

A DEFENSE OF COHERENCE THEORIES OF EPISTEMIC JUSTIFICATION

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## A Defense of Coherence Theories of Epistemic Justification

### **Abstract**

In this paper, I will argue that (1) non-inferential justification does not exist (2) foundationalism is inconsistent and must be rejected and finally (3) coherentism offers a plausible alternative and can successfully address recent objections. I will conclude that some form of coherentism is the most plausible theory of epistemic justification. I will draw on two “master arguments” for coherentism, one each from Pryor and Comesaña. I will argue that Pryor’s position with respect to the first master argument faces the arbitrariness objection and insufficiently deals with this problem. I will accept the second master argument, Comesaña’s, but argue that his objection to it, a rejection of inductivism, is similarly unsatisfying. After arguing in favor of the master arguments, I will address recent objections to coherence theories, including the input, basing, and truth connection objections, and find that coherentism survives these objections largely intact, with few commitments and concessions necessary to answer them. Finally, in light of the evidence against foundationalism and for coherentism, I will argue that some form of coherence theory of epistemic justification must be right.

**Introduction**

A theory of epistemic justification may be either doxastic or non-doxastic. A doxastic theory requires that only beliefs base beliefs. A non-doxastic theory claims more than just beliefs can base beliefs. Although non-doxastic theories continue to receive support, the contemporary debate focuses on doxastic theories. The doxastic theories are foundationalism and coherentism. The division is a result of disagreement to the answer of the regress problem, which questions how beliefs that function as justifiers come to be justified. Foundationalism claims that basic beliefs, which are immediately justified in virtue of having them (Pollock 1999), base other beliefs. Coherentism does not acknowledge the existence of basic beliefs, claiming that a coherent system of beliefs bases new beliefs.

Jim Pryor (2003) and (2012) identifies two “master arguments” for coherentism, one of which is his own reformulation of a popular coherentist contention and the second credited to Juan Comesaña. I will use these two arguments to defend coherentism and thereby attack foundationalism. The first master argument is an attempt to outline what is required by coherence theories. In formulating this argument, Pryor does not have any specific theory in mind. He is attempting to incorporate notions common to all coherence theories. Comesaña shows in the second master argument that many of the intuitively plausible foundation theories rely on inconsistent principles. To avoid this problem, he denies one of these inconsistent principles to argue for a foundation theory. I will argue that (1) there are reasons to think this principle is right and (2) a theory denying this principle will be unattractive.

Pryor (2003) posits the existence of immediate justification, justification that does not come from other beliefs<sup>1</sup>. Pryor's main thesis is that non-doxastic states such as experiences can justify belief. He appeals to examples, such as headaches. He writes, "Suppose I feel tired, or have a headache. I am justified in believing I feel those ways. And there do not seem to be any other propositions that mediate my justification for believing it" (6). Seemingly, what justifies the belief 'I have a headache' is the relevant experience. Coherence theories cannot allow experience to play a justifying role. For coherentism, a proposition derives justification from cohering with a set of beliefs, not from experience. The first master argument for coherentism is largely an attempt to deny the existence of this sort of justification, immediate justification, and argue that only beliefs (and not experience) can justify.

### **The First Master Argument**

The first master argument can be found throughout the literature, including in Sellars, Davidson, Williams, and Bonjour<sup>2</sup>. Pryor (2003) states it as follows,

- I. In order to be a justifier, you need to have propositional content, and you need to represent that proposition assertively.
- II. Only beliefs (or other states that are epistemically like beliefs) represent propositions assertively.

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<sup>1</sup> Pryor (2003) defines immediate justification as follows: "It's only required that what makes you justified doesn't include having justification for other beliefs" (3-4).

<sup>2</sup> Pryor (2003) mentions these philosophers as notable examples of coherentist philosophers who argue for the first master argument.

III. Only beliefs (or other states that are epistemically like beliefs) can be justifiers<sup>3</sup>.

Pryor has three attacks on the first master argument. Pryor first points out that the first master argument is not necessarily an attack against foundationalism because (III) is compatible with it. Pryor seems right about this. I will take up this point later and claim that some types of foundationalism cannot avoid the additional requirements most coherentists add to the first master argument and can also not avoid the second master argument. Second, he claims, “coherence itself is not a belief or belief-like state” (11). He argues here that the argument may apply to coherence itself; so (III) may rule out coherence if coherence is not a belief or belief-like state. Pryor proposes a solution: coherence is a property of certain sets of beliefs, and those sets that cohere well justify more than others (11). This seems acceptable and seems to match what coherentists have in mind when they speak of coherence. Third, he claims that “[the first master argument] gives us no reason to exclude experiences from the ranks of justifiers” (11). Of course, this point is contingent on whether experiences can satisfy (I), whether they can have propositional content. Pryor thinks they can. If this is true, as many philosophers of mind seem to think<sup>4</sup>, then Pryor may be correct again.

