

Chapter 1

Indispensability Arguments as Motivation for Accounts of A Priori Justification

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Introduction

There are three primary ways of arguing for the existence of a priori justification. The first is to appeal to *intuitive examples* where it seems, *prima facie*, that we do have non-empirical justification for believing something. Such examples have traditionally included propositions of mathematics, geometry and logic, as well as many if not all of the propositions of philosophy (or at least, that subset of them belief in which is or can be justified at all). Given that we do *seem* to have non-empirical justification in such cases, it is possible to argue on the basis of them that there must exist something like a priori justification for belief.

A second way of arguing for the existence of a priori justification, or at least of providing motivating considerations in its favor, is by arguing that a priori justification is *indispensable as part of a non-skeptical epistemology*. Such arguments proceed by providing considerations to the effect that theories of epistemic justification that do not acknowledge a role for a priori justification, in particular versions of strict or radical empiricism, entail skepticism with regard to all or a large portion of our beliefs in a way that can be remedied by acknowledging the existence of a priori justification.¹

Third, it is possible to argue for the existence of a priori justification by developing a positive account of this phenomenon that is able to explain the epistemic justification we take ourselves to have for various propositions in a way that is better than competing accounts, and that is able to respond adequately to various objections and criticisms.

These three lines of argument are by no means unrelated. Someone who found arguments of the first two sorts compelling would be motivated to develop an account along the lines of the third, while someone who began with the third approach of simply developing an account would surely need to appeal to intuitive examples and provide counterarguments against alternative positions in the process. It seems fair to say that, in the history of philosophy, it is arguments of the first type that have kept the notion of the a priori around and made the question of a priori justification a pressing one for most epistemologists, while it is arguments of the second sort that have most strongly motivated defenders of the existence of a priori justification and, unfortunately, very few philosophers have gone very far along the path of the third approach of actually developing complete proposals regarding what a priori justification is and how it works.

The project of this chapter is to present, clarify and ultimately defend some of the most traditional arguments in the second category, those aimed at showing that theories of epistemic justification that eschew appeal to a priori justification are in some sense deficient or that they entail skepticism about a large portion of beliefs that we normally take ourselves to be justified

¹ Importantly, arguments of this sort do not count by themselves as anti-skeptical arguments. That is, even if the addition of an explicit account of a priori justification to some existing theory of justification improves that theory or renders it capable of accounting for more cases of intuitively justified belief, this is not the same as providing a full-blown response to skepticism about epistemic justification in general, or about a priori justification specifically. Nevertheless, if it can be argued that accounts of epistemic justification that deny the existence of a priori justification face special problems or skeptical challenges not faced by accounts that include a priori justification, then the latter sort of account still has, at the very least, a dialectical advantage over the others.

in holding. I will consider three arguments of this sort, which I will call “the generality argument”, “the argument from modality” and the “meta-justification argument”. While each of these arguments has a rather lengthy history,² they have all recently been revitalized by, on the one hand, Laurence Bonjour’s book length defense of a priori justification and the various responses to it, and on the other by debates in modal epistemology concerning the implications of the so-called “necessary a posteriori” for our knowledge of modality.³ In these various debates, defenders of a priori justification have focused on establishing two points.

First: that a strict empiricist account of epistemic justification lacks, in principle, the resources to explain our justification for beliefs that are “experience-transcending” (especially, though not only, beliefs based on inductive or abductive reasoning) or modal in nature (involving necessity or possibility) or both. Second: that empiricism is self-undermining insofar as the epistemic resources that it makes available are, in principle, insufficient to provide justification for belief in the truth of empiricism itself as an epistemic theory.

Critics of the a priori have retorted along two lines. First: they argue that empiricism, properly understood, is not subject to the objections that have been raised against it. Second: it is argued that, especially for the issue of meta-justification and the accompanying issue of skepticism, rationalist accounts of a priori justification are equally subject to these problems and so do not gain any advantages over empiricism on these grounds.⁴

My own position is that while the rhetoric of some defenders of the a priori has perhaps claimed *too much* on behalf of the arguments under consideration here, nevertheless, when they are understood correctly as, on the one hand, arguments directed primarily against internalist foundationalist empiricism, and on the other as intended to motivate the development of internalist foundationalist rationalism then the following are both true: (i) the arguments themselves *are* conclusive against strict empiricism, and (ii) internalist foundationalist rationalism *is not* affected in the same way by these arguments as is empiricism.

² The argument from modality can be traced at least as far back as Kant’s discussion, which begins with the statement that “Experience teaches us, to be sure, that something is constituted thus and so, but not that it could not be otherwise.” Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), B3. While versions of the generality argument and the meta-justification argument can be found in the appendix to chapter 4 of Edmund Husserl’s *Logical Investigations* entitled “On some basic defects of empiricism”. See Edmund Husserl, *The Logical Investigations*, trans. J. N. Findlay, 2 vols. (Amherst: Humanity Books, 1900-1901/2000), 115-17.

³ Laurence Bonjour, *In Defense of Pure Reason: A Rationalist Account of a Priori Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). An earlier recent treatment of the question of the tenability of strict empiricism is, of course, George Bealer, “The Incoherence of Empiricism,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 66 (1992). For response to and discussion of Bonjour’s work, as well as some of Bealer’s arguments, see the reviews of Bonjour’s book and his replies in the symposium contained in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 63 vol. 3 (2001); Albert Casullo, “The Coherence of Empiricism,” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 81 (2000): chapter 2, James Beebe, “Bonjour’s Arguments against Skepticism About the a Priori,” *Philosophical Studies* 137 (2008), Joshua Thurow, “The a Priori: A Defense Via Explanation” (Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 2006). For a recent critical discussion of the argument from modality, see Albert Casullo, *A Priori Justification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), chapter 4.5. For recent defenses of a version of the argument from modality, see E. J. Lowe, *The Possibility of Metaphysics: Substance, Identity, and Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), ———, “Two Notions of Being: Entity and Essence,” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 83 (2008). On the argument from modality, see especially Gordon Prescott Barnes, “Necessity and Apriority,” *Philosophical Studies* 132 (2007).

⁴ This is most clearly the strategy of Casullo, “The Coherence of Empiricism.” It also seems to be the conclusion reached by James Beebe, “Bonjour’s Arguments against Skepticism About the a Priori,” *Philosophical Studies* 137 (2008).

I will begin with a brief discussion of the space of possible formulations of rationalism and empiricism as theories of epistemic justification, of the role that this has played in the contemporary dialectic concerning rationalism and empiricism, and of the formulations of these positions that I will be using here. I will then lay out some basic theses about epistemic justification that will play a role in my development of the arguments against empiricism. Chief amongst these will be the following epistemic principle:

The non-inferential content principle: No mental state can justify belief in a proposition p foundationally (without appeal to some principle(s) of inference, or to other mental states) unless the content of that state presents p or the fact that p .

I will then develop the generality and the modal arguments against empiricism on the basis of this thesis, and respond to some objections. After this I develop two formulations of the “meta-justification” argument. The first formulation shows that, in light of the generality and modal arguments, strict empiricism does not possess the epistemic resources needed to explain the possibility of *basically* justified belief in strict empiricism as a theory of justification. The second formulation of the meta-justification argument will show that strict empiricism does not possess the epistemic resources to explain justified belief in the proposition that beliefs formed based on empiricist reasons (in accordance with the theory of strict empiricism) are themselves likely to be true. This question of meta-justification is, I will suggest, ultimately the question of an empiricist response to skepticism. I will consider arguments that have been made to the effect that rationalism can provide no better meta-justification for itself, and that therefore rationalism and empiricism are, at best, stalemated on the issue of meta-justification. I will respond to this argument by suggesting that, while it is difficult to provide a full-blown meta-justification of this sort for rationalism, there is nevertheless an asymmetry in the applicability of skeptical arguments to rationalism and empiricism respectively, and that this asymmetry translates to an asymmetry in the extent to which meta-justification worries are applicable to rationalism as opposed to empiricism.

My conclusion will be that the first three (generality, modality, and the first version of meta-justification) arguments against internalist foundationalist empiricism are successful and conclusive against it in a way that has no parallel for rationalism, while the second version of the meta-justification argument can be seen to apply to empiricism with much greater force than to rationalism, thus undermining, at the very least, the claim that there is a stalemate between the two positions regarding this issue. Given all of this, I conclude that if one is an internalist foundationalist, then there are very good reasons to pursue some account of a priori justification. It is this that is the primary scope and import of most of the traditional arguments against empiricism.⁵

1. *Rationalism and Empiricism in the Context of Contemporary Epistemology*

My primary purpose here is to elaborate and defend certain standard arguments against strict empiricism and in favor of the existence of a priori justification, not to defend the very strong claims along these lines that have recently been made, in particular, by Laurence Bonjour. However, there is no doubt that a primary impetus for recent discussion of rationalist arguments against strict empiricism has been Laurence Bonjour’s book, *In Defense of Pure Reason*, where after only five pages Bonjour reaches the following conclusion:

⁵ The exception being, of course, the admittedly large amount of ink that has been spilt by critics of Quinean ‘coherence’ empiricism, key examples of which included Bealer, “The Incoherence of Empiricism.”, Bonjour, *In Defense of Pure Reason: A Rationalist Account of a Priori Justification*, chapter 3. I will not be addressing Coherentism at any length in this paper, though I will touch on the matter in the next section and in the conclusion.

“Thus we see that the repudiation of all a priori justification is apparently tantamount to the repudiation of argument or reasoning generally, thus amounting in effect to intellectual suicide.”⁶

BonJour writes this after considering two arguments against strict empiricism.⁷ His suggestion seems to be that, regardless of one’s other epistemic commitments, if one wishes to advocate a non-skeptical account of epistemic justification, then one *must* acknowledge some role for a priori justification. This is indeed a strong claim and the predominant response to this portion of BonJour’s discussion has been a kind of incredulity. Even if BonJour’s arguments establish something in favor of rationalism, it has been argued, it cannot be that they *entail* its truth, just so long as skepticism is false.⁸ After all, there are many different conceptions of epistemic justification, and thus many different formulations of empiricism, and it would be surprising at the very least if BonJour was in possession of just two arguments that were sufficient to refute all of these different formulations of empiricism.⁹ Further, it has been suggested that the arguments that BonJour offers against empiricism at various points in his book are, properly understood, equally devastating when leveled against the version of rationalism that he wishes to defend, leaving rationalism and empiricism stalemated in these regards.¹⁰

I agree with those who conclude that BonJour’s rhetoric claims more than his arguments have established, but I disagree that it follows from this that BonJour’s arguments, or at any rate arguments very much like them (i) establish nothing at all, or that (ii) these kinds of arguments against empiricism are equally applicable to rationalism, resulting in a stalemate of some sort between the two positions. In the balance of this section I will first demarcate the context within which most traditional rationalist arguments against empiricism are intended to operate, namely the context of foundationalist internalism, then I will lay out some basic assumptions that are at work in these arguments, assumptions that are quite reasonable to make in the context of foundationalist internalism.

