory – 2). Clearly, the same analysis applies to (Easy Calculation).

(Easy Calculation^ – 1) My calculations indicate that the sum of these numbers is x.

(Easy Calculation^ – 2) The sum of these numbers is x. (Let’s suppose that this is justified, but not on the basis of anything that does not include Easy Calculation^ – 1.)

(Easy Calculation^ – 3) If there is some error in my calculations, that error is compensated for by some other error, to produce a correct result.

Here, you are justified in believing (Easy Calculation^ – 2) on the basis of (Easy Calculation^ – 1) only in virtue of your having some independent source of justification for believing that your calculations are accurate on this occasion. Let that independent source of justification be E. If E makes you justified in believing that your calculations are accurate on this occasion, then E also makes you justified in believing (Easy Calculation^ – 3). Furthermore, you are justified in believing (Easy Calculation^ – 2) in virtue of E’s making you justified in believing (Easy Calculation^ – 3), but it is not the case that E makes you justified in believing (Easy Calculation^ – 3) in virtue of your being justified in believing (Easy Calculation^ – 2). Clearly, the same analysis applies to (Easy Calculation).

Again, the same analysis applies to (Easy Thermometer^).

(Easy Calculation# – 1) My calculations indicate that the sum of these numbers is x.

(Easy Calculation# – 2) The sum of these numbers is x. (Let’s suppose that this is justified, but not on the basis of anything that does not include Easy Calculation# – 1.)

(Easy Calculation# – 3) My calculations are correct on this occasion, and the sum of these numbers is greater than x/2.

Here, you are justified in believing (Easy Calculation# – 2) on the basis of (Easy Calculation# – 1) only in virtue of your having some independent source of justification for believing that your calculations are accurate on this occasion. Let that independent source of justification be E. If E makes you justified in believing that your calculations are accurate on this occasion, then E is also part of what makes you justified in believing (Easy Calculation# – 3). Furthermore, you are justified in believing (Easy Calculation# – 2) in virtue of E’s helping to make you justified in believing (Easy Calculation# – 3), but it is not the case that E helps to make you justified in believing (Easy Calculation# – 3) in virtue of your being justified in believing (Easy Calculation# – 2). Again, the same analysis applies to (Easy Thermometer#).

So GTF explains what goes wrong in all of the Easy, Easy^, and Easy# inferences above. It also explains why nothing goes wrong in the Normal, Indirect, or Easy\* inferences above. In the Normal and the Indirect inferences, your justification for believing the premises does not depend upon anything else (other than the premises) justifying you in believing the conclusion. And the same is true of the Easy\* inferences. In all those cases, your justification for believing the premises does not depend in any way upon what helps to justify you in believing the conclusion. GTF sorts the cases above perfectly.

In sum, the problem of single-case circularity is the problem of understanding what’s wrong with the Easy inferences listed above: GTF provides a solution to the problem of single-case circularity. In the next section, I will introduce a new version of the problem of epistemic circularity – distinct from the problem of single-case circularity – and show that GTF solves that new problem as well.

**II. The Problem of Bootstrapping Circularity**

The problem of single-case circularity is a problem concerning valid deductive inferences. In section I, I argued that GTF solves the problem. But there is a different problem of epistemic circularity that I would like to introduce in this section. The point of introducing this different problem is not merely to broaden our sense of the various forms that epistemic circularity can take, but also to provide further support for GTF. For, as I will argue in this section, GTF solves this new problem.

I’ll begin by reminding us of the problem of single-case circularity, using the following simple case:

(Easy Testimony)

You are wandering around St. Andrews, looking for Market Street. You ask an unremarkable stranger how to get to Market Street, and she tells you that it is 2 blocks straight ahead and 1 block left. Now you make the following inference, which I call “Easy Testimony”:

(Easy Testimony – 1) The stranger said that Market Street is 2 blocks straight ahead and 1 block left.

(Easy Testimony – 2) Market Street is 2 blocks straight ahead and 1 block left. (Let’s suppose that this is justified, but not on the basis of anything that does not include Easy Testimony – 1.)

(Easy Testimony – 3) Therefore, the stranger’s testimony is accurate on this occasion.

Easy Testimony is not a good inference: it is not the kind of inference by means of which you might gain justification for believing its conclusion (Easy Testimony – 3). And this is just as GTF would predict, for your justification for believing (Easy Testimony – 2) depends upon your having some independent source of justification for believing (Easy Testimony – 3), but not vice-versa.

