

The Cost of Skepticism: Who Pays?

Thomas Kelly
Princeton University

Those who favor externalist accounts of knowledge and justification often accuse their internalist opponents of *playing into the hands of the skeptic*. According to this line of thought, internalists characteristically set overly demanding requirements for knowledge and justification, requirements which ordinary believers infrequently satisfy: the internalist is thus committed by his or her own theory to a massive and implausible revisionism about the extent of what we know and justifiably believe. For reasons that I explore below, the version of internalist foundationalism developed by BonJour might seem particularly vulnerable to this charge. Given this, one of the most striking and provocative claims of the present work is BonJour's insistence that his theory fares no worse than—and indeed, compares favorably with—Sosa's externalist virtue theory with respect to the issue of skepticism.¹ My primary concern in what follows will be to evaluate this claim.

1. BonJour's View

BonJour stands in that tradition of thought according to which *perceptual justification* is ultimately underwritten by *explanatory considerations*. I take the core idea of this tradition to be something like the following. Consider first

The Commonsense Hypothesis: One's perceptual experiences are due to the existence of an external world.

A philosopher who holds that explanatory considerations underwrite perceptual justification holds that one's ability to arrive at justified beliefs about the external world via perception depends on the fact that

¹See especially the discussion on pages 199-200.

- (1) The Commonsense Hypothesis is the best explanation of one's perceptual experiences being as they are. In particular, the Commonsense Hypothesis is a better explanation than any of the skeptical hypotheses with which it competes (e.g., the hypothesis that one's perceptual experiences are due to the machinations of a Cartesian demon).

I want to emphasize that there are a number of importantly different ways in which this underlying idea can be developed and that the resulting views will differ greatly with respect to how vulnerable they are to the charge that they play into the hands of the skeptic. It is, I think, the particular way in which Bonjour develops the underlying idea that leaves him particularly open to this charge. In order to appreciate this, it will be helpful to briefly consider one way of developing the underlying idea which seems to me to be relatively immune to the same charge.

Suppose that a theorist endorses the following as a general principle about perceptual justification:

- (J) If one has an experience as of *p*, then, in the absence of any defeating considerations, one is justified in believing that *p* is the case.

According to this principle, the fact that I am presently having the experience as of a computer in front of me (and have no reason to suspect that this experience is not veridical) justifies me in believing that *there is a computer in front of me*. Of course, we might ask a theorist who endorses principle (J) why this principle holds. In particular, why should the relevant experience justify the belief that there is a computer in front of me and not (say) the belief that *an evil demon is causing it to seem as though there is a computer in front of me*? In response to this question, the theorist might appeal to explanatory considerations. In particular, the theorist might claim that the truth of (J) is underwritten by

- (1) The Commonsense Hypothesis is the best explanation of one's perceptual experiences being as they are.

Such a view is recognizably internalist, in that what one is justified in believing on the basis of perception depends on the character of one's experiences (as opposed to, say, facts about the virtuousness or reliability of one's perceptual faculties). But it is a relatively undemanding form of internalism, in the following respect: from the perspective of the individual believer, the role that explanatory considerations play in underwriting perceptual justification is entirely *below the surface*. That is, the capacity of one's experiences to justify one in believing certain propositions about the external world is underwritten by *the fact* that the Commonsense Hypothesis is superior to its skeptical competitors. As far as principle (J) is concerned, the individual believer need not recognize (even implicitly) the fact of this superiority in order to be justified. A somewhat more demanding view would thus require that

- (2) In order to be justified, one must *grasp* or *recognize* that the Commonsense Hypothesis is the best explanation of one's perceptual experiences being as they are.

Consider next a third, potentially yet more demanding way in which the core thought that explanatory considerations underwrite perceptual justification might be developed. According to this view, a believer must not only recognize *that* the Commonsense Hypothesis is the best explanation but also understand *why* it is the best explanation. That is

- (3) In order to be justified, one must understand why the Commonsense Hypothesis is the best explanation of one's experiences being as they are, in the sense of recognizing that its superiority consists in its possessing features F1...Fn.

Arguably, an individual might be in a position to recognize that one explanation is better than an alternative without being able to identify those features which render it superior.²

² Compare the way in which an inexperienced wine taster is sometimes in a position to make an accurate comparative judgement that one wine is superior to another without having any real grasp of the specific features in which its superiority resides.