1.1 *The Limits of Arguments Against Empiricism*

Suppose, for the sake of simplicity, that the terms ‘internalism’, ‘externalism’, ‘foundationalism’ and ‘coherentism’ are all univocal, mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive when applied to an account of epistemic justification.¹¹ This yields four potential types of theory of epistemic justification: (i) internalist foundationalism, (ii) internalist coherentism, (iii)

⁶ BonJour, *In Defense of Pure Reason: A Rationalist Account of a Priori Justification*, 5.

⁷ The generality argument, which I will be considering here, and another argument based on reasoning and inference, which I will not be addressing directly here. BonJour’s own discussion of these arguments can be found in Chapter 1 of his book, and a discussion of and response to both arguments can be found in Beebe, “Bonjour’s Arguments against Skepticism About the *a Priori*.”

⁸ Though BonJour is by no means alone in pressing such a view. Another recent defender of the a priori, Tommaso Piazza, defends a similar line of argument in Tommaso Piazza, *A Priori Knowledge : Toward a Phenomenological Explanation*, Phenomenology & Mind ; V. 10 (Frankfurt: Ontos, 2007), especially chapter 4.

⁹ Discussions along these lines can be found in, Tamar Szabó Gendler, “Empiricism, Rationalism and the Limits of Justification: Review of In Defense of Pure Reason,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 63, no. 3 (2001).

¹⁰ The most forceful statement of this response is Casullo, “The Coherence of Empiricism.”, and again in chapter 6 of his book———, *A Priori Justification*. James Beebe reaches a similar conclusion, at least regarding the issue of responding to skepticism, in Beebe, “Bonjour’s Arguments against Skepticism About the *a Priori*.”

¹¹ This is, of course, a strong and artificial set of assumptions. There are different versions of each of the kinds of views about justification that have been listed and it is possible to attempt to develop various kinds of hybrid views. The basic points that I am about to make would apply also in the case of hybrid views of various sorts, e.g. some combination of foundationalism and Coherentism. All that would change is the complexity of the formulation of the issues that would be required.

externalist foundationalism, and (iv) externalist coherentism. Suppose, again only for the sake of simplicity, that the terms ‘rationalism’ and ‘empiricism’ are also univocal. Then the four possible types of theory of epistemic justification would yield four potentially separate ways of drawing the rationalism-empiricism distinction. Suppose that all of these different ways of making the distinction result in theories that are, at least prima facie, plausible contenders for correct formulations of the distinction. Doing this results in the schematic possibilities listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Potential Varieties of Rationalism and Empiricism

	Foundationalism	Coherentism
Internalism	- Rationalism - Empiricism	- Rationalism - Empiricism
Externalism	- Rationalism - Empiricism	- Rationalism - Empiricism

Now, what the rhetoric of Bonjour’s discussion of empiricism would seem to suggest is that there are a small number of arguments, containing mostly similar premises, that are sufficient when taken together to conclusively establish (a) the inadequacy of all theories of epistemic justification outside of the “internalist foundationalist” box as complete non-skeptical accounts, and (b) the inadequacy of all empiricist accounts of epistemic justification within the “internalist foundationalist” box as complete non-skeptical accounts. While a small number of arguments with mostly similar premises may indeed be able to establish the truth of (b), it would be quite remarkable if this same group of arguments, by themselves, also established the truth of (a). Yet this is what Bonjour seems, or at least has seemed to many, to suggest.¹² In defense of Bonjour, it must be pointed out that he is relatively clear throughout the text of *In Defense of Pure Reason* that what he is concerned with is primarily the development of a rationalist account within the context of foundationalist internalism.¹³ Further, Bonjour has written about and criticized both externalism and coherentism at some length in other places.¹⁴ Thus, what he could have said in the first chapter of his book is that, given the conjunction of his previous arguments against externalism and coherentism with his current arguments against foundationalist internalist empiricism, anyone who does not include some element of a priori justification in their account of epistemic justification will indeed be committing “intellectual suicide”. Bonjour did not, of course, say this, nor would it be un-contentious if he had. But at least if he had said this then his critics could have devoted more time to clarifying and criticizing the substance and significance of his arguments, rather than to the perhaps excessive rhetoric with which he accompanied them.

A lesson to be learned from the recent literature on Bonjour’s arguments against empiricism is that the motivation and development of a theory of some specific type of epistemic justification (a priori, empirical, introspective, etc.) must happen against the background of assumptions about the nature of epistemic justification itself, in particular in terms of the position

¹² The point that Bonjour’s arguments may indeed establish the truth of some version of thesis (b), but not (a) is basically the conclusion reached by Beebe, "Bonjour's Arguments against Skepticism About the *a Priori*."

¹³ Bonjour, *In Defense of Pure Reason: A Rationalist Account of a Priori Justification*, 1 ftnt. 1, 4, 147-49.

¹⁴ In favor of internalism and against externalist, see Laurence Bonjour, "Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5 (1980), ———, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985). In favor of foundationalism and against coherentism, see ———, "The Dialectic of Foundationalism and Coherentism," in *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*, ed. John Greco and Ernest Sosa (Malden: Blackwell, 1999). Bonjour’s commitment to foundationalism is indeed a more recent development, however his position that a priori justification, if there is any, must be foundationalist was already present in Bonjour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*, Appendix A.

that one takes on the debate between the various versions of internalism and externalism, and between the various versions of foundationalism and coherentism. It is only once these background assumptions about the nature of epistemic justification have been filled in, at least to some degree, that it becomes possible to seriously ask, (a) whether or not the distinction between rationalism and empiricism is even formulable in the context of these assumptions (and also whether there may not be multiple versions of both positions), and (b) if it is, whether or not there exist anti-rationalist or anti-empiricist arguments that strongly motivate one of these positions as preferable to the other.

To put the matter another way, a rationalist argument against some version of empiricism, to the effect that empiricism is inadequate in some way that only the addition of a rationalist component can remedy, must, if it is to be successful, appeal to assumptions about what counts as an adequate account of epistemic justification that are *shared* equally by the two accounts. An internalist foundationalist rationalist and an internalist foundationalist empiricist can, in principle, meaningfully disagree about the question of whether or not a priori justification exists or is necessary in a complete non-skeptical epistemology. It is not clear that a similar meaningful disagreement *about a priori justification* itself could arise between, for example, an internalist foundationalist rationalist and an externalist foundationalist empiricist. In this case, it seems that any substantive disagreement that arises between the two will be traceable, directly or indirectly, to their differing understandings of epistemic justification itself, not to specific features of the rationalist or empiricist accounts on offer.

The moral to be drawn, I think, is that there are most likely limits to what any one rationalist argument against empiricism can be taken to show. These limits are determined by the background assumptions about the nature of epistemic justification that the arguments themselves presuppose. When background assumptions about the nature of epistemic justification are held fixed, then it is possible to raise the question of whether or not, given these assumptions, a complete account of epistemic justification requires appealing to a priori justification. However, when the background assumptions are different, then purported disagreements between rationalists and empiricists are much more likely to represent more basic disagreements at the level of general accounts of epistemic justification. For all of these reasons, it seems highly unlikely that any rationalist arguments against any particular form of empiricism will, by themselves, be sufficient to establish the correctness of that account of rationalism regardless of any and all other assumptions about the nature of epistemic justification.¹⁵ All this being said, however, I do think that, when kept within their proper limits, traditional rationalist arguments against empiricism do indeed establish, quite conclusively, the inadequacy of empiricism as a complete account of epistemic justification.

1.2 *The Traditional Rationalism-Empiricism Debate in the Context of Internalist Foundationalism*

The context of relevance for the traditional rationalist arguments against empiricism that are of concern to me here is that of foundationalist internalism. I think that it is historically sound to say that the majority of the debates between rationalists and empiricists about

¹⁵ I do not take myself to have established here the *impossibility* of such an argument. Perhaps such an argument exists. If it does, I would be fascinated to read it or to discover it. However, the discussion of the rationalist/empiricist divide so far, both historically and contemporarily, does militate against the existence of such an argument. At any rate, for purposes of argument here I am willing to simply forgo the claim that such an argument does or does not exist in the service of attempting to focus attention on the proper way of understanding and evaluating those arguments against empiricism that do in fact exist and have been, in various forms, offered in the historical and contemporary debates regarding these matters.

justification have indeed played out in the context of some version of foundationalist internalism. Further, it is worth noting that, of the possibilities suggested in Table 1 above, it is not clear that either externalist coherentism (whether empiricist or rationalist) or internalist coherentist rationalism are plausible or terribly well motivated positions. In the first case, once one has abandoned internalism in favor of externalism, it would seem that some of the primary motivations for abandoning foundationalism in favor of coherentism, in particular the Sellars problem, are strongly ameliorated, thus rendering coherentism about epistemic justification an unnecessary maneuver for the externalist.¹⁶ While with regard to the second option, it is unclear what someone who already defended internalist coherentism about empirical justification would stand to gain from adding, in addition, an account of internalist coherentist a priori justification. It is true that BonJour, when he defended a version of internalist coherence empiricism, believed that this account needed to be supplemented with some type of a priori justified rationale.¹⁷ However, even in *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*, BonJour is quite clear that this a priori justification would need to be foundationalist and non-discursive in character.¹⁸ There does seem to be room for the development of an externalist foundationalist account of a priori justification, perhaps by appeal to the notion of an innate or innately reliable cognitive process.¹⁹ However, it is worth noting that even in this case the nature and scope of a priori justification will, most likely, come out looking quite a bit different than the position traditionally associated with rationalism and a priori justification.²⁰ I do not take these brief remarks to establish the falsity of any of these positions, but only to provide some additional motivation for the assumption, which I shall be making and developing in the course of the rest of this paper at any rate, that the most significant formulations of and debates between rationalism and empiricism are best understood as taking place in the context of internalist foundationalism.