However, whether the first master argument is a sufficiently strong argument for coherentism is not at issue because, as Pryor says, many coherentists establish a further requirement, the premise principle. These coherentists strengthen (I) and (II) in the first

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<sup>3</sup> Implicit in this argument are the notions (1) all beliefs need justifiers and (2) basic beliefs are self justified.

<sup>4</sup> Comesaña notes that many philosophers of mind think experiences have propositional content on page 3 of his “On an Argument Against Immediate Justification.”

master argument by introducing the following principle:

- IV. The only things that can justify a belief that P are other states that assertively represent propositions, and those propositions have to be ones that *could be used as premises* in an argument for P. They have to stand in some kind of inferential relation to P: they have to imply it or inductively support it or something like that [stand in some suitable evidential relation] (Pryor 12).

(IV) strengthens (I) and (II) as follows:

- I'. A justifier must have propositional content, represent that proposition assertively, and be a proposition that could be used in premises for what the proposition supports (imply it or inductively support it or something like that).
- II'. Only beliefs (or other states that are epistemically like beliefs) can satisfy I'.

The premise principle, (IV), when combined with (I-III), is supposed to rule out immediate justification because it would rule out experiences which, coherentists will want to claim, cannot satisfy (I') and (II'), and therefore (III) follows: only beliefs can justify. Still, Pryor notes that a premise is missing: something like 'experiences cannot satisfy (I')' is required to prevent experiences from justifying because it is not immediately clear that experiences cannot satisfy (I'). Pryor admits that supplements such as this are necessary and used. Still, he thinks (IV) is too strong for some foundationalists, so he attacks the premise principle on behalf of the foundationalists who would reject it.

As Pryor notes, some foundationalists accept (IV), and some reject (IV). Coherentists supplement (IV) because it is not, when combined with (I)-(III) or (I'), (II'), and (III), sufficient to fix the argument. Coherentists take up fully formed theories. Pryor does not wish to address these<sup>5</sup>, and this is understandable because it would be impossible to do this without writing several books. The stated motivations for accepting or rejecting (IV) are at issue. If Pryor can show that (IV) is false, he will have formulated something of a master argument against the first master argument for coherentism. (IV) is a necessary (non-sufficient) part of the argument for coherence theories. Tracking Pryor, I will address his arguments against (IV) without appealing to any specific coherence theory.

Pryor argues that (IV) is too strong and not representative of belief-forming processes because many of our beliefs are not formed in such a conscious and reflective way. For example, it seems unnecessary that to move from the experience of a headache to the justification of the belief 'I have a headache' satisfies (IV). In defense of (IV), Pryor notes its importance is that "the contents of your beliefs and experiences will ordinarily not imply that you're in those states," which "prevent[s] experiences from directly justifying the belief that you're in them" (13). Focusing on this perceived gap, an argument for (IV) can be made through the arbitrariness objection.

Foundationalists rejecting (IV) face the arbitrariness objection. Simply stated, why should the experience of seeing a squirrel justify the belief of seeing a squirrel and not some unrelated belief? The experiences alone do not seem to contain anything to prevent

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<sup>5</sup> In his attack on (IV), Pryor acknowledges that he will deal with only a generic version of a coherence theory, attacking (IV) "from on high," before ascribing to any particular theory (See Pryor 2003, p. 16).

arbitrariness, though Pryor will argue otherwise. If (IV) is rejected, then foundationalists must account for the move from the experience of a headache to the relevant belief.

Avoiding arbitrariness is especially important for Pryor's argument by examples (examples of the form what justifies my belief that I have a headache is my headache). In answer to this objection, Pryor argues that the structure of experiences is somehow similar to the beliefs they justify.