In the course of everyday life, individuals often do make comparative judgements about the relative merits of competing potential explanations. I assume that, in some cases, such judgements are based on a genuine recognition that one explanation is better than another, or the best of a given lot. Notoriously, however, the theoretical task of specifying criteria of explanatory goodness has proven to be an excruciatingly difficult one.³ It might very well be that few if any individuals know the true story about what makes one explanation better than another. Taken together, these facts suggests that it may be possible to *recognize that* a given explanation is superior to an alternative without being in a position to *understand why* it is superior.⁴ If this is in fact the case, then (3) would seem to be a more demanding condition than (2).

Consider, finally, what is perhaps the most demanding view of the relevant kind:

- (4) In order to be justified, an individual must not only recognize that the superiority of the Commonsense Hypothesis consists in its possessing features $F_1 \dots F_n$, but must, in addition, understand why an explanation which possesses features $F_1 \dots F_n$ is *more likely to be true* in virtue of doing so.

It is one thing to be able to recognize that one hypothesis qualifies as better than another in virtue of its possessing such-and-such features; it is another thing to understand why those particular features tend to make explanations which possess them more likely to be true. Consider: it is widely thought that *simplicity* is among those features which contribute to the goodness of an explanation. But it is notoriously difficult to tell even a

³ As is familiar from the philosophy of science literature. For a sampling, see the relevant essays in Lipton (1995).

⁴ The facts recorded in the main text do not, of course, suffice to *show* that this is in fact a genuine possibility. It might be claimed, for example, that whenever one is in a position to recognize that a given potential explanation is superior to some alternative, one *implicitly grasps* the relevant criteria of explanatory goodness. On this view, attempts by philosophers of science and epistemologists to specify criteria of explanatory goodness are in effect attempts to make explicit theories that are already implicitly grasped or tacitly known by ordinary individuals.

I discuss the suggestion that ordinary individuals can be credited with an implicit grasp of theories of explanatory goodness further below.

plausible story about why simpler hypotheses are more likely to be true than less simple hypotheses. One who knows that simplicity is a virtue of hypotheses might be in a position to understand why one hypothesis is better than another (viz. its superior simplicity) without understanding why simpler hypotheses are more likely to be true.

Crucially, Bonjour opts for this last, most demanding form of the view. Only if ordinary believers at some level understand why those features that distinguish the Commonsense Hypothesis as superior to its competitors make the Commonsense Hypothesis more likely to be true will it be appropriate to credit ordinary believers with genuinely having reasons for the beliefs that they form on the basis of perception. An account of those features in virtue of which the Commonsense Hypothesis trumps its skeptical competitors is *a philosophical theory*—as is an account of why an hypothesis which possesses those features is more likely to be true in virtue of doing so. Bonjour invites the charge of skepticism by requiring that the relevant philosophical theories be within the grasp of the ordinary believer in order for the ordinary believer to be fully justified in forming beliefs on the basis of perception.

Bonjour himself is under no illusions about how formidable a task it is to provide the desired kind of philosophical account. His own contribution to this project is in many respects a model of diligent and painstaking philosophical analysis. But he freely admits that what he offers here constitutes only a ‘schematic’ defense of the requisite kind of view (p.188). At one point, he suggests that a full description of ‘the facts about our experience upon which the inference to the physical world must...rest’ would require a long book (p.91).⁵ I do not doubt Bonjour’s ability to ultimately discharge this project successfully.⁶ The problem, of course, is that the greater the theoretical virtuosity that Bonjour and others display in pursuit of this project, the more implausible it will be to credit ordinary believers with any grasp of the philosophical account that lies at the end of the tunnel.

⁵ Tellingly, this book-long account of experience would on Bonjour’s view constitute *one* ‘main premise’ for the relevant inference; more would be required (Cf. p.92).

⁶ My judgement to this effect reflects not only my confidence in Bonjour but also my conviction that there *is* some true story, waiting to be told, about why the Commonsense Hypothesis is a better explanation than its skeptical competitors (whether or not this story is what ultimately grounds perceptual justification).

