PHILOSOPHICAL TOPICS
VOL. 29, NOS. 1 & 2, SPRING AND FALL 2001

Doing Epistemology without Justification

William P. Alston
Syracuse University

Before launching into my paper I want to say how delighted I am to be able to contribute to this issue in honor of Alvin Goldman. I have known Al since the days in which he began his career at the University of Michigan, where I had been present for some time. I was privileged to be there during his (very rapid) growth as a philosopher up until my departure in 1971. Since then I have continued to observe and rejoice at his development into one of the most important philosophers in this country, and especially at the way in which he has been a trailblazer in more than one aspect of epistemology, in which field my own work is enormously indebted to him.

I.

The title of my paper is, of course, deliberately ambiguous. On a serious reading what it says is "doing epistemology without making use of any alleged epistemic status called 'justification'." A preliminary call for this approach was issued in "Epistemic Desiderata."[1] There, upon considering various controverted candidates for necessary conditions for the epistemic justification of beliefs, I concluded that the best diagnosis of the situation is

that there has been persistent failure to identify any one objective epistemic status concerning which the various accounts of epistemic justification are differing. This being the case, we would do better to abandon the attempt to find the objectively necessary and sufficient conditions for a belief's being "justified." If that conclusion is sound, how then should we proceed with the epistemic evaluation of beliefs? I suggested that there is general agreement among epistemologists that all the conditions that some affirm and some deny are necessary conditions for the justification of beliefs are *desiderata* for the cognitive enterprise, for the attempt to form true rather than false beliefs on matters with which we are concerned. Hence the epistemology of belief will be most fruitfully pursued by explicating and evaluating these desiderata, considering the contexts, interests, or purposes in terms of which one or another is more or less important, and raising questions as to what is involved in determining when a given desideratum has been realized. Here are the desiderata I focused on in that article.

1. Having adequate reasons, grounds, evidence . . . for a belief.
2. A belief's being based on adequate evidence . . .
3. A subject's having some high grade cognitive access to the grounds . . . for the belief.
4. Possessing higher level knowledge, or adequately grounded belief that a belief satisfies one or another lower-level desideratum.
5. A system of beliefs being "coherent" in one or another sense of that term.
6. Satisfying, or not violating, intellectual obligations in holding a certain belief.

"Epistemic Desiderata" was largely devoted to arguing the negative thesis that there is no such unique target as "epistemic justification." The alternative program was only sketched programmatically, with hints at specific implementations. In this paper I want to make a start at indicating what an epistemology of belief in terms of a plurality of epistemic desiderata would look like. Of course, a full implementation of the program would fill a good-sized book. This will be but a first step.

Before taking that first step I will look at some recent controversies over what it takes for epistemic justification, as case studies in what my alternative approach allows us to avoid. All my examples will involve confrontations between "internalism" and "externalism," construed in various ways. I will not attempt to add to the reasons I gave in "Epistemic Desiderata" for denying that 'epistemically justified' picks out a unique epistemic status that plays a crucial role in epistemic assessment. Instead I will look at these controversies from the standpoint of that denial, bringing out ways in which that standpoint enables us to avoid dead ends we run into when seeking to determine the nature of the supposed objective status termed 'justified'.

II.

I begin with a group of putative counterexamples, presented in chapter 3 of Laurence BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* (1985), to the supposition that reliable belief formation is *sufficient* for justification.[2] These involve four imaginary cases of individuals who possess reliable clairvoyant powers. In each case the person comes to believe, truly, that the president is currently in New York City, without having any of the usual reasons for such a belief. In each case the belief results from the exercise of a reliable clairvoyant power. The cases differ in what other relevant beliefs or knowledge the person has or lacks—reasons of the ordinary sort for or against the president's being in New York, reasons for or against the possession of reliable clairvoyance, etc. In none of the cases does the person have strong evidence that she/he is a reliable clairvoyant, or that there is any such power. I will focus on the fourth case, that of Norman. Norman "possesses no evidence or reasons of any kind for or against the general possibility of such a cognitive power or for or against the thesis that he possesses it" (41). BonJour alleges that since this is the case, Norman is "highly irrational and irresponsible in accepting" the belief that the president is in New York, given that from his own subjective conception of the situation he has no grounds for accepting it, and hence is not justified in doing so (38).

I am particularly interested in Norman because, unlike some of the other cases, Norman has no reasons for supposing that he lacks a reliable clairvoyant power and no reason for supposing that the president is *not* in New York. The lack that leads BonJour to deem him unjustified is the lack of sufficient reasons for supposing that the source of the belief in question is a reliable one. And one might well wonder whether the great mass of unsophisticated sense perceivers are not in the same situation. Dolan visually detects a truck coming down the street and thereupon believes that there is a truck coming down the street. But he has no independent reason for or against this belief, nor does he have reasons for supposing visual perception to be a generally reliable source of belief. BonJour's line of argument would seem to brand a large proportion of human perceptual beliefs unjustified as well.