Pryor's appeal to logical structure is not a satisfactory answer to the arbitrariness objection. Pryor argues, "The event of my having a headache has a logical structure akin to the structure of the proposition that I have a headache. Wouldn't these structures be enough to enable the Foundationalist to avoid the charge of arbitrariness?" (17). Pryor's proposed solution attempts to allow experiences to be justifiers, but it is not clear that sameness of logical structure is sufficient to satisfy the new condition (I'): it is not clear that sameness of logical structure would suffice to be a premise, and (I') requires that justifiers could be used as premises for some belief. Further, an experience and proposition may have the same logical structure but be entirely unrelated, so it is not clear that the logical structure argument answers the charge of arbitrariness. Pryor's solution to arbitrariness is therefore vague and unsatisfying.

Rather than fully address arbitrariness, Pryor attacks one of his earlier premises, the premise that experiences have propositional content. He proposes, "headaches...do not *themselves* have propositional content...[but can] be justification-makers—so long as *what* they give one justification *to* believe *is* a proposition" (18). This requires rejecting the first master argument, specifically (I) and (IV). This notion, though vaguely expressed, represents the final thrust of Pryor's paper. He writes, "If the Foundationalist

can make sense of beliefs being *grounded on* non-representational justifiers like headaches, then he can make sense of those justifiers being sufficiently available to you” (20). Even if beliefs are somehow grounded on experiences like headaches, it does not follow that the relation is epistemic. It may be causal. Further argumentation is needed to establish this point. Without further argumentation, specifically without showing how experiences can be justifiers if beliefs are in some sense grounded on them, Pryor’s argument seems insufficient: in the process of arguing that experiences can be justifiers he argues that, if beliefs are somehow grounded on experiences, experiences are justifiers. The relation of ‘being grounded on’ is not sufficient, by itself, to establish that they are justifiers, though perhaps it does establish that they are available.

Pryor’s concluding argument focuses on what grounding means. He thinks that epistemic norms governing how we form beliefs are central to grounding. Unfortunately, for this would help to establish what he means, Pryor’s analysis never answers the following problem: “If your belief’s being grounded on condition C isn’t a matter of your *deliberately following* a norm when you form that belief, then what is it a matter of?” (23). Clearly, as Pryor argues, many beliefs are not deliberately formed. Pryor implies that if you can have non-deliberate justified beliefs, then (IV) is false. He proposes a solution from a defender of (IV) from the perspective of an ideal reasoner<sup>6</sup>. I think this is the wrong approach because it is too limiting.

Pryor assumes that (IV) does not extend to non-deliberate belief formation,

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<sup>6</sup> The ideal reasoner always consciously abides by (IV) and structures all of her beliefs such that they are justified by propositions acting as premises. This seems to me like the strongest way to state (IV). If we always reason like Pryor’s ideal reasoner, then (IV) follows. However, just because reasoning like the ideal reasoner is sufficient to establish (IV) does not mean it is the only thing that can establish (IV). We may reason in this way unconsciously.

implicitly claiming that (IV) is not a necessary condition for a non-deliberate belief to be justified. Coherentists, of course, will claim the opposite: (IV) is a necessary condition for justified, non-deliberate beliefs. If (IV) is not a necessary condition, the problem of arbitrariness arises. If (IV) is a necessary condition and experiences cannot satisfy it, then experiences cannot justify. This is the result coherentists want. However, coherentists must claim that even non-deliberate, justified belief formation must follow (IV) otherwise it would not be a necessary condition. The intuitive thrust of Pryor's paper is that it seems like experiences can justify. In addressing these arguments, coherentists must (1) assert (I'), (II'), (III), and (IV) (2) that experiences cannot satisfy (I') or (II') and (3) that (IV) is a necessary condition for justified belief formation.

Pryor's objections to coherence theories focus on their requirements. It is tempting to think that justification need not require a robust structure in which beliefs derive justification through coherence with a coherent set of beliefs. For example, consider a context in which a subject S has only the experience of seeing a hand e. Why shouldn't this e directly justify p (the belief that S sees a hand)? Even with nothing else added, many foundationalists (including Pryor) will want to call this a case of justified belief formation. Of course, the arbitrariness objection prevents this from being obvious. It seems too easy to claim that a justified belief is formed on the basis of its relevant experience. This makes (IV) important. Pryor and foundationalists must either accept (IV) or resolve arbitrariness. I see no clear solution to arbitrariness, and I do not think Pryor presented one<sup>7</sup>. If foundationalists accept (IV), then it seems that this discussion

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<sup>7</sup> Concluding his section on arbitrariness, Pryor writes, "[Logical structure] is just one option for a Foundationalist to pursue. It's hard to draw any general assessment, until we see how the details work out. But the idea that only the Premise Principle can save us

requires focus on a specific coherence theory, and that is beyond the scope of this paper.