1.3 Foundationalism and the non-inferential content principle

I will understand by ‘internalism’ the position that it is a necessary condition on justification for belief that p that a subject have conscious access (immediately or on reflection) to some reason R that makes likely the truth of the belief that p , where justification based on reasons such as R is fallible. I will understand by ‘foundationalism’ the position that some reasons are *basic* or provide non-inferential regress stopping justification for belief (where this justification can also be fallible).²¹ Given these formulations, it is plausible to think that a foundationalist

¹⁶ For discussion of the role of the Sellars problem in motivating coherentism, and of the question of the potential relationship between externalism and coherentism, see BonJour, "The Dialectic of Foundationalism and Coherentism.", Ted L. Poston, "Sellars and Socrates: An Investigation of the Sellars Problem for a Socratic Epistemology" (University of Missouri, Columbia, 2006).

¹⁷ BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*, chapter 1, Appendix A.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Appendix A.

¹⁹ The most complete outline for such an account is probably to be found in Louis Antony, "A Naturalized Approach to the a Priori" *Philosophical Issues*, 14, *Epistemology* (2004). For a contrasting view on this matter, one that sees the conjunction of epistemic with semantic internalism as establishing the epistemological insignificance of the a priori/a posteriori distinction, see John Hawthorne, "A Priority and Externalism," in *Internalism and Externalism in Semantics and Epistemology*, ed. Sanford C. Goldberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

²⁰ As Antony herself is careful to make clear. On an externalist account of a priori justified belief that sees it as involving innate reliable cognitive processes, things like our ability to recognize faces may well count as a priori in nature. See Antony, "A Naturalized Approach to the a Priori": 6.

²¹ The question of exactly what constitutes a “regress stopping” reason or justification of the foundationalist sort is, of course, a perennially difficult one and I will not be attempting to resolve it here. My preferred account of basic reasons is to say that certain kinds of mental or intentional states, in particular perception, introspection, and rational intuition itself, exhibit phenomenological features or structures that distinguish them as involving or being connected with the objects they are about in such a way as, in general, to provide acquaintance with features of those

internalist should be committed to a principle according to which whether or not a belief with a certain kind of propositional content is justified depends in a very strong way on the relationship between that propositional content and the content(s) of the foundational and/or inferential mental states that comprise the justification or reason for holding that belief.

Albert Casullo has provided a first formulation of such a principle in the context of his criticism of BonJour's anti-empiricist arguments. Casullo formulates the principle as the thesis that: "No cognitive state can directly justify a belief whose content goes beyond that of the state."²² He identifies this as a key assumption in BonJour's arguments against empiricism. I think that Casullo is correct, but that his formulation of this principle fails to take into account the distinction between *basic* and *inferential* justification that is crucial from the perspective of foundationalist internalism. A more recent formulation of this principle is provided by Gordon Barnes in the context of an argument that sense perception cannot provide warrant for belief in propositions with modal content. Barnes formulates the principle in the following way: "...for any mental state M, if M does not have the representational content that p, then M cannot warrant the belief that p directly, without inference."²³

Barnes, I think, has gotten the principle just right. For the case of basically justified beliefs, the internalist foundationalist should uphold a principle to the effect that if some belief is basically justified, then the mental state that is the basic reason or justification for that belief should contain as much or more (of the same sort of) representational content as is contained in the content of the belief itself. And if a belief is inferentially justified, then the conjunction of the basic state(s) and the principles of inference involved should *in some way* be sufficient to justificational support the content of the belief.²⁴ Thus, in what follows, I will adopt and rely on Barnes's formulation of what I will call *the non-inferential content principle*. Further, I will treat the epistemic relationship of "justification" as a relation obtaining between two mental or intentional states. The first intentional state, the "justifying state" will be an act of perceiving, introspecting, intuiting in the rationalist sense, or of one of these acts plus an act of inference. The second or "justified" intentional state is a belief that is or could be based on the justifying state. The specific relationship between these two states is that the content of the justified state is a proposition the content of which is presented in the intentional content of the justifying state, or that is sufficiently supported by the content of the justifying state *when taken together with acts*

objects, and thus as providing fallible justification for belief. The account of these phenomenological features must ultimately, I think, rest on (and so be justified by) immediate acquaintance with our own mental states on the one hand, and the veracity of a priori intuition as a way of analyzing the structure of such states on the other. As far as justified belief about our own mental states goes, I think that the access we have to our own mental states is itself non-inferential and regress stopping. While I think that the best hope an internalist foundationalist has of explaining the regress stopping nature of a priori justification is ultimately to further elaborate on the idea that skepticism about a priori justification is in some significant sense self-undermining, an idea I will be developing to some extent in the final section of this chapter.

²² Casullo, "The Coherence of Empiricism," 33.

²³ Barnes, "Necessity and Apriority," 502.

²⁴ E.g. Suppose that a series of perceptual observations (basic states) in a lab in conjunction with certain abductive principles justifies a scientist in believing that she has discovered a new chemical molecule. Then, even though this scientist need not have a basic presentation of the chemical molecule itself in order to be justified in her beliefs about it, nevertheless, the conjunction of her basic perceptual beliefs and the principles of abductive inference involved must provide a sufficient quantity of justificational relevant information to support her belief. A similar point could be made about inductive reasoning and justification generally. The question of what exactly counts as "justificationally sufficient" is, of course, a perennially difficult one. But one that my purposes here do not require me to resolve.

of inference. An example of this relationship would be an intentional act of perception having a white swan as content justifying a belief in the proposition “this swan is white”.²⁵ I thus take the non-inferential content principle to be a commitment of internalist foundationalism, and it will play a key role in what follows.

1.4 *Inference and Epistemic Justification*

In what follows I will treat inference as something susceptible to epistemic evaluation. Thus, just as it is possible to say (or raise the question whether) “S is justified in believing that “All humans are mortal””, it is also possible to say (or raise the question whether) “S is justified in inferring from “All humans are mortal” that “Some humans are mortal” or “S is justified in inferring from “3 is odd” to “some number is odd””. Similar locutions will apply to inductive and abductive reasoning. From the perspective of internalist foundationalism, I assume that inference *does* require epistemic justification. However, the nature of the justification a subject has for making an inference can be of two sorts. On the one hand, a subject might rely on some basic rule or principle of inference, which she is also justified in believing, and apply this to a particular case in order to infer one proposition from another. On the other hand, a subject might simply reflect on the relationship between two (or more) propositions, and non-discursively come to apprehend that an evidential relationship (such as entailment or explanatory relevance) obtains amongst the propositions in question.

The ubiquity of natural deduction systems in contemporary philosophy often creates the impression that deductive reasoning is, by its nature, a rule governed activity such that the justification of any particular deductive inference is always in some way dependent upon a subject’s having relied on some valid inference rule, which the particular inference itself instantiates. Thus the inference from “If it is pouring then it is raining and it is pouring” to “It is raining” might be taken to be an inference performed in accordance with the rule Modus Ponens, and the subject who makes such an inference might be argued to be justified only if she both is reasoning according to the rule Modus Ponens *and* has some further justification for believing that the pattern Modus Ponens is itself valid. While this may be the way in which some agents actually reason, and thus also the story that needs to be told about the justification of their deductive reasoning, I see no reason at all to think that this is the most basic case of deductive reasoning. Indeed, for relatively simple deductive inferences, there is no reason to think that subjects who have some understanding of what “entailment” or “validity” mean need to reflect on anything more than the specific concrete propositions involved and to pose the question of whether or not the truth of the premise(s) guarantees the truth of the conclusion, or conversely if it is possible for the conclusion to be false given the truth of the premises. Reflecting in this way on a simple argument can plausibly be held to provide a subject who possesses the requisite understanding of validity with an immediate non-discursive insight into the obtaining of an entailment relationship between the propositions in question, without any reference to issues of logical form or epistemic reliance on rules of inference.

A similar point can be made for inductive and abductive inferences. For example, in the case of induction, a subject might rely on justified belief in a principle of inductive inference to the effect that “If a given proportion of observed *As* have been *Ys* and this proportion has remained constant across times and contexts, then it is likely that the given proportion of *As* in general are *Y* as well”, in order to infer from observations about the carnivorous behavior of

²⁵ The conception of “intentionality” presupposed here is basically that articulated by John Searle in *Intentionality*, and by Tim Crane in *The Elements of Mind*, though the concept has a much longer history in the Brentano-Husserl tradition of phenomenology.

bobcats to the conclusion that all or at least most bobcats are carnivorous. However, the subject could equally well reflect in a more direct way on the proposition(s) representing her observational base and the proposition representing her potential inductive conclusion, and come to appreciate that an objective relationship of “making likely” or probable obtains between the truth of the first and the truth of the second. While the principles of inference (such as “simplicity”, “scope”, etc.) involved in an abductive case might be more complicated to spell out, the basic distinction between making an inference based on justified belief in rules of inference that fit the case at hand, and making an inference based on a more immediate apprehension of the evidential relationship (in this case an “explanatory relation”) obtaining amongst the propositions under consideration, can be taken to hold as well.

Thus, in what follows, I will be working under the assumption that inferences are the kind of thing that require epistemic justification in order to result in justified belief, but that this justification can be arrived at in the two different ways that I have described. I now turn to the three primary objections to foundationalist internalist empiricism.

2. *Content Deficiency Arguments Against Empiricism*

Taking empiricism to be the thesis that all justified belief is justified immediately or mediately (inferentially) based on perceptual experience, including introspection, each of the arguments against empiricism proceeds by arguing that the content of perceptual and introspective experience, by itself, is insufficient to provide justification for certain kinds of inferences or for belief in certain kinds of propositions. Strict empiricism is thus argued to have the skeptical implication that we fail to be justified in believing in large sets of propositions that we normally take ourselves to be justified in believing. The arguments conclude by suggesting that, since traditional accounts of the a priori are intended to account precisely for the justification of our belief in such propositions, empiricism entails skepticism about such propositions unless it is augmented by a (non-skeptical) account of a priori justification. I will consider three arguments of this sort, each of which builds on the one before. These are the generality argument, the argument from modality, and (what I will call) the first version of the meta-justification argument.