But my concern here is not to get into the controversy between BonJour and reliabilists, but to look at that controversy from the standpoint of my epistemic desiderata approach. There the crucial point is that BonJour's judgment on these cases depends on his assumption that one necessary condition for a justified belief is that the subject is "responsible" in holding it, which in turn requires that the belief be supported by the subject's "own subjective conception of the situation." The reliabilism he is attacking, in particular that of David Armstrong, does not recognize any such requirement. The disputants do not completely disagree on requirements for justification. They both hold

that a belief is justified only if it is held in such a way that it is likely to be true.[3] But BonJour differs from Armstrong and some other reliabilists in endorsing the requirement just mentioned. What are we to say about this difference? To be sure, there might be a negotiated settlement. It is noteworthy that in the literature spawned by BonJour's cases, it is rare to find an externalist taking the hard line that if someone does possess reliable clairvoyant powers, beliefs acquired by exercising those powers would, just by that fact, count as justified. Goldman, for example, in "Epistemic Folkways and Scientific Epistemology," attempts to defuse BonJour's cases as objections to reliabilism without according justification to any of the clairvoyants in question.[4] But for present purposes I am interested in the standoff between BonJour and a more hard-nosed reliabilist, like Armstrong, who takes reliability of belief formation to be sufficient for at least prima facie justification (justification in the absence of sufficient overriders within the subject's knowledge or justified beliefs). If both stick to their guns, and we are at a loss to find any neutral ground on which to resolve the difference, what should we say about the situation? From my anti-justification perspective, we should say that, unlike his opponent, BonJour is *emphasizing* the desideratum of one's beliefs being supported by "one's epistemic perspective," one's current body of knowledge and justified belief. And, presumably, the reliabilist will not deny that this is something valuable for the cognitive enterprise. How could one deny that it is better to have good reasons for a belief than not? The dispute *only* concerns whether the absence of this prevents a belief from being *justified.* And if we were to forget "justification" and what it takes for that, and concentrate on the desiderata that are driving the argument, we would save ourselves a great deal of futile controversy. Norman exhibits one epistemically important desideratum and lacks another. We can then discuss what the further implications are of the possession or lack of each of these desiderata.

III.

My next exhibit concerns an internalist argument that reliability is not *necessary* for justification. Here is a statement of the argument by Richard Foley.

> Consider a world is which S believes, seems to remember, experiences, etc., just what he in this world believes, seems to remember, experiences, etc., but in which his beliefs are often false. Suppose further that in this other world the confidence with which he believes, and the clarity with which he seems to remember, and the intensity with which he experiences is identical with the actual world. Suppose even that what he would

> believe on reflection (about, e.g., what arguments are likely to be truth preserving) is identical with what he would believe on reflection in this world. So, if S somehow were to be switched instantaneously from his actual situation to the corresponding situation in the other world, he would not distinguish any difference, regardless of how hard he tried. To use the familiar example, suppose that a demon insures that this is the case. Call such a demon world "w" and then consider this question. Could some of the propositions which a person S believes in w be epistemically rational for him? For example, could some of the propositions which S perceptually believes be epistemically rational? The answer is "yes." If we are willing to grant that in our world some of the propositions S perceptually believes are epistemically rational, then these same propositions would be epistemically rational for S in w as well. After all, world w by hypothesis is one which from S's viewpoint is indistinguishable from this world. So, if given S's situation in this world his perceptual belief p is rational, his belief p would be rational in w as well.[5]

In this argument Foley obviously assumes that where two worlds are indistinguishable *from S's viewpoint,* they are thereby epistemically indistinguishable. More specifically whatever justifies ("makes it rational," in Foley's terminology) a certain belief in the one world will *ipso facto* do so in the other. But this is just what a reliabilist will (should) deny. For the reliabilist the question of whether the way a belief is formed is a generally reliable one is crucial to its justificatory status. Here too we find some reliabilists, Goldman in particular, trying various maneuvers to accommodate Foley's intuitions without giving up reliabilism. At one point he suggested that what is crucial for justification is reliability in normal worlds, "worlds consistent with our general beliefs about the actual world."[6] This would allow the beliefs in the demon world to be justified on a reliabilist account. In a later publication, "Strong and Weak Justification" (1988),[7] he distinguishes strong and weak justification, the former being reliabilist justification and the latter amounting to something like one's being nonculpable in forming the belief. The beliefs in the demon world would be weakly but not strongly justified. But, again I am interested in the controversy between Foley and a hard nosed reliabilist, or, alternatively, between Foley's view and the "strong justification" view.