### **The Second Master Argument**

The second master argument, due to Juan Comesaña, addresses Pryor's first objection to the first master argument, that foundationalism can avoid it, and presents a serious problem for a broad class of foundationalist views. Comesaña constructs a highly plausible extension of Pryor's view by using intuitive five principles of the view that are mutually inconsistent. Comesaña writes, "the original problem arises from the incompatibility of inductivism, closure, mere lemmas and entailment, plus the assumption that only E or H can justify you in believing H or not-E" (10). To illustrate the problem it is necessary to define these terms.

Comesaña (2013) defines inductivism as

- I. A justifier J may provide justification for a subject S to believe that P even if J doesn't entail that P (4).

This seems both clear and obvious: justification need not be entailment. Comesaña notes that a view holding inductivism must also hold that justifiers can be propositions<sup>8</sup>. This is a popular view, and Pryor would not object because he claims that experiences have propositional content.

After inductivism, Comesaña adds a principle of closure. He expresses it as

- II. If S has justification for believing that P and competently deduces Q from P, then S has justification for believing that Q (4).

Like inductivism, there does not seem to be anything obviously wrong with closure

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from arbitrariness seems unwarranted to me" (17). Pryor may be right that there is another solution to arbitrariness, but his arguments do not sufficiently establish that point. The problem remains.

<sup>8</sup> He notes "non trivially" to describe the type of satisfaction

principles. It seems that these principles have to be right, and most epistemologists have accepted some form of closure (Luper 2010). Comesaña notes that closure requires only that the deduction can occur, not that it must occur in all cases<sup>9</sup>.

The third principle is mere lemmas, which is a restraint on sources of justification<sup>10</sup>. Comesaña uses the example of a dice game before describing it as

- III. If S's justification for believing that P comes entirely from Q and Q does not justify S in believing R, then P does not justify S in believing R (5).

A mere lemma is a non-justifying proposition. Suppose a range of possibilities, and then suppose you attain justification for a disjunction<sup>11</sup>. If you reasoned that (1) because you are now more justified in believing the first disjunct obtained, the second did not, and (2) that you are now more justified in believing the second disjunct did not obtain (because the obtainment of the first entails the non-obtainment of the second), it would seem obvious that they were using faulty reasoning. This is a mere lemma. The justification I have should not increase; this is a compelling reason to accept the mere lemmas principle.

Finally, Comesaña introduces the entailment principle. He writes,

- IV. If P entails Q, then Q cannot justify S in believing not-P (6).

Like the others, there seems to be nothing wrong or problematic about this principle on the surface. But together, they are inconsistent. Comesaña writes, "There is a proposition

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<sup>9</sup> Comesaña uses the phrase "full generality" to describe the unnecessary application of closure. Of course, it seems unreasonable and impossible to expect an agent to always perform the deduction.

<sup>10</sup> Comesaña notes that entailment and mere lemmas are intended for contingent propositions.

<sup>11</sup> An exclusive disjunction: if one member of the disjunction obtains the other does not.

P of a certain kind such that Inductivism and Closure entail you might be justified in believing P, whereas Entailment and Mere Lemmas entail that you can't be justified in believing P" (6). I will briefly summarize Comesaña's example before speculating on its scope.

- V. The experience E, that you see a hand, immediately justifies a corresponding proposition, H, that there is a hand. E does not entail H. H entails... H or not-E. Suppose you competently deduce the entailment. Closure holds that you are now justified in believing the proposition H or not-E. The justification for this proposition seems to be either H or E. Mere lemmas requires that it must be E<sup>12</sup>. The negation of H or not-E (E and not-H) entails E. Therefore, E cannot be the justifier. So, according to the four principles, you are justified and not justified (6).

The inconsistency of (V-IX) counters a plausible version of Pryor's view.

If nothing else, the foundationalist view accepting each of the principles is untenable. While the problem does not affect all foundation theories, it confronts many. Comesaña's argument becomes a 'master argument' because the inconsistencies lead to a rejection of foundationalism. Even if Pryor is correct in asserting that the first master argument does not rule out foundationalism, the second certainly deals it a limiting blow.