Now compare Easy Testimony with another case:

(Bootstrapping Testimony)

You are wandering around St. Andrews, looking for Market Street. You ask an unremarkable stranger how to get to Market Street, and she tells you that it is 2 blocks straight ahead and 1 block left. It turns out that she is walking there too, and as you walk with her, you talk some more. She tells you that her name is “Denise”, that she has been travelling around Scotland for over a month now, that she lives in St. Louis, Missouri, though she was born in Johannesburg, that she’s just had her 30th birthday last week, and that her favorite gift was a bottle of Scotch.

(Bootstrapping Testimony – 1) The stranger said that Market Street is 2 blocks straight ahead and 1 block left, and Market Street is 2 blocks straight ahead and 1 block left (where the second conjunct is justified, but not on the basis of anything that does not include the first conjunct).

(Bootstrapping Testimony – 2) The stranger said that her name is “Denise”, and her name is “Denise” (where the second conjunct is justified, but not on the basis of anything that does not include the first conjunct).

(Bootstrapping Testimony – 3) The stranger said that she has been travelling around Scotland for over a month now, and she has been travelling around Scotland for over a month now (where the second conjunct is justified, but not on the basis of anything that does not include the first conjunct).

(Bootstrapping Testimony – 4) The stranger said that she lives in St. Louis Missouri, and she does live in St. Louis, Missouri (where the second conjunct is justified, but not on the basis of anything that does not include the first conjunct).

(Bootstrapping Testimony – 5) The stranger tells you that she was born in Johannesburg, and she was born in Johannesburg (where the second conjunct is justified, but not on the basis of anything that does not include the first conjunct).

(Bootstrapping Testimony – 6) The stranger said that her 30th birthday was last week, and her 30th birthday was last week (where the second conjunct is justified, but not on the basis of anything that does not include the first conjunct).

(Bootstrapping Testimony – 7) The stranger said that her favorite gift was a bottle of Scotch, and her favorite gift was a bottle of Scotch (where the second conjunct is justified, but not on the basis of anything that does not include the first conjunct).

(Bootstrapping Testimony – 8) Therefore, the stranger is a reliable testifier.

Even if Bootstrapping Testimony has the form of a good inductive inference – even if its premises provide a sufficient number of sufficiently representative cases to warrant a conclusion of reliability – it is still a bad inference. That is to say, it is not the kind of inference by means of which someone could come to be justified in believing the conclusion. This is not because the conclusion is not one that we can become justified in believing, nor is it because the conclusion is not one that we can become justified in believing on the basis of an inductive inference from cases. It is just that the conclusion is not one that we can become justified in believing on the basis of *this* inductive inference from cases. Why is this?

Notice that GTF can explain why this is. In the inference above, your justification for believing each premise depends upon your justification for believing its second conjunct. And while your justification for believing its second conjunct depended upon its first conjunct, it also depended upon your having some independent justification to regard the testifier as reliable. In other words, your justification for believing the premises depended upon your having some independent justification for believing the conclusion. But your having that independent justification for believing the conclusion did not also depend upon your having justification for believing the premises: even if your interlocutor’s assertions had been different, you would still have had that independent justification for believing her testimony (whatever it was, so long as it was not implausible given what else you knew about her). GTF, in short, explains what makes Bootstrapping Testimony a bad inference.

But now consider another inductive case:

(Super-Bootstrapping Newspaper)

You trust the *New York Times* to be a reliable source of news. You have good reason to believe, and you do believe, that most of what is reported in the *Times* is true. But you wonder: just how reliable is the Times? In particular, might it be *perfectly* reliable? You don’t know, but you decide to find out, and so you go through the Times reading each statement until you’ve read all N statements. Then you reason as follows:

(Super-Bootstrapping Newspaper – 1) The Times reported that p, and p (where the second conjunct is justified solely on the basis of the first, along with your justified belief that the *Times* is reliable).

(Super-Bootstrapping Newspaper – 2) The Times reported that q, and q (where the second conjunct is justified solely on the basis of the first, along with your justified belief that the *Times* is reliable).

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….

(Super-Bootstrapping Newspaper – N + 1) The *Times* is perfectly reliable.