What are we to say about the standoff concerning whether what we ordinarily take to be adequate evidence (grounds, reasons . . .) for a belief is sufficient for justification, whatever the degree of reliability of the process engendering it? Again, it seems impossible to find any neutral ground on which to resolve the dispute. Are we then to throw up our hands and say that we are faced with irresolvably divergent intuitions? An alternative is to accept the thesis that 'epistemic justification' picks out no objective status

about which the parties are disagreeing. Instead one party is much more impressed with the importance for epistemic evaluation of a certain obvious desideratum, reliability of belief formation, than the other. If we put aside the supposition that we have to decide whether that is necessary for "epistemic justification" we can proceed to the more fruitful task of determining what importance this and other desiderata have for the cognitive enterprise, for inquiry and the assessment of the results thereof.

IV.

My last case involves a reliabilist, Alvin Goldman, taking the offensive against internalism. In "Internalism Exposed," Goldman presents some alleged counterexamples to an accessibility form of an internalist view of justification.[8] He distinguishes different versions of his target. I will restrict myself to what he calls "weak internalism":

> (WI) Only facts concerning what conscious and/or stored mental states an agent is in at time t are justifiers of the agent's beliefs at t. (279)

The rationale for this restriction would be that only such mental states are cognitively accessible to the subject in a relatively direct fashion.

Against the supposition that only such facts contribute to the justification of a belief Goldman proffers various sorts of cases of justified beliefs that are not justified by facts like these. I will mention two.

1. *Forgotten evidence*. Sally received adequate evidence for the beneficial effects of broccoli in a *New York Times* article. She still believes this but has forgotten what her evidence was and cannot directly access it. Nevertheless, Goldman supposes, her belief is still justified (280–81).

2. *Logical or probabilistic relations*. Sally's belief about broccoli cannot be justified by any old conscious or stored mental state. The content of such a state or states must bear the appropriate logical or probabilistic relation of support to the broccoli belief. But such relations are not themselves conscious or stored mental states (282).

If we look at internalist rejoinders, we again find various kinds of weaving and bobbing. For example, in a recent paper, "Internalism Defended," Richard Feldman and Earl Conee discuss a number of attacks in Goldman's "Internalism Exposed," but, for the most part, they confine themselves to pointing out other forms of internalism that are immune to his criticisms.[9] And as for 2. above, it is common for internalists to claim that logical and probabilistic relations are as directly knowable as conscious mental states. But, again, I am not concerned here to enter into the dispute, but to look at

it from my non-justification perspective. From that vantage point the crucial question is as to why the disputants make the judgments they do as to when we do and do not have justified belief and as to what is required for this. And, I suggest, hard thinking about those issues will give rise to the more basic question as to how, if at all, one can identify what it is about which they take themselves to be disagreeing. Returning again to "Epistemic Desiderata," I sought there to show that there is no theoretically neutral way of identifying this common target, no way that does not involve presupposing that one of the contending parties is right about its nature. And once we come to realize this, the way is open to the further realization that what is really driving the argument on both sides are the conditions the relation of which to "justification" is supposed to be the heart of the matter. Put in those terms, Goldman is bringing out the fact that having acquired a belief in a truth-conducive way is an epistemically favorable feature of a belief, even if one can no longer remember that way. Whereas internalists tend to be more impressed by the absence of current access to what supports the belief. Again, both sides will presumably recognize that both these features are epistemically desirable. Unless and until it becomes clear that 'justified' picks out a feature of beliefs about which internalists and externalists are disagreeing *and* which is of crucial importance for the epistemic assessment of beliefs, we will do much better to stick with the various epistemic desiderata the alleged relevance of which to "justification" occupies so much of epistemologists' attention.

V.

I now turn to my main concern here, exploring some of the ways in which we might pursue the epistemology of belief without supposing that 'justification' picks out a uniquely important epistemic desideratum. This alternative approach will separate out the various desiderata that one or another theorist has taken to be constitutive of justification, as well as some others. This will relieve us of the burdensome task of deciding which of the competing accounts of "justification" is telling it like it is. And it will free us to explore the nature and relevance of a variety of epistemic desiderata without worrying about how they are related to any alleged desideratum picked out by 'justified'. In "Epistemic Desiderata" I suggested that such investigations could be ranged under four rubrics: the *elucidation*, *viability*, and *importance* of each desideratum, and their *interrelations*. In this brief sketch I will mostly focus on certain aspects of importance and viability. More specifically, I will be concerned both with the purposes and interests relative to which one or another desideratum is especially important, and also with

the assumptions we must make if we are to address seriously the question of when, or to what degree, one or another desideratum is realized.