The foundationalist has options. She may reject inductivism (V), closure (VI), mere lemmas (VII), entailment (VIII), or several of these. Comesaña explores these options

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<sup>12</sup> Specifically, Comesaña writes, "Mere Lemmas principle then entails that H can justify you in believing only things which E itself justifies you in believing" (6). It follows that the justification must come from E. Of course, this is a problem.

and concludes that a foundationalist facing this problem can plausibly (1) give up immediate justification or (2) give up inductivist immediate justification. Comesaña sympathizes with (2). Like his other principles, inductivism seems intuitively correct. Denying inductivism produces troubles.

Comesaña denies inductivism (V). He argues that denying inductivism need not require denying immediate justification. Even if Comesaña is right about this, pressing problems exist for this view. The denial of inductivism seems to lead to a skeptical result. Roughly stated, inductivism allows a justifier to provide evidence for a proposition without entailing that proposition. So if inductivism is not allowed, justifiers must entail in order to justify. A denier of inductivism must accept this.

People believe in inductivism because they believe it is required for knowledge. Comesaña's position will require him to deny fallibilism, "[A] theory that allows that S can know q on the basis of r where r only makes q probable" (Cohen 91). It is possible for Comesaña to argue that one could be mistaken about their justification and falsely believe some evidence entails some belief, but this approach does not account for our intuitive notions of what we know. Cohen writes, "It is plausible to suppose that, if knowing requires believing on the basis of evidence that entails what is believed, we have hardly any knowledge at all" (91). Intuitively, we think we know many things. Part of the quest for a theory of knowledge is to account for how we know many things. We often think that we know something not because we have mistaken evidence but instead have only probable evidence.

Further, even if the evidence in one case were sufficient to entail some belief, would a minor alteration in that evidence preserve justification? This is not clear.

Consider Comesaña's case of the hand in front of me. Let's assume he means that this evidence is sufficient (entails) belief. If I close one eye, is my belief still entailed? I think he could reasonably say yes. However, if I close both, I require some principle such that 'things before me do not radically change when I only close my eyes.' Comesaña does not want to deny this, but he needs a non-inductive justification of this principle. It is unclear what would justify this principle, and of course, whatever justifies must entail it. As this shows, the denial of inductivism leads to an unwieldy and implausible theory of justification.

The second master argument, while not definitively ruling out foundationalism, questions its plausibility. Comesaña concludes that two good options remain: (1) give up immediate justification or (2) give up inductivist immediate justification. He took (2), but it seems like (2) fails quite quickly. Only (1) remains, so to have a plausible theory of justification, a foundationalist must give up immediate justification. Giving up immediate justification requires giving up basic or non-inferential beliefs. Giving up these leaves only one plausible possibility: a coherence theory of epistemic justification.

## **Objections to Coherentism**

### **The Input Objection**

One common objection against coherence theories is the input objection. The input objection goes something like this: if justification is just a relation among beliefs, then conceivably one could maintain the same fully coherent set of beliefs but cut off experience from the world. Kvanvig, describing the input objection, mentions Plantinga's example of climbing a mountain: "a person initially in the middle of climbing a mountain, having a fully coherent set of beliefs while doing so, but having that set remain

the same after descending the mountain and then experiencing a Mozart opera” (5). Being on a mountain is evidential input, so the lack of change or reaction to that evidence cuts a coherentist off from that experience. Thus it seems like coherence has no need for experiential input, and this is problematic because intuitively we think experiential input plays an important role in forming justified beliefs.

Beliefs about experience could allow experience to play a non-justifying role in coherence. Experience may play a mediating, non-justifying role such that a belief about experience bases a target belief (a belief that is being considered, being tested by the system) if the belief is mediated by experience (if experience supports it). The type of support that experience provides need not be that of a justifier: what justifies a belief is still its coherence with the overall system. There doesn't seem to be a problem using beliefs about experience to interpret experience and form new beliefs that take their justification from other, older beliefs, not experiences. The mediating relation of experience and belief may be expressed causally. Experiences may cause changes in beliefs without experiences in themselves having any epistemic relation. This is not a new idea, and to some extent, it is a biting of the bullet. It is another detail that has thus far been insufficiently worked out by coherentists.