BonJour is clearly sensitive to the concern that he has placed perceptual justification outside the reach of subjects who might naturally be thought to enjoy it. At times, he is somewhat concessive about this.⁷ When he explicitly considers what would seem to be the crucial case of ‘ordinary believers’, BonJour sometimes suggests that (i) they grasp the relevant philosophical theories in an extremely dim or implicit way or that (ii) the relevant philosophical theories are ‘in principle’ available to them.⁸ Consider first the claim that ordinary believers grasp the relevant philosophical theories in an extremely dim or implicit way. No doubt, it is an important fact about human understanding that we often see through the glass darkly. But I suspect that, whatever the initial plausibility of the claim that ordinary believers have some dim or implicit grasp of the relevant theories, this plausibility dissipates once one distinguishes carefully between the different ways in which explanatory considerations might be taken to underwrite perceptual justification. *Perhaps* ordinary believers can be credited with an implicit recognition that the Commonsense Hypothesis trumps its skeptical competitors in virtue of possessing such-and-such features. What does not seem credible is that ordinary believers grasp (in any way) why those particular features make the Commonsense Hypothesis more likely to be true. For example, BonJour offers an interesting argument as to why the *analog character* of the Commonsense Hypothesis renders it more likely to be true than all of the

⁷ Thus, early on, he writes that

I am inclined to think...that the externalist is at least approximately right about this...the only version of foundationalism that seems to me ultimately defensible seems to require more subtlety and complexity of both thought and inference that unsophisticated subjects can, in general, plausibly be said to engage in (p.34).

It is clear from the surrounding context that by ‘unsophisticated subjects’ BonJour seems to have in mind young children, higher animals, and ‘relatively unsophisticated adults’. Perhaps it is thought that the intuitive cost of denying that such subjects have perceptually justified beliefs is relatively marginal. Even if one is prepared to grant this, however, one might worry that all of us, or almost all of us, will turn out to count as ‘unsophisticated subjects’ by the relevant standards of sophistication. It is not, after all, as though it is only young children, non-human animals, and particularly oafish adults who seem to lack any real grasp of the relevant theories, but university professors as well.

⁸ For (i), see, e.g., pages 199 and 200; for (ii), see, e.g., pages 78 and 96.

competing hypotheses that have a *digital* character (pp.94-95). Grant for the sake of argument both that an analog explanation of one's experience is more likely to be true than any competing digital explanation and that Bonjour's particular account of why this is so is correct. What remains implausible is that all of those individuals who have perceptually justified beliefs grasp--even implicitly or dimly--Bonjour's argument as to why the analog character of the Commonsense Hypothesis renders it more likely to be true than its digital competitors.

The idea that the status of an individual's beliefs as justified might depend on the fact that the relevant philosophical theories are 'in principle available' to that individual also seems problematic. One difficulty here is that of specifying, in a philosophically well-motivated way, a sense of 'in principle available' which does not open the door for the externalist by allowing the externalist to claim that (say) facts about the virtuousness or reliability of one's perceptual faculties are in principle available to one (even if, as it happens, one is wholly ignorant of such facts). For intuitively, there seems to be a perfectly good sense of 'in principle available' according to which purely external facts about the virtuousness or reliability of one's perceptual faculties *are* in principle available to an ordinary believer who happens to be unaware of such facts. (It is not, after all, as though anyone thinks that such facts are in principle unavailable in the same sense in which a realist about the past claims, and an anti-realist denies, that there might be certain facts about the distant past that are in principle unavailable to us.) In attempting to spell out the relevant sense of in principle availability it is tempting to resort to idealization. Perhaps the sense in which the relevant philosophical theories are in principle available to ordinary believers is just this: if ordinary believers were (much) more philosophically sophisticated than they in fact are, then they would be in a position to grasp the relevant philosophical theories and thus to understand why their experiences provide a good guide to the character of the external world. But why should we idealize with respect to an individual's philosophical knowledge or sophistication and not with respect to (say) how well-informed she is about the virtuousness or reliability of her perceptual faculties? Bonjour clearly thinks that it is crucial that the relevant philosophical theories are in principle available *on the basis of reflection alone*. Perhaps then, the reason why philosophical theories which one does not actually grasp can positively affect the

epistemic status of one's beliefs, but external facts about virtuousness and reliability which one does not actually grasp cannot positively affect the epistemic status of one's beliefs is captured by the following:

If ordinary believers were more philosophically sophisticated than they in fact are, then they could arrive at the relevant philosophical theories on the basis of reflection alone, but no one (no matter how philosophically sophisticated) could arrive at the empirical facts about reliability or virtuousness on the basis of reflection alone.