This discussion will be restricted to the topic of the epistemic assessment of *beliefs,* where the positive assessments, even if related to truth, are thought of as being logically compatible with falsity. Thus the discussion will stop short of an account of *knowledge*, for which truth is a logically necessary condition. And, of course, my chosen territory is just the one that has typically been approached in terms of "justification." One more preliminary remark. Though I have been, and will be, contrasting my "epistemic desiderata" approach with one in terms of justification, that should not blind us to the way in which attempts to develop a theory of justification have involved extensive and valuable discussion of the very desiderata on which I will be concentrating. Even though obsession with "justification" has tended to adulterate those discussions, that has not prevented them from producing results that are of permanent value. But in the remainder of this article I will try to concentrate on rather different points so as to highlight distinctive features of my approach. I will, however, inevitably say things that will be familiar from the voluminous literature on justification.

I will begin the discussion with *reliability*, thought of as the formation of belief in a way that can generally be relied on to produce true beliefs.[10] Let's consider the difference between contexts in which it is, and is not, important to consider the extent to which this desideratum is realized. For example, if we are evaluating applicants for a position that calls for making judgments on matters of practical importance, we will obviously be interested in whether a given candidate can be relied on to make judgments on such matters that are generally true. Another such context is that in which we need to ascertain some matter of fact and are confronted with a choice among several possible informants. We will be interested in choosing an informant that we have reason to suppose to be reliable on that kind of issue.[11]

Contrast these contexts with the following. (1) I want to find out on my own the correct answer to a certain question. Here, so long as I arrive at an answer on the basis of very strong evidence, it is of no practical concern to me whether the way in which my belief formation was carried out is one that is *generally* reliable. Here the interest in getting the truth on this particular matter overshadows any concern for a general truth yielding propensity. (2) I am interested in determining whether you have sufficient reason for a belief of yours, perhaps a belief about the mood of a close friend. Here the desideratum that is most relevant is, obviously, *having sufficient reason for believing that p*, rather than arriving at the belief that p in a way that is generally reliable. To be sure, it could be argued that in both of these latter contexts, the most salient desideratum could not be realized without the subject's forming a belief in a generally reliable way. Be that as it may, it

remains that in these cases reliability is not what we are most interested in for its own sake. If it comes into the picture, it will only be as an accompaniment to, or indication of, our primary goal.

Now consider the *satisfaction of intellectual obligations* desideratum. Relative to what concerns is it of primary importance? In "The Deontological Conception of Epistemic Justification," I argued that if we think of our basic intellectual obligation as one to believe only what is true, so far as possible, this makes unrealistic assumptions of voluntary control of belief.[12] The obligations not ruled out by this defect are obligations to do what we can (or what can reasonably be expected of one) to see to it that one's belief-forming dispositions are such as to be reliable. This desideratum diverges somewhat both from reliability and from having adequate grounds for a belief. In the same essay I argued that there are many sorts of cases in which one has done as much as could reasonably be expected of one along these lines, even though one falls markedly short of both reliable belief formation and believing only on sufficient grounds. Hence this desideratum would not be salient in the kinds of situations mentioned above. On the other hand, it will be of prime importance where there is a question of blame for believing so–and–so. (Again, I am taking it that one cannot properly be blamed for making the wrong *choice* as to what to believe at a certain time.) Consider a student who is "guilty" of a howler, e.g., supposing that Jane Austen wrote *Middlemarch*. I am not considering whether the student should be marked down on a test for this, but whether he should be held to be culpable, properly upbraided for making such an elementary mistake. This will depend on what could have been expected of him. If it was within his capacities to get straight on who wrote what with sufficient study time, and if there were no overriding obligations that prevented him from using the time in this way, he could properly be blamed for academic dereliction. But if, for whatever reason, he was incapable of mastering the material, it would not be in order to hold him responsible for his mistake. Note that these concerns are not distinctively epistemic. If this case is typical of those in which the desideratum in question is of considerable importance, we must conclude that its relevance is other than epistemic.

Now let's consider the kind of access stressed by internalists, cognitive access to what in justification terms would be called 'justifiers'—grounds, evidence, reasons, etc. In this justification-free epistemology let's use the term 'epistemizers'. The kind of access in question differs for different forms of internalism. Consider being detectable just on reflection, just, as Ginet says, by clearheadedly asking oneself the question.[13] In what contexts is this a matter of practical importance? Clearly not in our first cases, in which reliability on a certain matter or kind of matter is the primary desideratum. Nor is it of crucial importance when we are engaged in trying to find the answer to a question, or when we want to determine whether someone

has adequate grounds of a belief (unless, in this latter case, we need to find this out from the person in question). But one context in which this is a capacity greatly to be desired is that in which someone is called on to defend a belief, respond to a challenge of the entitlement to hold it. To be sure, one might be able to mount an effective defense without being able to access one's grounds *just on reflection.* More elaborate means might be required. But, clearly, the more direct one's access to one's grounds the better, if one's concern is to exhibit those grounds in response to a challenge.