2.1 *The Generality Argument*

The generality argument begins with the thesis that the contents of perceptual and introspective experience are *particular* in nature, providing access only to individual objects and collections of such objects in the world or in the mind. By contrast, the principles (whether inductive or abductive) involved in justified inferences beyond the content of immediate experience are *general* in nature; they apply to *kinds* of cases or observations, not to *specific* individuals or experiences. However, the *non-inferential content principle* for foundationalist internalism says that no belief can be non-inferentially justified by an intentional act the content of which is not at least equal in what it presents to the propositional content of the belief it justifies. Given this, it is not possible for the basic experiences or reasons countenanced by empiricism to provide immediate justification for general beliefs (such as “No proposition is both true and false”, “All cats are mammals” or “Any object set in motion and unimpeded will continue in motion in a straight line forever”), insofar as the content of such beliefs goes beyond the content of any particular sensory experience or set of such experiences. But inductive and abductive principles (such as the principle that “the conversion of observed Xs that are C over time to a steady ratio makes it probable that the same ratio of unobserved Xs are also C”, or “that theory is most likely to be true that explains a phenomenon in the simplest way possible”) are themselves general in nature.

This would not be a problem if it were acceptable for the justification of such general principles to be circular, for then it might be acceptable, for example, for the principle of induction to be assumed and used to justify itself inductively. However, circular justification seems unacceptable in this case, as does an infinite regress of appeal to ever further principles of inductive or abductive reasoning.²⁶ But then strict empiricism cannot justify experience-transcending beliefs directly (immediately) based on sensory or introspective experience, nor can it justify such beliefs indirectly (mediately) by appeal to induction or abduction, since the principles involved in such inferences are general and also require justification of a sort that immediate experience (or sets of such experiences) cannot provide.²⁷

Thus, strict empiricism leads to skepticism about the justification of belief in any proposition the content of which goes beyond what a given subject has had immediate perceptual and introspective experience of (even when all of the experiences of the subject over time are taken together). Assuming that such skepticism is implausible, and remaining within the framework of internalist foundationalism, appeal to some form of basic a priori justification seems required. This yields the following argument against strict empiricism:

- P1) Empiricism is the thesis that all belief is justified either mediately or immediately based on perception or introspection.
- P2) The content of perceptual and introspective experiences is particular.
- P3) *The non-inferential content principle*: No intentional state can non-inferentially justify belief in a proposition the content of which goes beyond what is presented in that intentional state.
- P4) Inference requires justification in order to result in epistemically justified belief.
- P5) Inductive and abductive inferences require justified belief in either principles of (inductive and abductive) inference, or in non-discursively recognized relationships of “making probable” or “likely” obtaining between the relevant propositions, in order to result in other justified beliefs.
- P6) Relationships of “making probable” or “likely” obtaining amongst propositions are not part of the content of sensory experience.
- P7) Principles of inductive and abductive inference are general in nature.
- P8) Neither circular justification nor an infinite regress of alternative principles is sufficient to provide justification for belief in inductive and abductive principles.
 - Empiricism cannot account for the immediate justification of beliefs with non-particular or experience-transcending content (P1—P3, & P6)

²⁶ These points about inferential justification, circularity and the possibility of an infinite regress have not always been rendered explicit in recent discussions of the generality argument, such as BonJour, *In Defense of Pure Reason: A Rationalist Account of a Priori Justification*, Casullo, "The Coherence of Empiricism." However, the issue is given clear expression by Edmund Husserl in what may be the first formulation of the generality argument as an argument against empiricism, in his *Logical Investigations*. The point has been made more recently by Joshua Thurow. See Husserl, *The Logical Investigations*, 115-17, Thurow, "The a Priori: A Defense Via Explanation", chapter 2.

²⁷ There is, in addition, no reason to think that strict empiricism is in a position to explain the justification of justified experience-transcending inferences by appealing to the non-discursive recognition of a relationship of “making probable” or “likely” obtaining between two propositions, insofar as such a relationship, whatever its exact nature, cannot plausibly be counted amongst the contents of perceptual or sensory experience. If such “probabilifying relations” were indeed part of the contents of sensory experience, then the skeptical worries surrounding the problem of induction that were expressed by David Hume, reiterated by Bertrand Russell, and are still lingering in the present, would be simply unmotivated.

- Empiricism cannot account for the immediate justification of general inductive and abductive principles of inference (P1—P3 & P7)
- Empiricism cannot account for the mediate justification of general inductive and abductive principles of inference (Preceding two lines and P8)

C) Empiricism cannot account for the immediate or mediate justification of any general (experience-transcending) belief.

So, it seems that, given plausible assumptions about the nature of mental content, justification and the nature of justified experience transcending inferences, such as abduction and induction, empiricism does indeed entail justificatory skepticism about large bodies of propositions (such as those of the sciences, mathematics, logic and philosophy).

2.1.1 Casullo's Rejoinder

Albert Casullo's retort to this, however, is that if rationalism cannot provide an account of mental states with general content as the justification for general beliefs, it also is subject to the generality argument, and "skepticism is a consequence of rationalism" as well.²⁸ Casullo argues that rationalism does not have an account of the experience of general mental content that would be needed to explain the justification of belief in inductive and abductive principles (and other things), and that in the absence of such an account the claim that there is such experience is "perplexing."²⁹ This yields the following generality argument against rationalism.³⁰

P1) Rationalism: There is a priori justification.

P2) The content of rational intuitions is *particular*.

P3) The non-inferential content principle: No intentional state can non-inferentially justify belief in a proposition the content of which goes beyond what is represented in that intentional state.

P4) Inference requires justification in order to result in epistemically justified belief.

P5) Inductive and abductive inferences require justified belief in either principles of (inductive and abductive) inference, or in non-discursively recognized relationships of "making probable" or "likely" obtaining between the relevant propositions, in order to result in other justified beliefs.

P6) Relationships of "making probable" or "likely" obtaining amongst propositions are not part of the content of rational intuition.

P7) Principles of inductive and abductive inference are general in nature.

P8) Neither circular justification nor an infinite regress of alternative principles is sufficient to provide justification for belief in inductive and abductive principles.

- Reasoning as above.

C) Rationalism cannot account for the immediate or mediate justification of any general belief.

If Casullo is correct about the second premise (an the sixth), the rationalist faces a dilemma. To avoid the generality argument the rationalist must either reject premise (P3) by admitting that a mental state with content that is *particular can* immediately justify a general belief, or reject premise (P7) and admit that some principles of inference are particular. However, Casullo correctly argues that rationalist rejection of either of these premises would

²⁸ Casullo, "The Coherence of Empiricism," 33.

²⁹ *Ibid.*: 33-5.

³⁰ I here formulate Casullo's objection in the context of my own formulation of the generality argument. His own formulation involves fewer premises, in particular eschewing discussion of the issues surrounding the nature of inference. Since Casullo's charge is that the same argument applies with equal force to rationalism, I do not think that anything essential to Casullo's argument is lost in my formulation of it here. Indeed, all of the key premises are preserved. For Casullo's own discussion, see *Ibid.*, ———, *A Priori Justification*, 100-4.

vindicate empiricism as well.³¹ Casullo's conclusion is that in the absence of an account of experiences with general content, the rationalist is no better off than the empiricist regarding the generality argument.

2.1.2 *Rejoinder to Casullo*

The challenge to empiricism that the generality argument represents is that, for a large class of propositions, the very constraints that empiricism places on what can count as justified belief rule out in principle the possibility that belief in such propositions could be justified. It is for this reason that empiricism implies skepticism about the possibility of justification for such beliefs. Now, Casullo urges that skepticism is also a consequence of rationalism insofar as the mental states necessary to shore up a rationalist account are not well understood and have not been completely explained. While there is some merit to Casullo's charge, it is simply not sufficient to establish his contention that empiricism and rationalism are *equally* affected by the generality argument. To see this, it must be kept in mind that there are at least two distinct ways in which skepticism can be a problem for a theory of epistemic justification. The first is the problem raised by skeptical doubts for *any* theory of justification, those raised when the account is confronted by skeptical scenarios that seem to undermine the idea that there is any epistemic justification at all. Every account must eventually try to provide a non-question begging response to such objections; this just *is* the problem of skepticism about justification.

A second way in which the problem of skepticism can be raised for an account of justification, however, is when something internal to that account itself, some of its basic commitments, in conjunction with plausible epistemic principles or requirements, themselves imply skepticism about certain kinds of propositions. And this is exactly what happens in the generality argument against empiricism. The conjunction of empiricism with the non-inferential content principle entails that it is a necessary condition for any belief to be justified that the content of that belief be mediately or immediately locatable in sensory experience. But the generality argument against empiricism entails that for a large class of beliefs (logic, general scientific principles, mathematics) this is not possible. Those beliefs therefore fail to meet a necessary condition for empiricist justification and so are unjustified. The additional crucial premise that leads to this conclusion (P2) is that sensory experience provides access to particular objects in the actual world, not to properties, abstract objects, other possible worlds, or entailment relations between propositions. This assumption is very plausible and an empiricist response to the generality argument would require either rejecting the non-inferential content principle or revising standard assumptions about what the content of sensory experience makes available. Since neither of these options is plausible, empiricism entails skepticism about the justification of belief in large numbers of propositions. Thus strict empiricism taken in conjunction with the non-inferential content principle does entail skepticism about justified belief for a large class of propositions. In this respect, the generality argument is a principled objection to empiricism. It is not directed at some accidental feature of the position, or at something in the position that is highly contentious or likely to be clarified or better articulated in the future. Nor does it in any way beg the question by assuming that empiricism is false. Quite the contrary, the argument says that *if* strict empiricism *is true*, then skepticism about belief in certain propositions follows. The challenge that the generality argument poses to empiricism is not that an account of justified general beliefs has not yet been given, but that given the understanding of justification that empiricism is committed to, no account is *possible*.

³¹ Casullo, "The Coherence of Empiricism," 33-5.