However, as Sosa remarks in another context (p.223), the resulting account seems to involve an arbitrary and unmotivated privileging of the faculty of reflection in the determination of epistemic status.

Can we at least agree with a weaker, conditional claim that BonJour offers (p.200), viz. that *if* a successfully worked out theory of the envisaged kind can after all be said to be dimly or implicitly within the grasp of common sense, then his view can accommodate our commonsense convictions?

Let me record a reservation about this. Suppose that BonJour does succeed, at some future date, in rigorously carrying out the envisaged project. Following Sosa (p.226), let's refer to this finished product as BonJour's 'Proof of an External World'. Suppose further that we subsequently memorize the Proof, in all of its extensive detail. (So BonJour's Proof is fully and unquestionably 'available' to us.) Consider now the perceptual beliefs about our immediate physical environment that we form after we have committed BonJour's Proof to memory. Assuming that these beliefs are justified, is it plausible to attribute their status as such to the fact that we have reflective access to BonJour's Proof? This seems to me to be dubious. For it seems likely that, even if we have firmly committed BonJour's Proof to memory, our grasp on this proof would play no psychological role either in our coming to hold or our continuing to hold perceptual beliefs about our immediate environment. Indeed, it seems overwhelmingly likely that the psychological processes operative in standard cases of beliefs acquired via perception would be exactly those that were operative before we memorized BonJour's Proof. Of course, now that we have committed BonJour's Proof to memory, we could (at least in principle) arrive at the same beliefs by utilizing BonJour's Proof—and if we did, then the

resulting beliefs would uncontroversially count as epistemically justified. But given that we do not in fact arrive at the relevant beliefs in this way, why suppose that the mere availability of Bonjour's Proof affects the epistemic status of beliefs that we hold *entirely on some other basis*?⁹

No one is better than Bonjour at making vivid the force of the fundamental internalist intuition that, if a given consideration is to play a role in justifying or rationalizing an individual's belief, then that consideration must be available (at least in principle) to the individual in question. I have considerable sympathy for this intuition. From an internalist perspective, however, it's natural to think that the reason why only considerations which are *available* to an individual can play a role in justifying her beliefs is that only considerations of which an individual in some sense *avails* herself can play a role in justifying her beliefs. After all, once a theorist allows that the status of my beliefs as justified can depend on considerations which play absolutely no role in my holding those beliefs, why not allow that my beliefs can be justified by considerations that might be completely unavailable (e.g., purely external facts about reliability)? That is, why should it matter whether my *not* availing myself of these seemingly relevant considerations is due to the fact that they are simply unavailable or has some more

⁹ Compare: I might have extremely strong evidence that *today will be a good day*—evidence which would suffice to justify my belief that today will be a good day if I held the belief on the basis of that evidence. Suppose, however, that as it happens this evidence plays absolutely no role in coming to hold the belief, or in my continuing to hold that belief, and makes absolutely no difference to the intensity with which I hold the belief. Rather, I believe that today will be a good day solely on the basis of wishful thinking. (As it happens, I possess an irrationally optimistic temperament which leads me to believe that every day will be a good day, regardless of any relevant evidence). It seems clear that, in these circumstances, my believing that today will be a good day is unjustified—the mere fact that there are considerations available which would suffice to justify my belief if only I made use of them does not save me from the charge of irrationality, given that I do not in fact avail myself of those considerations. Similarly, it's very unclear why the mere availability of Bonjour's Proof would make a difference to the epistemic status of our actual beliefs, given that our grasp of the Proof plays absolutely no role in our actual psychology. The upshot, I think, is this: any view which wants to preserve the commonsense conviction that many of our actual beliefs are fully rational and justified cannot make their status as such depend on our grasp of some extremely complicated argument given that no such argument plays a role in our holding the relevant beliefs (even if the argument is in principle available to us).

contingent cause?¹⁰ The plausibility of the internalist intuition that only considerations which are available can justify one's beliefs derives, I suspect, from the plausibility of the intuition that only considerations of which one in some sense avails oneself can justify one's beliefs.¹¹