This discussion of access naturally leads into a consideration of the state to which the exploitation of access leads, viz., one's higher-level knowledge, or well-grounded belief, that a lower-level belief has a certain epistemic status. It can easily be seen that this is not necessary for the purposes we surveyed before the previous paragraph. For example, in choosing an informant we are unlikely to be concerned as to whether the candidate knows or has strong grounds for believing that she is a reliable source for answering the question. It is quite sufficient that she *is* such a source. But just as it is highly desirable for purposes of responding to epistemic challenges that one have as sure an access as possible to one's grounds for a belief, so, *ipso facto,* it is even more highly desirable for that purpose that one already be in possession of information concerning the epistemic status of the belief and what that depends on.

Thus far I have focused on practical interests for which one or another epistemic desideratum is of special importance. I am sure that philosophical readers will be anxiously, and perhaps irritatedly, waiting for me to turn my attention to the role of various desiderata in philosophical reflections on the epistemic assessment of beliefs. But before turning to that I want to make the point that the epistemic assessment of belief in the thoughts and social interactions of daily life are of relevance to those philosophical reflections. Conditions that are of importance for epistemic evaluation in daily life have a *prima facie* claim to attention in systematic epistemology. And, correlatively, if a certain condition is of no interest in a variety of contexts of daily life, as we have seen higher-level epistemic knowledge not to be, that is something that should be duly noted in attempts to develop a systematic epistemology of belief. In that spirit here are a couple of morals I would like to draw for epistemology from the above survey.

First, one may well be struck by the way in which different desiderata are salient in different contexts. Where there is a keen interest in reliability, access to epistemizers fades into the background. Where having adequate reasons for a belief is crucial, reliability is not so important. It remains to be seen how this impacts on the more impersonal context of philosophical epistemic reflection, but that reflection ignores this point at its peril. And, second, the most striking implication of this diversity is the fact that in

everyday life there seems to be no single desideratum or set of desiderata that are epistemically crucial in all contexts. This is a further reason for doubting that there is any unique epistemic status, "justification," that is most important epistemically across all variations of contexts of epistemic assessment.

VI.

Now, at last, I turn to a consideration of the desiderata from the standpoint of systematic epistemology. Philosophical reflection on knowledge or the epistemic assessment of belief has traditionally been largely carried on in abstraction from such everyday concerns as I have been discussing. It is supposed to issue in an account of epistemic status of an all-purpose sort, one that is applicable to any context in which issues of epistemic assessment arise, whatever the practical concerns involved. In these increasingly pragmatic and "bottom-line" oriented times, epistemology has often been reproached for precisely this distance from "real life." But I won't associate myself with those complaints. I find a detached philosophical reflection on things epistemic, and on many other things, to be of great value, not only in itself but in application to the problems of everyday life. I would only add that the epistemologist should not be so tightly enclosed in the ivory tower as to ignore the need for relevance to concerns outside philosophy itself.

What I will do now is to give a few samples of philosophical reflection on the epistemic status of beliefs that turns its back on anything like accounts of "justification." This will be an "all-purpose" consideration of the elucidation, viability, relative importance, and interrelations of various specific epistemic desiderata. Within the limits of this paper I can do no more than hint at how some of this might go, but I hope and trust that this will be significantly better than nothing.

A natural starting point would be an attempt at an organization, a taxonomy of the desiderata. Sticking with desiderata for individual beliefs, and leaving aside the evaluation of large bodies of beliefs where foundationalism and coherentism take center stage as alternatives, I find the following classification to be useful.

I. *Verific, truth-conducive* statuses.
   A. The belief's being formed in a *reliable* way.
   B. The belief's being based on, or the subject's being in possession of an adequate ground, where the adequacy consists of the ground's being such that given the ground, it is objectively likely that the belief is true.

II. Favorable statuses that do not entail likelihood of truth.
   A. Satisfying intellectual obligations in holding the belief or in doing things that are in the causal ancestry of the belief.
   B. Self-evidence or other forms of intuitive plausibility.
   C. The belief's being formed by the exercise of an intellectual virtue.

The desiderata in I. and II. can all attach to first-level beliefs, beliefs that are not about other beliefs, though they are not restricted to those. There is another group of desiderata that involve higher-level beliefs or higher-level cognitions of other sorts. I will think of them here as desiderata for the lower-level beliefs to which these higher-level beliefs or other cognitions are directed.

III. *Higher-level* desiderata.
   A. Some relatively direct and/or certain access to the source of the epistemic status of the lower-level belief.
   B. Knowledge or well-grounded belief concerning the epistemic status of the lower-level belief.

I could add more items under each of these headings, but this is more than enough to occupy us here.