Casullo's reformulation of the generality argument establishes nothing so strong regarding rationalism. The complaint that rationalism has not provided a fully adequate account of general mental content *is not* a principled objection to rationalism, one that shows that the rationalist, once she has embraced plausible additional epistemic principles (in particular the non-inferential content principle) cannot but be a skeptic about certain beliefs. The conjunction of rationalism with the non-inferential content principle entails that it is a necessary condition for any belief to be justified that the content of that belief be mediately or immediately locatable in the content of *some* justifying mental state(s), whether sensory experience or otherwise. It is a commitment of rationalism that *some* mental states *have* contents that are abstract or general in nature and that these states are *not* sensory states. However, Casullo asserts, on grounds that existing accounts of these kinds of rationalist mental states are unclear, that the content of these states *must* be particular, and that thus the generality argument applies to rationalism just as it applies to empiricism, since the same necessary condition for justification is violated in both cases. But for Casullo to characterize rationalism as the position that the contents of rational intuition are *particular* is for him to either change the topic entirely or to just bluntly assert the falsity of rationalism, and so to *beg the question* against it.

Whereas nearly everyone, rationalist and empiricist alike, admits that the content of sensory experience is particular in the sense relevant to premise 2 of the generality argument, the rationalist specifically maintains that there are in addition to sensory states other kinds of mental states with non-particular contents that play a role in the justification of certain kinds of beliefs. The existence of such states is contentious and defenders of their existence do owe a more thorough account of them. But the assumption that such states *do not exist*, which is the key assumption of Casullo's generality argument against rationalism, does not *establish* that the generality argument applies to rationalism, but simply *assumes* that rationalism is false. If rationalism is false, then there are of course no mental states of the sort that the rationalist claims exist and play a role in epistemic justification, but simply assuming this does not provide a good argument against rationalism. Thus, whereas the generality argument against empiricism rests on widely accepted premises about the resources available to an empiricist account of justification, and even accepts for purposes of argument that empiricism is *true*, Casullo's generality argument against rationalism rests, in part, on the unsupported denial of the very proposition that is at issue between rationalists and empiricists, indeed on the refusal to consider the possibility that rationalism is *true* at all.

The generality argument against empiricism says: "given empiricism (assuming it to be *true*), skepticism about certain beliefs follows", whereas Casullo's generality argument against rationalism must be understood as saying either "given that rationalism is *just like* empiricism, skepticism about certain beliefs follows" or "given that rationalism is *false*, skepticism about certain beliefs follows". Neither of these moves seriously engages rationalism. The first does not because it changes the topic, the second would be an engagement with rationalism if it were supported by additional premises, but it is not supported by anything other than standard laments about the unclarity of the notion of rational intuition. Further, even if Casullo's assumption that rationalism is false were supported by additional arguments, it is not clear what bearing a direct argument for the falsity of rationalism would have on whether or not the generality argument applies to it, since that argument against empiricism begins with the assumption that empiricism is *true*. There is thus a fundamental asymmetry in the way in which the generality argument 'applies' to empiricism and rationalism respectively, Casullo's attempted reformulation notwithstanding.

Thus, the generality argument against rationalism does not point to a fundamental defect in the position, but simply to the need for a program of research that should be part of the rationalist's project in any case. Casullo has provided evidence, not for the impossibility of a rationalist account of general content, but only for the much more plausible and generally acknowledged point that a complete account is difficult to come by. Casullo focuses on only one such account, Laurence Bonjour's, an account which Bonjour himself characterizes as incomplete.³² Bonjour does, however, suggest two conditions for any rationalist account of justification. The first is some version of realism about properties or universals.³³ The second is an account of how the mind is able to apprehend or experience universals. Supposing these to be necessary conditions for a rationalist account of justification, the impossibility of such an account could be shown only if the first condition, the second, or both were shown to be impossible in the way that the generality argument does show that empiricist justification of general beliefs is impossible. Casullo has not done this.³⁴

The only question at this point in the dialectic is whether or not a rationalist account is worth pursuing. Contra Casullo, my contention is that the failure of empiricism with regard to the generality argument in conjunction with the implausibility of skepticism about epistemic justification does provide support for the position that a "generality argument-proof" rationalist account is worth pursuing. In order to avoid the generality argument, it is open to the rationalist to elaborate an account of how epistemically significant general mental content is possible. Casullo's real objection to rationalism seems to be, not that it is crucially affected by the generality argument, but rather that the epistemological ambitions of rationalism are in some sense implausible or misguided, and thus that some other strategy should be tried in epistemology. I think that Casullo's concerns here are not without merit, but at this point the matter becomes one of which starting point(s) and program(s) of research a particular epistemologist finds plausible as places to begin from, not one of a definitive argument against rationalism forcing us to abandon it in favor of something else, as Casullo seems to suggest. Within the context of foundationalist internalism, and on the plausible assumption that skepticism is not an option, the generality argument does provide strong support for the thesis that empiricism is not while rationalism is a viable option.

2.2 *The Argument from Modality*

The argument from modality can be traced at least as far back as Kant, whose much cited discussion begins with the statement that "Experience teaches us, to be sure, that something is constituted thus and so, but not that it could not be otherwise."³⁵ More recently, E. J. Lowe has presented a version of the argument from modality in support of the thesis that metaphysics is an a priori, not an empirical discipline, and Gordon Prescott Barnes has provided a sustained and

³² Bonjour, *In Defense of Pure Reason: A Rationalist Account of a Priori Justification*, 185.

³³ *Ibid.*, 158.

³⁴ By contrast, the conjunction of empiricism with the non-inferential content principle makes it a necessary condition for any belief to be justified that the content of that belief be mediately or immediately traceable to the contents of sensory experience. The thrust of the generality argument is then that for many kinds of beliefs (mathematics, logic, etc.) sensory experience simply does not contain the required contents, nor can they be indirectly derived from it. Such beliefs thus fail the necessary condition on epistemic justification imposed by empiricism and so are unjustified. The only way around this result for a strict empiricist is for her to argue that the contents of sensory experience contain information that they seem manifestly *not* to contain.

³⁵ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B3.

systematic argument to the effect that knowledge of necessity cannot be purely empirically based.³⁶

The argument against strict empiricism based on modality is, in the formulation I will give it here, very similar to the generality argument. Defining ‘empiricism’ as the position that all justification is immediately or mediately (inferentially) based on sensory experience, the argument begins with the premise that the content of perceptual experience does not include necessity or other modal features. The non-inferential content principle is then appealed to and it is argued that since the content of perceptual and introspective experience does not include modal properties, and since no mental state can non-inferentially justify belief in a proposition the content of which is not presented in that state, sensory experience alone cannot justify belief in propositions with modal content (such as “necessarily everything is identical to itself” or “it is impossible for a physical object to be simultaneously entirely cubical and spherical”). In light of the generality argument against empiricism, I here take the question of *mediate* or *inferential* justification of belief in modal propositions based on experience to be moot, insofar as it has already been shown that the strict empiricist must be a skeptic about justification for belief in inductive and abductive inference.³⁷ Thus, given strict empiricism, skepticism about justified belief in propositions with modal content follows. The argument thus runs:

P1) Empiricism is the thesis that all belief is justified either mediately or immediately based on perception or introspection.

P2) The content of perceptual and introspective experiences provides access to what is actual, and does not include modal properties or features.

P3) *The non-inferential content principle*: No intentional state can non-inferentially justify belief in a proposition the content of which goes beyond what is represented in that intentional state.

P4) The results of the generality argument obtain for empiricism.

- Empiricism cannot account for the immediate justification of beliefs with modal content. (P1—P3)
- Empiricism cannot account for the mediate (inferential) justification of beliefs with modal content. (P1—P4)

C) Empiricism cannot account for the immediate or mediate (inferential) justification of any belief in a proposition with modal content.

The crucial premise in this argument is, of course, premise (P2). It seems relatively uncontroversial that the content of empirical experience is not explicitly modal. Perception gives us access to actual colors, shapes, smells, the texture and weight of objects, their relative spatial relations to one another, the sounds that things make and etc., but nowhere in any of the data of

³⁶ Lowe, *The Possibility of Metaphysics: Substance, Identity, and Time*, chapter 1, Barnes, "Necessity and Apriority."

³⁷ For a thorough analysis of the prospects of a deductive, inductive analogical or abductive inferential empiricist justification of belief in propositions with modal content, see the thorough and systematic discussion of these matters in Barnes, "Necessity and Apriority." Barnes' arguments and discussion show, quite conclusively I think, that even if one concedes for the sake of argument that the strict empiricist is entitled to the full array of standard evidence-relevant inferences, there is still no plausible way to get from strict empiricism to justified belief in propositions with modal content. Once again, since the generality argument does hold against strict empiricism, thus ruling out justification of belief in modal propositions based on inference, I refrain from exploring these matters here. In any case, I see little room for improvement in the account that has already been provided by Barnes.

perception is there any content corresponding to “necessity”.³⁸ The spatial extension of a given physical object is not *perceived as* a necessary property of the object *qua* physical object. Nor does a given object’s being *perceived as* red include as part of its content that the very same object could not possibly be simultaneously entirely green. Considerations of a similar nature apply to introspection of one’s own thoughts. The experience that provides one with justification for the belief “I am thinking” or “I am thinking about Descartes” does not include as part of its content that it is necessary that one be so thinking (indeed, it probably isn’t necessary at all) or that “necessarily, if one is thinking then one exists”. Similar things can be said regarding the content of experiences about one’s current beliefs or experiences based on introspective awareness. There just isn’t any modal content present in the purely perceptual components of such experiences.

Even granting this, however, some may still be tempted to resist premise P2 based on the idea of the “necessary a posteriori”, first discussed in the works of Saul Kripke and Hilary Putnam.³⁹ If some propositions are indeed both necessary and a posteriori, then isn’t it the case that these propositions must be modal propositions belief in which can only be justified a posteriori, that is, based on experience? I turn to a consideration of this issue.

2.2.1 *The Necessary A Posteriori and Empirical Justification of Modal Beliefs*

So far I have been arguing that appeal to sensory experience alone is insufficient to ground justified belief in propositions with modal content. My argument has been that since sensory experience provides access to what is actual regarding an object or state of affairs but not to what is necessary or possible regarding it, this fact in conjunction with commitment to the non-inferential content principle excludes the possibility that sensory experience alone is sufficient for justifying any belief with modal content.

An objection to this line of reasoning that might arise at this point is as follows: it is relatively uncontroversial that there are necessary a posteriori propositions, propositions that are (a) necessarily true, but that (b) *cannot* be known (or justifiably believed) without engaging in empirical investigation of the world. Since empirical investigation requires sensory experience, and since necessary a posteriori propositions cannot be known without this sensory experience, doesn’t it follow that sensory experience must provide access to modal features of reality, at least in the case of necessary a posteriori propositions?