Again, even if Super-Bootstrapping Newspaper has the form of a good inductive inference – even if its premises provide a sufficient number of sufficiently representative cases to warrant a conclusion of super-reliability – it is still a bad inference. That is to say, it is not the kind of inference by means of which someone could come to be justified in believing the conclusion. This is not because the conclusion is not one that we can become justified in believing, nor is it because the conclusion is not one that we can become justified in believing on the basis of an inductive inference from cases. It is just that the conclusion is not one that we can become justified in believing on the basis of *this* inductive inference from cases. Why is this? It is not obvious how to use GTF to explain the problem with Super-Bootstrapping Newspaper, since the conclusion of that inference is stronger than the background needed to justify any particular premise.

Nonetheless, the conclusion of that inference is not stronger than the background needed to justify the *conjunction* of premises. It’s one thing to believe the *Times* with respect to a particular claim it reports. It’s another thing to believe the *Times* with respect to the conjunction of claims it reports. The latter does not require simply justified trust in the *Times*: I have justified trust in lots of sources, but still am not justified in believing the conjunction of everything they report. (To take an obvious example: I am justified in trusting my own cognitive powers, but should I therefore believe that the conjunction of all the propositions I believe is true?) In order to be justified in believing the conjunction of everything that the *Times* reports, I would already have to have some independent justification for believing that the *Times* is perfectly reliable. In short, GTF explains this case as well as the earlier bootstrapping case.

I conclude my argument for GTF. In the next section, we’ll see that, while GTF solves the problems of single-case circularity and bootstrapping circularity, it raises a further question, and it is this further question that constitutes the more general problem of epistemic circularity with which Sosa is concerned.

**III. GTF and the Regress of Justifiers**

According to GTF, the Easy inferences above are bad because to some extent the justification of their premises depends upon the justification of their conclusion, not vice-versa. This means that, if the premises of those inferences are justified, then that is because the conclusions are independently justified. But if we ask what it is that provides this independent justification for the conclusions, we may seem to be launched on a potentially vicious regress.

To see the regress that I have in mind here, let’s focus on a particular example. Recall, for instance:

(Easy Thermometer)

Your child complains of body aches, so you take her temperature. You find a thermometer in the cupboard, you use the thermometer to take her temperature, and it reads 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit. Now you make the following inference, which I call “Easy Thermometer”:

(Easy Thermometer – 1) The thermometer indicates a temperature of 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit.

(Easy Thermometer – 2) Her temperature is 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit. (Let’s suppose that this is justified, but not on the basis of anything that does not include Easy Thermometer – 1.)

(Easy Thermometer – 3) The thermometer gives an accurate reading on this occasion.

According to GTF, Easy Thermometer is not a good inference because the premises are justified only by virtue of the conclusion’s being independently justified. Now, there are lots of different things that could provide justification for the conclusion (Easy Thermometer – 3) independently of the specific premises listed above. But let’s refer to whatever factor it is that provides this independent justification for (Easy Thermometer – 3) as I. Now, if I justifies you in believing (Easy Thermometer – 3), then are you justified in believing that I indicates the truth of (Easy Thermometer – 3)? Either you are or you aren’t. If you aren’t so justified, then let’s say that I is an “external” justifier: a justifer your having of which does not require you to be aware that it indicates the truth of the proposition it justifies. Suppose, for the moment, that I is not an external justifier, and that you are justified in believing that I indicates the truth of (Easy Thermometer – 3). In that case, you are justified in believing both (Easy Thermometer – 3), and that I indicates the truth of (Easy Thermometer – 3). If you are justified in believing both of these propositions, then can you make the following inference:

(Easy I)

(Easy I – 1) (Easy Thermometer – 3).

(Easy I – 2) I indicates that (Easy Thermometer – 3) is true.

(Easy I – 3) I gives an accurate indication on this occasion.

Whatever the value of I, the inference above is a version of the Easy inferences diagnosed above. Although it is valid, it cannot transmit justification from premises to conclusion any better than they can. GTF tells us that this must be because the conclusion (Easy I – 3) requires justification independent of the premises. Let’s call the thing that provides this independent justification I’. Now, if I’ justifies you in believing (Easy I – 3), then are you justified in believing that I indicates the truth of (Easy I – 3)? Either you are or you aren’t. If you aren’t so justified, then I’ is an external justifier. Suppose that I’ is not an external justifier, and that you are justified in believing that I’ indicates the truth of (Easy I – 3). In that case, you are justified in believing both (Easy I – 3), and that I’ indicates the truth of (Easy I – 3). If you are justified in believing both of these propositions, then can you make the following inference:

(Easy I’)

(Easy I’ – 1) (Easy I – 3)

(Easy I’ – 2) I’ indicates that (Easy I – 3) is true.