Let's say that the focal aim of cognition is to form true rather than false beliefs on matters of concern to us. Given that, we may think of a positive epistemic status of a belief as one that renders the belief likely to be true. Setting the terms of the discussion in this way may seem to prejudice it by giving I. the nod over II. and III. before we begin examining their relative merits. But that this is not the whole story is indicated by the fact that virtually all epistemologists, including those who emphasize "internalist" conditions of justification such as those in groups II. and III., accept likelihood of truth as a prime epistemic desideratum. For the most part the emphasis on desiderata in groups II. and III. is intimately connected with a conviction that their realization can be expected to carry with it a truth-conducive tendency, even though that is not built into the conception of the desideratum. Thus BonJour, who, as we saw above, insists on *proceeding responsibly* as a necessary condition of justification, is also equally insistent that if epistemic justification is to be of any value, it must carry with it a likelihood of truth. There are exceptions to this generalization, but they are in a distinct minority.[14]

From my "no-justification" perspective, I would say that the overriding importance of likelihood of truth as an epistemic desideratum has been obscured in the epistemological literature by the fact that many epistemologists, including my earlier self,[15] have been led by strong internalist intuitions, associated with the term 'justified' and its cognates, to feature one or another desideratum from groups II. and III. in an account of justified belief. When this is conjoined with the tendency to take justification to be the cru-

cial positive epistemic status, it has led to a blurring of the central epistemic importance of truth-conducivity, even though most of those involved in this blurring also hold views that imply that central importance. If we forget about "justification" and the various intuitions as to what is involved in that, we will be free to give truth-conducivity the central place it deserves in the pantheon of epistemic desiderata.

I want, if at all possible, to neutralize any impression that the above is just an argument for an externalist theory of justification in other terms. I am deadly serious about doing epistemology without 'justification', externalist, internalist, or any other sort. And that carries with it a "Let a thousand flowers bloom" attitude toward epistemic desiderata. I am not at all disposed to deny that items in groups II. and III., at least those that are viable, are genuine epistemic desiderata and hence something to be positively valued. But that is compatible with recognizing differences of centrality and basicality between them. And my suggestion is that, given the centrality of a concern for truth in our cognitive operations (something I am prepared to argue for at length, though I will not do so here),[16] desiderata that feature that concern have a certain primacy in the epistemic assessment of beliefs.

Let me expand a bit on the relation of verific desiderata to those in groups II. and III. One might conclude from what I have said in this section that the group I. desiderata are all we need for cognitive purposes. So long as our beliefs are likely to be true, what more could we ask? I think it is difficult to argue with that statement. But let's not forget the antecedent of the conditional: "if the beliefs are likely to be true." So long as that is satisfied everything will go swimmingly from the epistemic point of view. And insofar as we are completely passive in the cognitive side of our lives, there is nothing more to ask for. If our belief formations just happen, with no active involvement on our parts, then where they are formed truth-conducively that is a good thing epistemically, and where they are not it is a bad thing; and that is all there is to be said about the matter. But human beings, at least those at a certain stage of cognitive development, are not completely passive cognitively. They take an active interest in seeing to it that their beliefs are acquired in such a way as to render it likely that they are true rather than false. And that means that there is reason for them to be interested in identifying conditions that are truth-conducive and doing what they can to see to it that these conditions are realized. And that, in turn, means that there is epistemic value in seeking higher-level epistemic knowledge, and access thereto, of the sorts that are constitutive of desiderata in group III. And insofar as the items in group II. are likely accompaniments of truth-conducive conditions, they too will possess epistemic value from a truth-oriented perspective. That, in rough outline, is how I see more internalist kinds of conditions possessing positive epistemic value, but one that is strictly derivative from the more basic value possessed by the group I. items.

VII.

One persistent concern (one might even say "obsession") of epistemology throughout its history is with skepticism and the attempt to respond to skeptical challenges. There are, of course, a variety of forms of skepticism, and for this and other reasons a thorough discussion of how the various desiderata are related to this aspect of epistemology is far beyond the bounds of this essay. But since the attempt to respond to skeptical challenges is intimately related to the assumptions one must make to determine when one or another desideratum is realized, I will make a few preliminary points about this. To keep the discussion within manageable limits I will focus on one particular kind of skeptical challenge—the demand that a non-skeptic show that she/he genuinely knows something or that some belief of his/hers possesses some epistemic desideratum.

I will begin by noting that it is a common reproach against reliabilism, and other forms of externalism, that it is unable to meet this sceptical challenge. "Of course," the internalist critic will say, "*if* your belief was formed in a reliable way, that is a highly desirable feature for the aim at forming true beliefs. But why should we suppose that it is? Any attempt to show that it was so formed will make use of various facts one supposes one has ascertained about that particular belief acquisition, and about the general reliability of such acquisitions. This simply pushes the skeptical challenge back to the supposition that one has knowledge, or reliable belief, about those facts. The skeptical challenge has merely been relocated, not answered."