My response to this is “no”. The existence of necessary a posteriori propositions is a challenge to anyone who wishes to maintain that *all* necessary propositions are knowable or justifiably believable *purely* a priori. However, the thesis I have been defending here is not so strong. I have been arguing that justified belief in modal propositions cannot be grounded *purely* in sensory experience. And this is perfectly compatible with the thesis that some justified belief in propositions with modal content, though essentially involving an a priori element, nevertheless also depends in some fundamental way on sensory experience.⁴⁰ My position is that it is possible to concede the existence of necessary a posteriori propositions, while nevertheless maintaining

³⁸ Or for that matter, any content pertaining to the non-actual but possible, as would seem to be required to support belief in the proposition that “it is possible that I am a brain in a vat” or “there could have been other kinds of spiders than there are.”

³⁹ Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972/2003), Hilary Putnam, “The Meaning Of “Meaning”,” in *Mind, Language and Reality: Philosophical Papers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

⁴⁰ “These preliminary remarks do not conflict with the classical rationalist view...that all necessity can be traced back ultimately to the a priori.” Paul Boghossian and Christopher Peacocke, “Introduction,” in *New Essays on the a Priori*, ed. Paul Boghossian and Christopher Peacocke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3-4.

that justification for belief in the modal versions of these propositions (justification for belief that “Necessarily water is H₂O” as opposed to justification for belief that “Water is H₂O”) is *never* grounded in sensory experience alone. More specifically, it is possible to construe justified belief in propositions such as “Necessarily Hesperus (if it exists) is Phosphorous”, “Necessarily water (if there is any) is H₂O”, and “Necessarily this table (if it exists) is not made of ice” as the result of arguments involving a mixture of premises, some of which are justified empirically and some of which are justified a priori. I will show that for any case where the conclusion of such an argument involves necessity, the modal element will be traceable to a premise belief in which is justified a priori, if at all; even if there is an additional premise, belief in which is clearly justified empirically, if at all, and without which the conclusion *could not be* justifiably believed (thus making it a proposition that, though modal, can only be justifiably believed or known a posteriori).

There are three kinds of propositions that are standardly offered as examples of the necessary a posteriori, each of which stems from Kripke’s original discussion in *Naming and Necessity*. These include identity statements between proper names, as in ‘Hesperus is Phosphorus’, statements of theoretical identification such as ‘Water is H₂O’, and ascriptions of essential properties such as ‘this table was made from that block of wood’.⁴¹ In the following three subsections I will address each of these kinds of necessary a posteriori propositions and explain how justification for believing in the *necessity* of a posteriori necessary propositions is, in each case, traceable to a premise the justification for belief in which must itself be non-empirical. Before doing this it is worth drawing attention to one further point.

Namely, the interpretation of the epistemology of necessary a posteriori propositions that I am advocating here seems to be the position that Kripke himself adopts. In an addendum to a later edition of *Naming and Necessity* he writes:

“...the peculiar character of mathematical propositions (like Goldbach’s conjecture) is that one knows (*a priori*) that they cannot be contingently true; a mathematical statement, if true, is necessary.

All the cases of the necessary *a posteriori* advocated in the text [*Naming and Necessity*] have the special character attributed to mathematical statements: Philosophical analysis tells us that they cannot be contingently true, so any empirical knowledge of their truth is automatically empirical knowledge that they are necessary. This characterization applies, in particular, to the cases of identity statements and of essence. It *may* give a clue to a general theory of *a posteriori* knowledge of necessary truths.”⁴²

Here Kripke seems to be maintaining precisely what I wish to establish, namely that the justification for belief in the necessity of necessary a posteriori propositions derives from a priori philosophical analysis, even if it is or must be empirical evidence that justifies is in believing that such propositions are in fact true. In what follows I will attempt to further substantiate this point.

2.2.2 *Identity Statements Involving Proper Names*

Identity statements involving proper names are the first class of propositions that are now standardly taken to be both necessary and a posteriori. On the assumption that ordinary proper names are “rigid designators”, terms that refer to the same object on every possible world where they refer at all, it seems to follow that both trivial identity statements such as ‘Cicero is Cicero’ and informative identity statements such as ‘Hesperus is Phosphorus’ are, if true, necessarily

⁴¹ See pages 100-5, 128-9, and 113-14 respectively of Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 159. See also some of the comments on page 109. I am indebted to Mike McGlone for calling my attention to this passage, and for numerous other helpful remarks on the material in this section.

true. And while “Cicero is Cicero” is arguably something that can be known by a priori reflection alone, knowledge of the truth of an informative identity statement such as “Hesperus is Phosphorus” seems to depend essentially on sensory experience and empirical investigation of the world. Since ‘Hesperus’ and ‘Phosphorus’ are both rigid designators they refer to the same object on any world in which they refer at all, and given that we know that “Hesperus is Phosphorus” we know that they refer to the same object, so it seems to follow that “Necessarily Hesperus is Phosphorus”. Thus, given the direct or non-descriptive account of reference proposed by Kripke and Putnam, and the empirical knowledge that “Hesperus = Phosphorus”, it follows that “Necessarily Hesperus = Phosphorus”. Since we could not know that “Necessarily Hesperus is Phosphorus” unless we knew that “Hesperus is Phosphorus”, and since we could not know that “Hesperus is Phosphorus” without engaging in empirical investigation of the world, the proposition that “Hesperus is Phosphorus” is both necessary and a posteriori. From the perspective of the argument from modality against empiricism, the question such an example raises is simply this: is our justification for the belief *that* this proposition is necessary itself in some sense empirical?

Consider a more explicit formulation of the premises required to get us to the conclusion that “Hesperus is Phosphorus” is necessary.

P1) *Direct Reference*: Proper names are rigid designators, they refer to the same object in any world in which they refer at all.

P2) Definition of ‘necessity’: a proposition is necessarily true if it is true at every possible world.

P3) ‘Hesperus’ and ‘Phosphorus’ are non-empty proper names.

P4) Hesperus is identical to Phosphorus.

Since ‘Hesperus’ and ‘Phosphorus’ are proper names (P3) and since “Hesperus is Phosphorus” (P4), it follows by (P1) that ‘Hesperus’ and ‘Phosphorus’ refer to the same object in any world in which they refer at all, but then by (P2) it follows that:

C) Necessarily Hesperus is identical to Phosphorus.

I am willing to concede, at least for the sake of argument here, that premises (P3) and (P4) are propositions belief in which can be justified simply by appeal to sensory experience, and so are empirical. However, there is no reason to think that the experiences that justify belief in these premises involve any modal content whatsoever. They establish that Hesperus and Phosphorus are actually identical, but not that they must be so. Premise (P2) expresses either an insight into the nature of necessity itself, or a stipulation of what ‘necessity’ is to mean relative to the semantics of a modal language. If the modality in the conclusion of this argument is supposed to be the kind of *de re* modality normally appealed to in connection with the metaphysical issue of essentialism, then it is probably best understood in the former way rather than in the latter. However, on either interpretation of (P2) it seems clear that there is no sensory experiential content that, taken by itself, would be sufficient to justify belief in it. This leaves only (P1), the theory of direct reference itself. What justification do we have for believing (P1)?

The motivation for the thesis that proper names are rigid designators involves appealing to discrepancies between the way in which names and definite descriptions get used and evaluated in various counterfactual cases. For example, it seems that the proper name ‘Richard Nixon’ would refer to the very individual Nixon, regardless of whether or not (for example) the description, ‘The winner of the election in 1968’ is true of that individual on a given world or in

a given set of circumstances.⁴³ Similarly, the name ‘Aristotle’ would refer to or pick out the individual Aristotle on every possible world, regardless of whether or not that individual is “the author of the *Posterior Analytics*” or “the greatest student of Plato”. Thus “Aristotle is Aristotle” is necessary, while “Aristotle is the greatest student of Plato” is contingent. Names, but not descriptions, designate rigidly across the space of possible worlds. Further support for the thesis that proper names are rigid designators can be derived, indirectly, based on criticisms of traditional versions of the “description theory of proper names”, according to which the meaning of a name is some description or cluster of descriptions.⁴⁴ In the first case the direct reference view of proper names is motivated based on intuitions generated about whether we would or would not consider a name to refer in certain counter-factual circumstances, while in the second case the direct reference view is motivated insofar as it holds a possible solution to problems that arise for descriptivist views, problems motivated by intuitions in response to hypothetical cases. I think it is clear that neither of these kinds of consideration involve any essential appeal to the contents of sense experience, and thus that to the extent that considerations of this sort provide justification for belief in the theory of direct reference, this justification is non-empirical in nature.

What I take the foregoing considerations to have shown is that, while justified belief in the proposition that “necessarily Hesperus is Phosphorus” would not be possible in the absence of any sensory experience or empirical investigation whatsoever (premises P3 and P4), nevertheless, justification for belief in the premises that make it possible to be justified in believing the modal version of the conclusion (premises P1 and P2) is itself non-empirical in nature. Thus the phenomenon of necessary a posteriori identity statements involving proper names, while interesting in its own right, in no way provides a counter-example to the conclusion of the argument from modality against empiricism, which is that sensory experience alone cannot provide justification for beliefs with modal content.

2.2.3 Theoretical Identity Statements

The second class of propositions now standardly taken to be examples of the necessary a posteriori involves theoretical identity statements such as “heat is the motion of molecules” and “water is H₂O”. The preferred interpretation of such identity statements is that they involve the identification of a general term (‘water’ or ‘heat’) originally introduced by reference to certain observable surface features or uses of the substances named, with the scientifically discovered underlying structure or nature of those substances that is both responsible for and explains the surface features. General terms such as ‘water’ differ from proper names such as ‘Nixon’ insofar as they make reference to an entire class or extension of objects, rather than to a single individual. The introduction of kind terms thus involves, not an actual connection with a specific individual, but rather a fixing of their extension relative to some paradigmatic sample(s), in conjunction with the resolution that the term refer to anything *relevantly similar* (in some specified respect) to the original paradigms involved in reference-fixing. This difference notwithstanding (indeed in part because of it), it has been argued that natural kind terms are like proper names in being rigid designators, and in grounding necessary truths that are knowable only a posteriori.⁴⁵

⁴³ For discussion of such cases see *Ibid.*, 49. See also Scott Soames, *Reference and Description: The Case against Two-Dimensionalism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), chapter 2.