Among Bonjour's central concerns is the project of providing a philosophical account of why the Commonsense Hypothesis is superior to its skeptical competitors. I want to emphasize that this project will be of interest and importance to any theorist who takes explanatory considerations to underwrite perceptual justification. That is, even a theorist who thinks that the role played by explanatory considerations is completely 'below the surface' from the perspective of the individual believer will presumably welcome the envisaged kind of account. Bonjour invites the charge that he plays into the hands of the skeptic by requiring that individual believers in some sense grasp the relevant philosophical theories in order to arrive at justified beliefs on the basis of perception. I want to emphasize then, that even if Bonjour were to jettison this requirement, much of his project would retain its significance and importance.

2. Is Sosa Any Better Off?

Bonjour freely admits that, even given certain optimistic assumptions, his view will be 'less than fully satisfactory from the standpoint of common sense' (p.200). But he attempts to minimize the dialectical cost of this admission by arguing that Sosa's view

¹⁰ The present suggestion is *not* that one must have a given consideration explicitly before one's mind in order to be justified in holding a belief on the basis of that consideration—a suggestion of which Bonjour is rightfully dismissive (See, e.g., page 174). Rather, the present suggestion is that, if the status of one's belief that p as justified depends on a given consideration, then that consideration must play at least some minimal role in one's psychological economy vis-à-vis the relevant belief, must make at least some difference to the range of circumstances in which one would or would not continue to hold the belief.

¹¹ Moreover, notice that if the mere availability of a given consideration does not suffice for that consideration to positively contribute to justifying an individual's belief, then a fortiori, mere in principle availability does not suffice. This suggests an additional reason why the retreat to in principle availability is an unpromising line for Bonjour to take.

fares no better with respect to the issue of skepticism. Indeed, BonJour suggests that his own view compares *favorably* with Sosa's on this score.¹²

As I understand it, BonJour's argument here is extremely straightforward. It runs as follows. Once the commonsense conviction that skepticism is false is correctly understood, we will see that the account of epistemic justification that Sosa offers does not in fact do justice to that conviction. Indeed, we will see that Sosa's account is essentially *irrelevant* to that conviction. For the relevant commonsense conviction is simply that we have *good reasons* for our beliefs about the external world, and the account of justification which Sosa offers does not seem a plausible candidate for an analysis of the conditions under which an individual has a good reason to believe a given proposition.¹³

One of the virtues of BonJour's discussion of this issue is his strong emphasis on the fact that the commonsense conviction that many of our ordinary beliefs are justified is itself less than perfectly transparent and thus stands in need of interpretation.¹⁴ Notoriously, even if the parties to a given dispute agree that our commonsense convictions should be taken seriously, this itself is no guarantee of substantive common ground, for it can be and often is a contested issue as to what exactly common sense 'says'.¹⁵ BonJour holds that 'the specifically epistemological notion of justification is to a

¹² For the suggestion of superiority, see especially pages 199-200.

¹³ Thus, Sosa's view, like externalist views more generally

...does not and cannot by its very nature speak to the issue that internalist views are primarily concerned with, which is...whether we have good reasons to think that our beliefs...are true...It is in this way that a virtue epistemology of the sort that Sosa advocates is simply irrelevant to at least one central epistemological issue (p.189).

¹⁴ See especially pages 39-40 and 199-200.

¹⁵ A point that has been familiar since at least the time of Berkeley, who insisted that his view *that tables and chairs are ideas* is--contrary to what one might have strongly suspected--perfectly consistent with common sense. The general point, viz. that what common sense says about a given subject is itself often a matter of interpretation and potentially controversial, seems to me to be a sound one, although one that is no doubt eminently subject to abuse in its applications.

significant extent a technical philosophical notion, one that is not clearly and unquestionably present in common sense' (p.36).¹⁶ But according to Bonjour

Our fundamental commonsense conviction, I suggest, is not...that our empirical beliefs are 'epistemically justified' in a sense that is loosely enough specified to admit externalism as a possible interpretation. It is rather the conviction that in general we actually do have *good reasons* within our cognitive grasp for thinking that our various beliefs about the world are true (pp.39-40, emphasis his).¹⁷