It is impossible to simply reject this charge. It is an essential feature of reliabilism that the epistemic status of a given belief depends on various empirical facts. So if we are to determine that a given belief was formed in a reliable way, we must be able to determine that the relevant facts about its provenance obtain. And what about those? Reliabilists have generally grasped the nettle here and made a virtue of necessity by, so to say, glorying in the fact that on their position epistemology cannot be "first philosophy." Epistemological knowledge cannot be the first knowledge we obtain. It is only at a relatively advanced stage of cognitive development that epistemological questions arise. And in order to answer them we have to make use of much that we have learned at earlier, less sophisticated and reflective stages. This is one of the respects in which reliabilism is classed, both by friend and foe, as a "naturalistic" epistemology. But then what is the reliabilist to say about the skeptical challenge under discussion?

I see no alternative here to a frank admission that the challenge cannot be answered if it is posed in the unqualified way we have been imagining. If the skeptic will not accept any claim that the claimant has not already shown himself to be entitled to, then, since any such showing requires

premises that have already been shown to be acceptable, any attempt to satisfy such a skeptic will necessarily give rise to an infinite regress of showings. This is a mug's game, and we are well out of it. Any skeptical challenge worth considering must be more local than this. It must allow some beliefs to be acceptable without having been shown to be, if any discussion of the challenge is to be possible. And so the reliabilist's failure to successfully answer so global a skeptical challenge cannot be held against him.

And yet the internalist may seem to have a significant advantage over her rival on this point. By restricting epistemizers to conditions to which the subject has relatively direct access, or of which the subject has knowledge or epistemically positive belief, the internalist seems to be in a position to claim a positive epistemic status for a given belief without the necessity of engaging in empirical investigations that beg the question against the skeptic. To be sure, externalists can lodge the counter-charge that by restricting epistemizers in this way the internalist position implies that we have much less knowledge, or well-grounded belief, than we ordinarily suppose we have, and that the internalist takes us to have. Earlier we saw Goldman making such a charge. But leaving that aside, there is a more fundamental point to be made about this controversy.

Still thinking in terms of the global skeptical challenge, how will the skeptic view the internalist's claim to an advantage? If the skeptic sticks to his guns, he will say that the internalist, for her part, is not entitled either to the claim that she has direct access to adequate grounds of her belief, or that such grounds exist, or that she knows that the belief is adequately grounded, until she has shown this to be the case. No doubt, the internalist does not consider any such showing to be necessary. She supposes her direct acquaintance with the facts in question is sufficient to assure her of them. But that would cut no ice with the extreme skeptic. Why should he take the internalist's word that she has this direct acquaintance with these facts any more than he takes the reliabilist's word for it that his belief was reliably formed? Saying doesn't make it so. And so the global skeptical challenge remains unanswered in either case. There is a standoff on this point. The externalist and internalist are in the same position vis–à–vis global skepticism. Both have to assume, in practice, the reliability of certain sources of knowledge in order to establish their entitlement to certain beliefs.

But what if we think of a less global skeptical challenge, one that is much more familiar in the philosophical literature. Suppose that, like Hume of the *Treatise,* we take for granted one's knowledge of one's own impressions and ideas, and then issue the challenge to establish any other claims (about the "external world" or regularities in nature) just on that basis. Or we can update this in terms of the kind of internalist basis we saw Goldman discussing, construing it in terms of what can be known by introspection of

one's present conscious states or recall of stored cognitive states. A foundationalist internalism is tailor made to meet this particular challenge. For classical forms of that are defined by the claim that all our knowledge that goes beyond one's own conscious states (and perhaps what is self-evident on reflection) can be established on that basis. Whereas the reliabilist makes no such claim. For the reliabilist, beliefs about the "external world" get their positive epistemic status, where they do, in just the same way as the more "internal" beliefs about one's own mind and what can be known just on reflection, viz., by being acquired in a reliable way. And so the internalist can claim to beat her rival at responding to this skeptical challenge.

Of course, that claim can be made good only if the further knowledge which the internalist, like all the rest of us, assumes we have, can indeed be established on the chosen "internal" basis. And, I make bold to say, despite centuries of effort, no one has made a convincing case that this can be done. But suppose tomorrow someone should make such a case. A more fundamental point will still remain. This has to do with the validity of the terms of this skeptical challenge. That consists, we must remember, in taking some sources of knowledge for granted and requiring that any other claims to knowledge be validated on the basis of what those favored sources yield. But the supposition that this is a reasonable requirement for the "further claims" runs into the "undue partiality" argument, put forth so eloquently by Thomas Reid.