(Easy I’ – 3) I’ gives an accurate indication on this occasion.

Whatever the value of I’, the inference above is, again, an Easy inference: although it is valid, it cannot transmit justification from premises to conclusion. GTF tells us that this must be because the conclusion (Easy I’ – 3) requires justification independent of the premises. Let’s call the thing that provides this independent justification I’’. Now, if I’’ justifies you in believing (Easy I’ – 3), then are you justified in believing that I’ indicates the truth of (Easy I’ – 3)? Either you are or you aren’t. If you aren’t so justified, then I’’ is an external justifier. Suppose that I’’ is not an external justifier, and that you are justified in believing that I’’ indicates the truth of (Easy I’ – 3). In that case, you are justified in believing both (Easy I’ – 3), and that I’’ indicates the truth of (Easy I’ – 3). If you are justified in believing both of these propositions … regress looms.

In response to this regress of justifiers, we have four options: (i) We could claim that the regress ends with an external justifier, i.e., a justifier your having which does not guarantee that you are justified in believing that it indicates the truth of the proposition it justifies. (ii) We could claim that the regress ends with a justifier that vouchsafes its own accuracy, i.e., a justifier that not only justifies you in believing some first-order proposition p, but simultaneously justifies you in believing that that very justifier accurately indicates the truth of p on this occasion. (iii) We could claim that the regress goes in a circle. Or (iv) we could claim that the regress goes on forever, without repeating. Since justification can be overdetermined, these options are not mutually exclusive: we could have one justificatory regress that terminates in an external justifier, and another justificatory regress for the very same proposition that goes on *ad infinitum*.

The general problem of epistemic circularity with which Sosa and other epistemologists are concerned is the problem of how to respond to this regress, a regress that is generated by presupposing GTF.

In the next section, I will describe Sosa’s response to this regress, which is a combination of (i) and (iii). I will argue that this response runs afoul of GTF, the very presupposition of the regress problem. In the final section, I will argue that we can capture the insights of Sosa’s account, and also respect GTF, without having to accept Sosa’s own version of (iii).

**IV. Sosa’s Attempted Solution to the Problem of Epistemic Circularity**

In the final chapter of his *Knowing Full Well*, Ernest Sosa addresses this general problem of epistemic circularity.[[4]](#footnote-4) In what follows, I critically assess his solution to it, and then describe an emendation to his solution that would avoid the problems encountered by Sosa’s own solution, but would still be consistent with Sosa’s overall epistemological picture. To sketch Sosa’s own picture, I begin by considering:

(Easy Vision)

You are looking at a red table in front of you in normal lighting. It looks red to you. Now you reason as follows:

(Easy Vision – 1) It looks me to as if there is a red table before me.

(Easy Vision – 2) There is a red table before me (justified, but not on the basis of anything that does not include Easy Vision – 1).

(Easy Vision – 3) My current visual experience is veridical (at least with respect to there being a red table before me).

Once again, the inference Easy Vision, though sound, is not a good inference: while I can easily become justified in believing the conclusion of the inference, I cannot become justified in believing it on the basis of this inference. GTF explains why: it is because my justifiedness in believing the premises depends on some independent justification I have for believing the conclusion, but not vice-versa. But where does this independent justification come from?

According to Sosa, perceptual experience normally justifies us in believing such things as the second premise of the inference above only in light of our justified presupposition (perhaps only implicit, and perhaps never subject to reflective scrutiny) that perceptual experience is typically veridical. But then, Sosa claim, this general presupposition itself can be justified at two levels, and in a different way at each level. At the animal level, the presupposition is justified by virtue of the “reliability [of the faculty] that enables the harvest of needful information”.[[5]](#footnote-5) Such “animal justification” is external, in the sense that the factor that justifies you in the presupposition is not one that you need be in any way aware of, and so not one that you need be justified in believing anything about. *A fortiori*, it is not one that you need be justified in believing indicates the truth of the proposition that it justifies.