⁴⁴ See Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, Lecture II.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Lecture III, Hilary Putnam, “The Meaning Of “Meaning”,” in *The Twin Earth Chronicles*, ed. Andrew Pessin and Sanford Goldberg (London: M. E. Sharpe 1996).

The argument from the thesis that natural kind terms are rigid designators to the thesis that certain propositions involving them are necessary and a posteriori will be different depending on whether the conclusion being aimed for is an instance of what Nathan Salmon has called “trivial” or “non-trivial” essentialism.⁴⁶ A “trivial essentialist” proposition, according to Salmon, is one that informs us in a non-descriptive way about, as Salmon puts it in an example, “...the haecceity of the planet Venus, the property of *being that very thing*.”⁴⁷ The proposition discussed in the previous section, that “necessarily Hesperus is Phosphorus” is an example of a trivial essentialist truth. It entails, as Salmon puts it, “...that if Hesperus in fact has the property of *being Phosphorus*, then Hesperus is such that it would be impossible for it not to have the property of *being Phosphorus* and hence also the property of *being a planet if Phosphorus is*.”⁴⁸ But all of this, so far, tells us much about the coreferentiality of certain proper names, and almost nothing about the nature or essence of the thing itself that they refer to. By contrast, a non-trivial essentialist proposition is one where a genuine property or feature is asserted to be necessary for a given thing or kind of thing, for example, that “Venus is necessarily a planet” or “Necessarily water is identical to anything having a molecular structure composed of two hydrogen atoms covalently bonded to one oxygen atom”.

The distinction between trivial and non-trivial essentialist propositions thus hinges, largely, on the distinction between cases where *only* proper names function as rigid designators, and cases where both proper names *and* definite descriptions or property ascriptions function rigidly. Necessary a posteriori cases of the first sort, for either names or natural kind terms, can be arrived at by means of arguments such as the one rehearsed above in section 2.2.2, while necessary a posteriori cases of the second sort require, in addition to the basic argument from the theory of direct reference and the nature of necessity, also additional premises that make it possible to *rigidify* certain descriptions or property ascriptions with regard to certain objects or kinds. I will elaborate on this point, after which it should become relatively easy to see that the only difference between necessary a posteriori propositions involving names and those involving kind terms is that, if the propositions involving kind terms are any more significant than those involving proper names, the argument for this will rely on premises the justification for belief in which is even more clearly non-empirical than the original argument with which we began in 2.2.2, thus showing that necessary a posteriori theoretical identifications are even less of a threat to the argument from modality against empiricism than are those involving proper names.

Why are identity statements involving proper names examples of “trivial essentialism”? The syntax of identity statements in general requires that the terms flanking the ‘=’ predicate be referring expressions.⁴⁹ Further, the argument for arriving at a necessary a posteriori proposition is only satisfied if the names or kind-terms (or other referring expressions) in a given identity statement are rigid designators. Thus, “Hesperus = Phosphorus” is a necessary a posteriori proposition. However, “The first star visible in the evening = the first star visible in the morning”, while a posteriori (discoverable by empirical investigation only) is prototypically *not* necessary. For the descriptions ‘the first star visible in the evening’ and ‘the first star visible in the morning’ could be true of *different* stars respectively in different possible worlds, or of no

⁴⁶ Nathan U. Salmon, *Reference and Essence*, 2 ed. (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1981/2005), 82-7.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁴⁹ Much of my discussion here follows points that have been made by Lowe, "Two Notions of Being: Entity and Essence.", E. J. Lowe, "Does the Descriptivist/Anti-Descriptivist Debate Have Any Philosophical Significance?," *Philosophical Books* 48, no. 1 (2007).

stars at all (maybe two stars appear simultaneously in the morning and in the evening). And, though both descriptions are true of the planet Venus in the actual world, there could also be some other world in which Venus (the very thing rigidly designated by both ‘Hesperus’ and ‘Phosphorus’ in our world) exists, but in which neither of these descriptions are true of it. If “Hesperus = Phosphorus” is a necessary a posteriori proposition, then what it tells us is that the names ‘Hesperus’ and ‘Phosphorus’ are co-referential in any world in which they refer at all. But in the absence of additional assumptions, this is *all* that the proposition can tell us. Though we learn that in the actual world the first star to appear in the evening and the last star to vanish in the morning are identical, the necessary a posteriori nature of the proposition containing the names (Hesperus and Phosphorus) associated with these descriptions does not entitle us to believe that “it is necessary that the first star to appear in the evening is identical to the last star visible in the morning”. Indeed, by itself justified belief in the necessary a posteriori proposition that “necessarily Hesperus is Phosphorus” does not even guarantee that the thing referred to by both ‘Hesperus’ and ‘Phosphorus’ in every possible world *must* be a planet. Thus, when we come to justifiably believe that two names are co-referential and so necessarily co-referring, we do not, just in virtue of this fact, come to learn *anything* essential about the specific thing that these names refer to.

This point about necessary a posteriori propositions involving proper names is not terribly controversial, however the same reasoning goes, *mutatis mutandis*, for necessary a posteriori propositions involving kind terms, such as “Water is H₂O”. If ‘water’ and ‘H₂O’ are taken as rigidly designating names, then *what* this statement, taken as a necessary a posteriori proposition, tells us is merely that the terms ‘Water’ and ‘H₂O’, both understood as rigid designators and *not* as descriptions, are necessarily co-referential in any world where their referents exist at all. And this conclusion can be arrived at by reasoning analogous to that employed for the case of ‘Hesperus’ and ‘Phosphorus’ in 2.2.2 above, with the exception that the first premise must stipulate that ‘water’ is to refer to anything “similar with regard to essential features with” certain paradigmatic samples. Understood in this way, however, “Necessarily water is H₂O” does not entitle us to conclude that (i) “Necessarily Water is identical to anything having a molecular structure composed of two hydrogen atoms covalently bonded to one oxygen atom”, or that (ii) “Necessarily the clear drinkable liquid that falls from the skies, fills the lakes and rivers, etc. is H₂O”, or that (iii) “Necessarily the clear drinkable liquid that falls from the skies, fills the lakes and rivers, etc. is identical to anything having a molecular structure composed of two hydrogen atoms covalently bonded to one oxygen atom”. As in the case of ‘Hesperus’ and ‘Phosphorus’, so in the case of ‘Water’ and ‘H₂O’, we are not justified in simply assuming that the descriptive information associated with a referring term in the actual world will be true of the object or extension that that term refers to across all possible worlds. There is thus a substantial sense in which “Necessarily water is H₂O”, while telling us something about the relationship between two descriptions and their referents in the actual world and the relationship between two names (that of being coreferential) across all possible worlds, nevertheless fails by itself to tell us anything about the essence or nature of anything in any world, and in this sense it too would be a kind of “trivial” essentialism.

If, on the other hand, the proposition “Necessarily water is H₂O” is to be interpreted in such a way that ‘H₂O’ gets treated as a *description* of a certain kind of chemical structure, rather than as merely a rigidly designating name, then there must be some reason or justification for viewing the description “thing having molecular structure composed of two hydrogen atoms covalently bonded to one oxygen atom” as rigid with respect to water. That is, as describing an essential

feature of water. This is, of course, the interpretation that is usually given to “water is H₂O”, construed as a necessary a posteriori proposition. But the crucial point here is that this kind of non trivially essentialist a posteriori proposition cannot be derived simply from the direct theory of reference or semantic externalism in conjunction with the empirical discovery that the chemical microstructure of actual water is indeed H₂O.⁵⁰ Nathan Salmon has reconstructed the arguments of both Hilary Putnam and Keith Donnellan for non-trivially essentialist necessary a posteriori propositions in the following argument schema, which he calls the “OK-mechanism” (‘O’ for ‘ostensive definition’ and ‘K’ for ‘kind’). The schema is as follows:

P1) “It is necessarily the case that: something is a (bit of) v if and only if it is an instance of *dthat* (the same K-kind that *this* is an instance of).

P2) This has the Ψ -property of being ψ .

P3) Being an instance of the same K-kind as something consists, at least in part, in having the same Ψ -property that the given thing has.

C) Therefore, it is necessarily the case that: every (bit of) v is ψ .⁵¹

(P1) is Salmon’s considered gloss of Putnam’s description of how natural kind terms have their reference established as referring to anything of the same kind as a given demonstratively picked out (*dthat*) paradigm. (P2) reports the empirical fact that an instance of the paradigmatically identified stuff has a given property or structure, while (P3) describes, in general terms, what it means for one thing to be ‘an instance of the same kind as’ another thing in terms of some specific property. Thus premise one could be the introduction of ‘water’ (v) as anything that is an instance of the same chemical kind as *this very stuff* (where the subject points to a paradigm sample of water). Premise two would be the report that ‘this very stuff’ (water) has the underlying chemical structure (Ψ -property) of being H₂O (ψ). And premise three would be the thesis that a necessary condition for one thing to be the same K-kind (in this case *chemical kind*) as a given thing (*this*), is for it to have the same Ψ -property, in this case “underlying chemical structure” as the given thing. Ignoring premise three for a moment, it would be possible to understand this argument as analogous to the argument given in 2.2.2 for the necessary coreferentiality of proper names. Here ‘water’ would be ‘ v ’ and ‘H₂O’ would be ‘ ψ ’. Assuming, as the direct theory of reference does, that both ‘ v ’ and ‘ ψ ’ are rigid, then it would follow from this plus premise two that “necessarily v is ψ ” where both ‘ v ’ and ‘ ψ ’ are understood as non-descriptive names. This would result in a trivially essentialist proposition akin to “Hesperus is Phosphorus”, and the story about justification for belief in this proposition would be exactly analogous to the argument from 1.1.2 above. Though sensory experience is a necessary condition for justified belief in the truth of such a proposition, justification for belief in its modal

⁵⁰ This point is first and most forcefully made by Nathan Salmon in Salmon, *Reference and Essence*. Especially the second part of this book. Salmon is primarily concerned to establish that “non-trivial” essentialist conclusions cannot be derived from the direct theory of reference in conjunction with uncontroversial empirical premises alone, but that interesting metaphysical theses will only be derivable from such premises in conjunction with additional premises of a non-trivial essentialist nature. Thus point is further developed and applied more directly to epistemological considerations in the following: George Bealer, “The Philosophical Limits of Scientific Essentialism,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 1, Metaphysics (1987), E. J. Lowe, “Metaphysical Realism, Essentialism, and the Grounds of Modal Knowledge. Paper Presented at the Conference on Philosophy as a Discipline: On the Nature of Philosophical Knowledge, University of Tampere, 7--8 September, 2006,” (2006), Lowe, “Two Notions of Being: Entity and Essence.”, ———, “Does the Descriptivist/Anti-Descriptivist Debate Have Any Philosophical Significance?.”, Barnes, “Necessity and Apriority.”