> The author of the "Treatise of Human Nature" appears to me to be but a half-skeptic. He hath not followed his principles so far as they lead him, but, after having, with unparalleled intrepidity and success, combated vulgar prejudices, when he had but one blow to strike, his courage fails him, he fairly lays down his arms, and yields himself a captive to the most common of all vulgar prejudices—I mean the belief of the existence of his own impressions and ideas.
>
> I beg, therefore, to have the honour of making an addition to the skeptical system, without which I conceive it cannot hang together. I affirm, that the belief of the existence of impressions and ideas, is as little supported by reason, as that of the existence of minds and bodies. No man ever did or could offer any reason for this belief . . . A thorough and consistent skeptic will never, therefore, yield this point. To such a skeptic I have nothing to say, but of the semiskeptic, I should beg to know, why they believe the existence of their impressions and ideas. The true reason I take to be, because they cannot help it; and the same reason will lead them to believe many other things.[17]
>
> The skeptic asks me, Why do you believe the existence of the external object which you perceive? This belief, sir, is none of my manufacture; it came from the mint of Nature; it bears her image and superscription; and, if it is not right, the fault is not mine; I even took it upon trust, and without suspicion. Reason,

> says the skeptic is the only judge of truth, and you ought to throw off every opinion and every belief that is not grounded on reason. Why, sir, should I believe the faculty of reason more than that of perception?—they came both out of the same shop, and were made by the same artist; and if he puts one piece of false ware into my hands, what should hinder him from putting another?[18]

I cannot push this discussion further in this article. But what I have done already suffices for a very important conclusion. The skirmish with skepticism leaves unshaken the earlier conclusion that the fundamental epistemic desiderata are the verific ones, and that the others, however valuable (and they *are* valuable), owe their desirability to their relation to the former. Though the reliabilist cannot show that any beliefs satisfy the reliabilist desideratum without assuming that other beliefs do so (and thus falling into what I call "epistemic circularity"),[19] a similar fate awaits us whatever sources of belief we take as basic. The most basic point here, only hinted at above, is that we cannot move one step in establishing any beliefs without relying on some sources of belief to do so. And if we take the reliability of some sources for granted, without the need for validating them, and then use them to call others into question, we fall victim to Reid's "undue partiality" argument. Both externalist and internalist, in order to show that the crucial truth-conducive desiderata are realized for the beliefs in which they are interested, must take for granted, in practice, the reliability of certain ways of forming beliefs. The externalist may seem to be at a disadvantage in taking more for granted. But this may be more than compensated for by the failure of the internalist to reach her intended goal on the basis of the resources to which she has restricted herself. And, as foreshadowed above, this discussion reveals some important points about what one must assume in order to determine whether a particular desideratum is realized in a particular case.

In these last two sections I have aspired only to give some fragmentary examples of what doing this part of epistemology would look like if we conducted it without supposing that 'justified' denotes a unique objective epistemic status that is of basic importance for the epistemic evaluation of beliefs. A more convincing illustration must await a more extended presentation.

NOTES

1. William P. Alston, "Epistemic Desiderata," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 53, 3 (September 1993): 527–51.
2. Laurence BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985).

3. Here BonJour departs from some of his fellow internalists. For a survey of internalists on this point, see William P. Alston, *A Realist Conception of Truth* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), ch. 8.
4. Alvin Goldman, *Liaisons* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992).
5. Richard Foley, "What's Wrong with Reliabilism?," *Monist* 68, 2 (1985): 188–202. Quote, 189–90.
6. Alvin Goldman, *Epistemology and Cognition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 107.
7. Reprinted in Goldman, *Liaisons.*
8. Alvin Goldman, "Internalism Exposed," *Journal of Philosophy* 96, 6 (1999): 271–93.
9. Richard Feldman and Earl Conee, "Internalism Defended," in *Epistemology: Internalism and Externalism,* ed. Hilary Kornblith (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).
10. In "How to Think about Reliability," I defend the view that reliability of belief formation is to be thought of in terms of a belief's being produced by a "realized" function of certain features of proximate input, such that beliefs so formed would generally be true in situations of sorts that we typically encounter. (William P. Alston, "How to Think about Reliability," *Philosophical Topics* 23, 1[1995]: 1–29.) For present purposes I need not assume that or any other detailed account of what reliability of belief formation amounts to, except to assume that it is possible to give an account that renders the concept intelligible and useful.
11. For a fascinating and powerful attempt to locate the concept of knowledge in terms of the conditions one would want to be satisfied by an informant, see Edward Craig, *Knowledge and the State of Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).
12. William P. Alston, "The Deontological Conception of Epistemic Justification," *Philosophical Perspectives* 2 (1988): 257–99. Reprinted in Alston, *Epistemic Justification* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989).
13. Carl Ginet, *Knowledge, Perception, and Memory* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1975), 34.
14. For one notable exception, see Ginet, *Knowledge, Perception, and Memory,* ch. 3.
15. See "An Internalist Externalism" in Alston, *Epistemic Justification.*
16. For some discussion of this, see Alston, *A Realist Conception of Truth,* ch. 8.
17. Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind,* ed. T. Duggan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 81–82.
18. Ibid., 207.
19. William P. Alston, "Epistemic Circularity," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 47, 1 (September 1986): 1–30. Reprinted in Alston, *Epistemic Justification.*