Sosa regards such animal justification as causally necessary in, but not sufficient for, the development of a higher level of justification that Sosa calls “reflective”. At the reflective level, the presupposition of the typical veridicality of perceptual experience is justified in a way that involves circularity, but a kind of circularity that Sosa regards as virtuous, not vicious. I will quote Sosa’s description of the kind of circularity involved in reflective justification of the presupposition, because it is on the basis of this description that I take Sosa’s overall solution to the problem of circularity to include a version of (iii) above:

“Epistemic justification works more like a web than like a pipe that transmits the juice of justification or warrant. Justified beliefs are nodes of a web properly attached to the environing world through perception and memory. Take an intricate spider’s web with its many nodes, attached at various points to various surfaces. The position of each node might then depend causally (to some extent, perhaps to a small extent) on the positions of the other nodes. Here there is distributive dependence on each and also collective dependence on all.

“That explains a web model for belief (thought beliefs also occupy an important dynamical, historical dimension, one that requires a more complex web model). Any given belief node is in place through its connections with the other nodes, including that original given node. Through the basing of beliefs on other beliefs and on experiences, a rational web is woven, each member of which is upheld in part (perhaps in miniscule part) by others, directly or indirectly. There is no apparent reason why such basing should be regarded as either causally or normatively asymmetrical, no reason why many beliefs could not constitute webs in which each node is based partly on the others. Each might thus gain its epistemic status through such relations to the others, where the whole web is also attached to the world through causal mechanisms of perception and memory.

“Reflective endorsement may now take its place in the web with no apparent special problems. Through our growing knowledge of ourselves and of the world around us and of the relation between the two, we come to see our modes of rational basing and other belief acquisition as sufficiently reliable. This enables us to endorse such modes reflectively as truth-reliable, of a sort to lend epistemic justification to our commitments and beliefs. True, when we modify an epistemic commitment, whether implicit or explicit, we do so based on beliefs acquired through commitments already in place, prominently those involved in perceptual uptake. There is hence an inevitable circle in how we come to modify and hold perceptual commitments, whether implicit or explicit. We hold them, and sustain them over time, based on continuing observations, which are themselves based on the now installed, and perhaps modified, commitments. No special vise pertains to the nodes of our web constituted by these commitments.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

Sosa’s story seems to be this: believers begin their cognitive lives (and, in most cases, complete them as well) by having their regress of justifiers terminate with an external justifier – in particular, some facts about the kind of information needed by that believer. But some believers can competently reflect on the relation between their own beliefs and the things represented by those beliefs, and by engaging in such reflection, they can manage to have their regress of justifiers not terminate at all, but rather go on indefinitely in a circle. There are two versions of this story: on one version, suggested by some passages in Sosa’s writings, reflective creatures do not lose their animal justifications, but retain it while also acquiring a new kind of justification as well – reflective justification. On the other version, suggested by other passages in Sosa’s writings, animal justifications are not supplemented with, but are rather replaced by, reflective justifications. I am not sure which of these views is Sosa’s considered view, and I’m also not sure what considerations might decide between them.

My objection to Sosa’s story can be raised no matter which of these two versions of the story we accept. For my objection concerns how to reconcile the coherentist element in Sosa’s story with GTF. Recall GTF:

Necessarily, S’s competent deduction *P therefore Q* fails to transmit (doxastic) justification from P to Q if there is some E such that

1. E is part of what makes S justified in believing Q, and
2. S is justified in believing that P in virtue of (i), but
3. (i) does not obtain in virtue of S’s being justified in believing that P.

If this principle is to explain the failure of the Easy inferences, then those inferences must be such that there is something that independently justifies us in believing their conclusion, and our justification for believing the premises is in virtue of that, but not vice-versa. But, if justification is a web in the nodes of which “there is distributive dependence on each and also collective dependence on all”, then how can clause (iii) of GTF above ever be satisfied? How, on Sosa’s story, can it ever fail to be the case that what justifies S in believing the conclusion of an inference does not to some extent do so in virtue of S’s justifiedness in believing the premises? How can asymmetric relations of epistemic dependence ever obtain, if (either version of) Sosa’s story is true? And if such asymmetric relations of dependence do not ever obtain, then, by GTF, a competent deduction never fails to transmit justification from premises to conclusion. But that is obviously wrong: the Easy inferences above obviously do fail to transmit justification from premises to conclusion. So: either GTF is wrong, or else Sosa’s coherentist epistemology is wrong. Since sections I and II above argued for GTF, I conclude that Sosa’s coherentist epistemology is wrong.