I strongly agree with both Sosa and Bonjour that we have little pre-theoretical grasp on the term 'justification'—and that, in this respect, the concept of *reasonable* or *rational belief* seems to be on firmer intuitive footing. I also agree that the conviction that we have *good reasons* for many of our beliefs about the world is certainly among the fundamental commonsense convictions that are relevant for epistemology (whether or not it is *the* fundamental conviction). Moreover, it is a striking fact, I think, that externalist accounts of justification have typically *not* been offered as analyses of the conditions in which an individual has a good reason to believe a proposition. More often, externalist accounts have been offered as analyses of a necessary condition for knowledge, or of some other epistemically valuable state which one might occupy. Sosa himself does not explicitly offer either of his 'V accounts' as an account of the conditions in which an individual has a reason to believe a proposition. Many other leading externalists have gone further, and explicitly eschewed any suggestion that the accounts that they offer should be taken as attempts to analyze epistemic rationality or reasonableness, or the

¹⁶ Cf. p. 32 where Bonjour claims that once the concept of epistemic justification is sundered from that of epistemic rationality, the former concept has 'no clear intuitive content'. Interestingly, on this point Sosa seems to be in agreement: "The term 'justification' is not widely applied to beliefs in ordinary discourse. It may be a philosophers' term of art..." (p.141).

¹⁷ Cf. pp. 199-200, where Bonjour writes that

...it seems to me quite doubtful that the commonsense conviction is that our beliefs are justified in the specific, quite complicated sense that Sosa has delineated...On the contrary, the commonsense conviction seems to me to be simply that we have good reasons for thinking that our beliefs are true, in which case...Sosa's account does not genuinely accommodate that conviction...

conditions in which one has a reason to believe a proposition.¹⁸ In contrast, internalists have been far less hesitant to invoke the concepts of *rationality*, *reasonableness* or *reason* in attempting to provide some intuitive context for their own attempts at analysis.

Perhaps this general tendency reflects a sense that the language of ‘reasons’ (or ‘rational’ or ‘reasonableness’) possesses, more so than other concepts of normative epistemology, a certain internalist connotation which effectively guarantees that externalist accounts will always seem least plausible when they are construed as analyses of such notions.

Suppose then that neither Sosa’s V-APT or V-ADROIT is in fact a correct analysis of the conditions under which an individual has a good reason to believe a proposition—and that, indeed, no externalist account of justification provides such an analysis. Even if this is granted, however, it seems to fall short of the conclusion that Sosa is committed to a kind of skepticism or to *denying* that we have good reasons for many of our beliefs. At best, what seems true is something weaker: that insofar as externalist accounts are not particularly plausible when taken as analyses of the conditions in which an individual has a good reason to believe a proposition, one who offers only an externalist account is not in a good position to *vindicate* the commonsense conviction that we have good reasons for many of our beliefs. However, the mere fact that a given account does not vindicate a commonsense conviction does not mean that it is incompatible with that conviction. Perhaps some externalists would claim that the concept of a good reason is ultimately not a coherent one, and thus, that we should simply abandon the conviction that we have good reasons for many of our beliefs. This, I think, would be a view against which the charge of ‘skepticism’ could fairly be made. But such a charge would not seem to be well-aimed if it were directed at Sosa, who explicitly says that ‘developing an internalist epistemology through an account of reflective knowledge seems a project worth pursuing, and one which I intend to pursue’ (p.228).

My suggestion then, is that BonJour’s real complaint against externalism is not that externalist views have skeptical implications but rather that such views are essentially incomplete inasmuch as they do not provide us with something that we as theorists want,

¹⁸ See, e.g., Goldman (1986, p.27), Dretske, (2000, p.xi), and Plantinga (1993, p.132, distinguishing ‘rationality’ from ‘warrant’).

viz. an account of good reasons which vindicates the conviction that ordinary believers do have good reasons for (many of) their beliefs.

Wouldn't the essential incompleteness of externalism be enough for Bonjour's purposes? After all, Bonjour champions an ecumenical spirit, and he allows that there are interesting and important epistemological projects to which externalist accounts are relevant (pp.35-36; 178,183). What he seems most concerned to combat is a kind of epistemic chauvinism or exclusivism on the part of the externalist, according to which only externalist analyses are viable or of philosophical interest and importance. If it is in fact correct that externalist accounts are not particularly plausible when construed as analyses of the conditions in which an individual has a reason to believe a proposition, isn't this enough for Bonjour's purposes?