### **The Basing Objection**

A second objection against coherence theories is the basing objection. In holistic coherentism's answer to the regress problem, an oddity arises: instead of forming a chain in which beliefs justify other beliefs in a linear fashion, beliefs derive justification from being part of a coherent set. Beliefs derive justification from the whole set, not just from other individual beliefs (assuming there are more than two beliefs in the coherent set, of

course). Kvanvig (1995) summarizes, “The result is a strange and awkward view: justified beliefs must be based on everything in one’s system of beliefs” (5). For example, why should some justified belief about a poker game be based on my beliefs about penguins? On the face of it, this seems like an implausible view to hold.

A solution emerges in that there is no requirement that coherence theories must adopt this holistic account of basing. Evans and Smith outline one possible solution in *Knowledge* (2012). They claim that the basing relation need not be causal; it could be such that “in order for his belief to be justified, he must be disposed to revise it if he loses” any of the beliefs that the belief is based on (118). This translates to the following biconditionals for S’s belief that p to be justified:

- VI. P coheres with S’s belief system B and B is adequately large and coherent
- VII. S’s belief that p is based on each member of a subset B’ of B (118-119).

Evans and Smith acknowledge that the above conditions are insufficient for a proper theory of basing: S must not only satisfy them, they must be satisfied in such a way that the belief that Mars is red is based on the belief that color vision is reliable (119).

In response to this deficiency, I will introduce the following additional condition:

- VIII. S’s belief that p is justified if and only if (VI) and (VII) are satisfied and (VII) is strengthened such that B’, evidence for B, contains beliefs sufficient to justify p without any additional basing support from B.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> A notable feature of coherence theories is that the coherence relation is not completely clear. It is not my aim to solve this problem.

(VIII), combined with (VI) and (VII), provides a theory of basing such that a belief need not rely on the holistic system, and therefore seemingly irrelevant beliefs, to be justified. This solution accounts for the intuitive notion that a target belief need not cohere with each member of the system to be justified. Coherence is a property of the entire system, and it may also be a property of sets within the system. If it is a property of sets and those sets (B') are evidence for the system, then it seems like coherence avoids the basing objection insofar as a vague relation can avoid this objection.

### **The Truth Connection Objection**

A third objection against coherence theories is the truth connection objection. While the input objection claims that coherence theories can be cut off from evidence, the truth connection objection claims that coherence theories can be cut off from truth. Kvanvig (1995) explains, "A traditional way of putting this concern is in the language of the alternative systems objection, according to which nearly any belief can be justified by simply embedding it in the right system of information" (262). Alternately explained, a fictional novel may have perfect coherence but have no connection to truth whatsoever. The general worry here, according to Kvanvig, is that justification is supposed to lead to truth, and many are skeptical about whether coherence leads to truth<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> I will not discuss the problem of impossibility results here, but I believe Gregory Wheeler (2012) has solved the matter in favor of coherentism in his paper "Explaining the Limits of Olsson's Impossibility Result." Additionally, the testimonial cases that Olsson and others use for impossibility results require *ceteris paribus* (with other conditions remaining the same) conditions, among them an externalist condition: "full testimonial independence," which requires that testimonial reports be free of influence and distinct from the contents of other reports. Most coherentists are internalists and have no reason to accept these results. Further evidence that these conditions are too strong or unnecessary can be found in Schupbach (2007).

The most plausible solution to the truth connection objection may be biting the bullet. Even though one could be stuck in some skeptical paradox such that all of their beliefs are false, this only makes coherence more like foundationalism. In foundationalism, a belief could be immediately justified just by existing or coming from the right source. Why should coherence be susceptible to occurring in a fairy tale and foundationalism not? It seems that they are both theories of defeasible justification, “justification that can be lost given improvements in one’s epistemic position”<sup>15</sup> (Comesana 13). It seems that the truth connection problem affects theories of epistemic justification equally and is therefore not specific to coherence theories.

### **Conclusion**

The second master argument is fatal for many foundation theories. Those that experience the attack and survive contain flaws, often due to rejecting at least one of Comesana’s four principles. Additionally, many of the recent objections to coherentism such as the input objection, the basing objection, and the truth-connection objection are overstated (the truth connection objection), incorrect (the impossibility results objection), or addressable (the input and basing objections). If limited to doxastic theories, the most plausible theory of epistemic justification is a coherence theory. As Kvanvig claims, many of the objections to coherentism have functioned as barriers to coming up with a positive account of coherentism; they have functioned as distractions. With these distractions cast aside, coherentism offers promise.

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<sup>15</sup> Comesana paraphrases Pryor (2000) here.

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