Could we accept Sosa’s coherentist by modifying GTF so that it allowed for some directions of epistemic dependency to be more significant than others, as follows:

**(GTF – modified)** Necessarily, S’s competent deduction *P therefore Q* fails to transmit (doxastic) justification from P to Q if there is some E such that

1. E is part of what makes S justified in believing Q, and
2. S is justified in believing that P (to some significant degree) in virtue of (i), but
3. (i) obtains to no more than a slight degree in virtue of S’s being justified in believing that P.

While Sosa’s coherentist epistemology is consistent with GTF-modified, GTF – modified is not true. Recall one of our cases above:

(Easy Calculation# – 1) My calculations indicate that the sum of these numbers is x.

(Easy Calculation# – 2) The sum of these numbers is x. (Let’s suppose that this is justified, but not on the basis of anything that does not include Easy Calculation# – 1.)

(Easy Calculation# – 3) My calculations are correct on this occasion, and the sum of these numbers is greater than x/2.

Here, you are justified in believing (Easy Calculation# – 2) on the basis of (Easy Calculation# – 1) only in virtue of your having some independent source of justification (E) for believing that your calculations are accurate on this occasion. If E makes you justified in believing that your calculations are accurate on this occasion, then E is also part of what makes you justified in believing (Easy Calculation# – 3). Furthermore, you are justified in believing (Easy Calculation# – 2) in virtue of E’s helping to make you justified in believing (Easy Calculation# – 3). But does E help at all to make you justified in believing (Easy Calculation# – 3) in virtue of your being justified in believing (Easy Calculation# – 2)? No. E justifies you in believing (Easy Calculation# - 3) simply in virtue of justifying the first conjunct of (Easy Calculation# - 3), and the justification of that conjunct does not depend at all on your justification for (Easy Calculation# - 2). To suppose, as Sosa would have to, that E helps to make you justified in believing (Easy Calculation# - 3) in virtue of your being justified in believing (Easy Calculation# - 2) is to suppose the existence of support relations for which there is no evidence at all.

Of course, if the content of (Easy Calculation# - 2) were highly implausible given other things you are justified in believing, then that would defeat your justification for (Easy Calculation# - 3). But it does not follow from that that, when (Easy Calculation# - 2) is not implausible, it plays any role in rendering (Easy Calculation# - 3) justified. GTF-modified will not work, and so Sosa’s coherentist epistemology cannot be rendered consistent with the correct account of the transmission failure displayed by the Easy inferences.

In the next section, we’ll see what can be salvaged from Sosa’s epistemological picture. It turns out that the answer is: quite a bit. But the cost of salvaging it in the way that I propose doing will be to move from a coherentist epistemology to a foundationalist epistemology in which coherence plays an important role.

**V. A Foundationalist Solution to the Problem of Epistemic Circularity**

If we do not accept Sosa’s account of the regress of justifiers, then how should we respond to this regress? In order to develop my answer to this question, let me begin by making a point about an agent’s total evidence. Whatever exactly our total empirical evidence consists in, it will be a conjunction of propositions, each of which is such that we are empirically justified in believing it. And there are going to be many particular propositions in our evidence set which are such that, in order to be justified in believing those particular propositions, we will also have to be justified in believing in the veracity of the source of that particular proposition's justification. (Specifically, this will be true at least of those evidence propositions which, like the second premise in each of the Easy inferences, we are justified in believing on account of reasons that we can identify.) But how can we be justified in believing in the veracity of that source on the occasion in question, without relying upon the very pieces of evidence produced by that source on that occasion?

This can happen if our total evidence contains pieces of evidence from a variety of sources or occasions, where the deliverances of each corroborate the deliverances of the others. If you have evidence from any one cognitive source and occasion of which you are aware, then you also have evidence that does not derive from that same source and occasion. So, with these pieces in place, I can finally state my solution to the problem of epistemic circularity as follows: in order for me to justifiably believe some propositions as a result of the operation of some cognitive source of which I am aware, I must be justified in believing some other propositions about the veracity of that particular cognitive source on that particular occasion. But in order to be justified in believing some propositions about the veracity of that particular cognitive source on that particular occasion, my total empirical evidence must make it highly probable that the source in question is veracious on that occasion. In order for my total empirical evidence to make it highly probable that the source in question is veracious on that occasion, my total empirical evidence must contain pieces of evidence that are not from the source in question or not from the occasion in question, and those other pieces of evidence must corroborate the evidence I get from the source in question on that occasion. But I am justified in believing each of the particular pieces of my total evidence (at least those particular pieces that I am justified in believing in virtue of the operation of some cognitive source of which I am aware) only in virtue of being justified in believing some propositions about the veracity of its source which I am in turn justified in believing only in virtue of my total evidence. In short, I am justified in believing each proposition in my total evidence only by virtue of being justified in believing some conjunction of evidence propositions. To sum up the present view in a doubly misleading way: I am justified in believing each particular evidence proposition only because I am justified in believing all of them.[[7]](#footnote-7)