The difficulty for Bonjour, of course, is that, for reasons rehearsed above, his own version of internalism *does* seem incompatible with the commonsense conviction that ordinary people do have good reasons for many of their beliefs about the world. For Bonjour's account, unlike Sosa's, *is* explicitly offered as an account of what is involved in having good reasons to believe propositions about the external world. But if this is what is involved in having such reasons, then it seems clear that ordinary believers do not have the reasons with which reflective common sense credits them.

Where does this leave us? If we assume that some version of internalism is likely to be the true story about the conditions under which one has a good reason to believe a proposition, we should expect that some internalist view which is significantly less demanding than Bonjour's will be the most promising. Interestingly, Bonjour seems to think that the only choice here is between an externalist view such as Sosa's and the particular version of internalist foundationalism that he develops.¹⁹

I confess to finding this suggestion—that there is no 'third alternative'—somewhat puzzling. Consider, for example, the 'modest' version of internalism sketched above, according to which one's experiences provide genuine (though defeasible) reasons for

¹⁹ Consider, for example, his parenthetical remark that

Many will no doubt think at this point that there must be some third alternative that is less dire: I can say only that I can find no dialectical space for such an alternative that does not simply evade the issues (p.199).

beliefs about the external world but which does not require the kind of philosophical sophistication or grasp of high epistemological theory which renders BonJour's account problematic. Again, such an account of reasons is recognizably internalist (since one's experiences are paradigmatic internal states) and satisfies the desideratum of placing good reasons within the reach of ordinary believers. Why then is such an account (or something along similar lines) not a promising candidate for the desired third alternative?

I close with the following speculation about why BonJour considers such an internalist view unacceptable. I suspect that BonJour would regard such a 'modest' form of internalism as an inherently unstable and unmotivated compromise between the kind of much more thoroughgoing internalism which he espouses and a full-fledged externalist view of the kind developed by Sosa. That is, I suspect that BonJour thinks that, unless ordinary believers can be credited with at least an implicit grasp of an extremely complicated philosophical theory about *why* experience provides an accurate guide to the nature of the world, then a believer who relies on her experiences in forming beliefs about the world is 'flying blind', in much the way that BonJour thinks that we would be flying blind if externalism were the whole story.²⁰

This is a provocative thought that raises deep issues, issues that I lack the space to pursue here. Notice, however, that if I am correct in my speculation about the way in which BonJour conceives of the dialectical options, then there is a sense in which, for BonJour, the *real* commonsense conviction which a non-skeptical epistemology must ultimately vindicate is not that we have good reasons for our beliefs. For intuitively, my having certain experiences rather than others provides good (though defeasible) reasons for my holding certain beliefs about the external world. Rather, the real conviction that any non-skeptical epistemology must ultimately vindicate is that we have good reasons for our beliefs that are 'internally recognizable as such'—where having good reasons that are internally recognizable as such requires that one grasp what is in effect a non-question-begging philosophical argument against the skeptic.²¹

²⁰ For the metaphor of 'flying blind', see page 195.

²¹ For BonJour's use of the 'internally recognizable as such' locution, see page 188. A comparison with the case of inductive inference is perhaps illuminating here. It is natural

REFERENCES

- BonJour, Laurence, and Sosa, Ernest 2003. Epistemic Justification. (Blackwell Publishing: Oxford).
- Dretske, Fred 2000: Perception, Knowledge and Belief. (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge).
- Goldman, Alvin 1986: Epistemology and Cognition. (Harvard University Press: Cambridge).
- Lipton, Peter (ed.) 1995. Theory, Evidence, and Explanation. (Dartmouth: Brookfield, VT).
- Plantinga, Alvin 1993: Warrant: The Current Debate. (Oxford University Press: Oxford).

to think that someone who knows that *all of the many previously-observed emeralds have been green* has a good (though defeasible) reason to believe that all emeralds are green, and is justified in holding the belief on that basis. The requirement that, in addition to possessing this good reason, it must be 'internally recognizable as such' in BonJour's sense would seem to amount to the idea that one must also grasp a non-question-begging philosophical argument against the Humean skeptic about induction.