This last formulation is misleading in two ways. First, it misleadingly suggest that my justification for believing each particular evidence proposition is somehow inferential, as if I infer each evidence proposition from the conjunction of my total evidence. But this is wrong. There is a difference between justifiably inferring p from q, on the one hand, and being justified in believing p partly in virtue of being justified in believing q, on the other. The former is a species of the latter, but the latter is a much broader category. For instance, I typically infer the conclusion of a mathematical proof simply from the mathematical premises of that very proof, and not form any non‐mathematical propositions concerning my execution of the proof, and yet I am justified in believing the conclusion of the proof only in virtue of my being justified in believing some non‐mathematical propositions concerning my execution of the proof (e.g., I was not careless when I did it). Similarly, I do not infer the particular propositions in my evidence set from their conjunction, but this does not mean that I am not justified in believing those particular evidence propositions in virtue of being justified in believing some conjunction of them.

But I also do not want to suggest that there is some specific conjunction of propositions in my evidence set such that my justifiably believing any single proposition in my evidence set depends in any way (inferential or otherwise) upon my being justified in believing that specific conjunction. Rather, what my justifiably believing any single proposition in my evidence set depends upon *is* *there* *being* *some* *conjunction* *or* *other* of evidence propositions that includes the single proposition in question, and includes other propositions justified by other sources than the source that justifies the former proposition, such that I am justified in believing that conjunction.

So the overall picture that I am proposing is as follows. My evidence set consists of a conjunction of empirical propositions, each of which I am (non‐inferentially) justified in believing and each of which I am justified in believing partly in virtue of being justified in believing the others (or any others that could equally well constitute an evidence set that included that particular conjunct). The evidentiary status of each evidence proposition thus depends on its coherence with the rest of the propositions in my evidence set: no set of propositions could constitute an agent’s evidence set unless it was sufficiently coherent. By adopting this position, we can solve the problem of easy knowledge by appeal to transmission failure, and we can do so without forsaking empiricism, and without running into any insurmountable problems of epistemic circularity. And notice that it is very close to Sosa’s picture, without being committed to his problematic claim that epistemic dependence relations are always symmetric.

But have we really avoided the problem of epistemic circularity altogether? I said that we corroborate the evidence that we get from each source at a moment by appealing to other sources or other moments that provide some of our other evidence. But we cannot corroborate *the* *whole* of our empirical evidence. So what justifies me in believing that my total empirical evidence is not systematically misleading?

What justifies me in believing that my total empirical evidence is not systematically misleading is simply my total empirical evidence. My total empirical evidence justifies me in believing quite a few things about the world, including the following claims of this paragraph. What evidence someone has is a result of impacts upon their sensory systems. Such impacts are interrelated in such complicated ways that it would be very difficult to make them systematically misleading (i.e., misleading in a way that left no trace in one's evidence set itself). At the present time, I have no evidence of the existence of anything that can perform such a difficult task, and a great deal of evidence that no such thing exists. (Perhaps scientists who have more evidence than I do, and schizophrenics who have less evidence than I do, ought both to be less confident than I am about the non-misleading character of their total evidence.) Thus, my total evidence justifies me in believing that my total evidence is not systematically misleading. Perhaps it is misleading here and there, but it is not so misleading as to make it impossible for me to correct it by appeal to my total evidence.

Given what I’ve said above, how should we respond to the regress of justifiers described above? Here, we have plenty of latitude. We could, for instance, accept either (i) or (ii), and treat the conjunction of all of one’s evidence propositions at a time as a single foundationally justified proposition (either external or not). While GTF forces us to reject the view that Sosa himself espouses, we can grant much of what Sosa says in emphasizing the role of coherence in justification.

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1. Sosa 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Wright 1985… [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. I made the mistake of defending PTF in my 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Sosa 2011, chapter 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Sosa 2011, 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Sosa 2011, … [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. In Neta 2008, I defend the propositional conception of evidence that I merely assume in the present paper. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)