⁵¹ Salmon, *Reference and Essence*, 168.

status will depend on justification for belief in the premises about the direct theory of reference and modality themselves, both of which are most plausibly construed as non-empirical.

With the addition of premise three in Salmon's argument, it does become possible to conclude the stronger non-trivially essentialist proposition that "Necessarily water is identical to anything having a molecular structure composed of two hydrogen atoms covalently bonded to one oxygen atom". However, this conclusion only follows if the modal force of premise three is sufficiently robust. Salmon argues that for the argument to support a non-trivial essentialist conclusion of the sort just mentioned, the third premise must be interpreted as a necessary condition on the "instance of same kind as" relation across possible worlds, to the effect that a sample of water in a given world *w* will be a sample of *the same kind as* a sample of water in the actual world only if that sample has the same chemical microstructure as the sample in the actual world.⁵² In other words, a non-trivially essentialist a posteriori proposition only follows from the conjunction of the direct theory of reference with uncontroversial empirical premises when these are supplemented with an additional premise with non-trivial essentialist import, namely a principle asserting what counts as partial trans-world identity for instances of a given kind. For my purposes what is crucial is simply that justification for belief in such a premise will clearly be non-empirical in nature.

Thus, whether necessary a posteriori theoretical identity statements are taken to be trivially or non-trivially essentialist, justification for belief in the premises that warrant ascribing necessity to such propositions is itself non-empirical in nature, so the existence of such propositions in no way undermines the argument from modality against empiricism, the thesis that sensory experience alone cannot justify belief in propositions with modal content.

2.2.4 *Essential Property Ascriptions*

The final standard example of necessary a posteriori propositions is also the easiest to deal with in the current context. These are propositions that purportedly ascribe a necessary property to some particular object. For example, "this table was necessarily made from that block of wood" or "necessarily Queen Elizabeth came from this sperm and this egg". Examples such as these are supposed to be necessarily true, but knowable only a posteriori insofar as the facts about which sperm and egg Queen Elizabeth did in fact come from, or which block of wood a particular table was indeed made from, are not facts that are discoverable a priori. We must actually become acquainted with the objects under consideration before we can know these specific things about them, and this can only happen empirically. What is telling about these examples of the necessary a posteriori, however, is that they do not require appeal to either the direct theory of reference itself, nor to any version of the thesis that identity is a necessary relationship.⁵³

Kripke introduces these and similar examples in the context of attempting to further stress the point that what is knowable or conceivable strictly a priori and what is necessary, what is

⁵² Ibid., Chapter 6.

⁵³ Saul Kripke, "Identity and Necessity," in *Naming, Necessity, and Natural Kinds*, ed. Stephen P. Schwartz (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971/1977), Ruth Barcan Marcus, *Modalities: Philosophical Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). In brief, the argument for this assumes that everything is necessarily identical to itself, that if two objects *x* and *y* are identical then whatever is true of *x* is also true of *y* (Leibniz's Law) and, for purposes of reasoning, that *a* and *b* are identical. The reasoning, then, is that *a* is necessarily identical to itself, and since *a* and *b* are identical, all things true of *a* must be true of *b*. Since it is true of *a* that it is necessarily identical to *a*, it must also be true of *b* that it is necessarily identical to *a*, but then if *a* and *b* are identical it follows that *a* and *b* are necessarily identical.

epistemological and what is metaphysical, *can* come apart in certain cases.⁵⁴ Kripke is concerned, for example, to show that while it is conceivable in an epistemological sense that, for example, we could discover that Queen Elizabeth does not have the parents we all think she has, but some others, it is nevertheless necessary that whatever parents Elizabeth did indeed have, or more specifically, whatever sperm and egg she did indeed originate from, she also necessarily originated from. Similarly, though there is an epistemic sense in which we could discover that the table now in front of us is indeed made of ice rather than water, it is nevertheless the case that whatever material this table did indeed originate with it necessarily originated with, such that no table could be *this very table* without having been made from *that very material*.

Now, I think Kripke's basic argument here is correct. For any concrete particular object that has a property essentially it seems to be the case that both (a) we could only justifiably believe that *that very object* has that very property in part based on sensory experience, insofar as this is the only way that we could become acquainted with *that very object* and that (b) since figuring out which properties a specific individual object *actually has* is a matter of empirical investigation that is subject to possibilities of error, then at any given time it may be possible to conceive in an epistemic sense of coming to find out that the object under investigation is a certain way W, even if as a matter of fact the object is necessarily non-W (not ice, or not from any parents other than her actual parents, or etc.). However, it seems equally clear that justified belief that these properties are *necessary* properties of the things they are properties of does not rest on an empirical basis. Kripke's own discussion bears this out. When discussing the necessity of the origins of Queen Elizabeth, Kripke does not say that he has carefully investigated her and that while performing this inspection he has been able to see in any sensory sense of 'see' that her origins are necessary to her, rather, after considering some other possibilities, he asserts that "It seems to me that anything coming from a different origin would not be this object."⁵⁵ Similarly with regard to the case of the table, Kripke's claim is not that sensory inspection of the table reveals its modal properties. Rather, sensory inspection reveals what properties it does actually have, and then as Kripke says based on the attempt to imagine this very table made from another chunk of wood or from ice that "...it seems to me that this is *not* to imagine *this* table as made of wood or ice but rather it is to imagine another table, *resembling* this one in all external details, made of another block of wood, or even of ice."⁵⁶ In both cases there is no suggestion that it is sensory experience that tells us what is necessary regarding these individuals. Rather, it is sensory experience that gives us access to these individuals and to the properties they actually have, and it is then modal intuitions based on consideration of counter-factual cases involving these individuals that justifies us, if we are justified at all, in believing that certain of these properties are indeed necessary features of these individuals.

Kripke's own considered position seems to be that it is possible to know a priori certain general principles, such as "if a material object has its origin from a certain hunk of matter, it could not have had its origin in any other matter", and if an object exists then "the *substance* of which it is made is essential".⁵⁷ But that the application of these principles to specific individuals, and so knowledge that a specific origin or substantial composition is essential for a specific individual, must await and so justificationaly depend on sensory experience of that very

⁵⁴ Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, 110-15.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 114, fnnts. 56 & 57.

individual. This position seems both plausible as an interpretation of Kripke's own position, especially in light of the lengthy quote in section 2.2.1 above, and also independently correct.⁵⁸

As with identity statements involving proper names and theoretical identity statements, so also in the case of propositions ascribing essential properties to individuals, justified belief in the modal element of such propositions will be non-empirical in nature, even if justified belief in their truth does essentially require sensory experience as well. There is thus nothing in the necessary a posteriori that supports the thesis that sensory experience alone can provide justification for belief in *any* proposition with modal content. Thus the necessary a posteriori does not provide us with any reason to doubt the independently plausible premise P2 (that the content of perceptual and introspective experiences does not include modal properties or features) of the argument from modality against strict empiricism, and we are left with the conclusion that strict empiricism does indeed entail a pervasive skepticism about the justification for belief in propositions with modal content.

2.3 *Meta-Justification: First Version*

If a subject S has a *basic* reason to believe that P just in case S has (immediately or on reflection) access to a reason R that makes likely the truth of P, then S has a *meta-reason* or *meta-justification* for the belief that P just in case S has (immediately or on reflection) access to some reason R* for believing that beliefs based on reasons such as R are likely to be true. Thus, if a subject believes that there is a chair in front of her (P) based on her perception of the chair (R) and her perception of the chair does indeed make it likely that there is indeed a chair before her, the subject has a *basic* reason for believing the proposition in question. If, in addition to her basic reason or perception, the subject also has some additional reason (R*) for thinking that beliefs based on perceptions such as the one that she has had (R) are indeed likely to be true, the subject has a *meta-reason* or *meta-justification* for belief that there is a chair in front of her. Given this terminology, a standard objection to strict empiricism is that given the truth of empiricism, it is impossible to provide a meta-justification for belief in the reliability of empiricist reasons, or for the truth of the empiricist thesis that all justified belief is justified based on immediate or mediate sense experience (including introspection). After all, any attempt to provide such a meta-justification will either have to appeal to empirical justification, and thus be circular (appealing to empirical justification in support of the truth of the thesis that there is such a thing as empirical justification) or appeal to some source of justification other than an empirical source, thus abandoning strict empiricism.⁵⁹

There is an important distinction regarding meta-justification that must be clarified at the beginning. As I have formulated the matter so far, following discussions by BonJour and Casullo, possession of meta-justification is being treated as a *necessary condition* for the possession of basic justification. On this view the basic justification that a subject has for believing a given proposition depends "essentially" on the meta-justification the subject has for believing that their basic reason for believing that P does indeed make the truth of P likely. In other words: no meta-justification, no basic justification either. An alternative way of formulating the question of meta-justification is simply as a request for reasons to believe that a

⁵⁸ Nathan Salmon reaches a similar conclusion about how to interpret the metaphysical significance of ascriptions of essential properties. Salmon maintains that any argument to the conclusion that some property is an essential property of a specific individual will be most plausibly construed as relying on some such general principle as the ones that Kripke himself considers. Salmon, *Reference and Essence*, 190-2, and Chapter 7.

⁵⁹ Treatment of the definitions of meta-justification, and of the issues surrounding it on which my own discussion is based, can be found in BonJour, *In Defense of Pure Reason: A Rationalist Account of a Priori Justification*, 142, Casullo, "The Coherence of Empiricism."

theory of epistemic justification itself (such as rationalism or empiricism) is true. In this latter case a subject being justified in believing that P would simply involve that subject possessing a basic reason that makes the truth of P likely. The further project of providing meta-justification would involve providing reasons to believe that a given theory of epistemic justification is correct or for thinking that a particular reason that one has accepted for believing some proposition is indeed a good one. However, the source of these meta-reasons could, in such a case, be the very same source posited by the theory belief in which is being justified, insofar as it is no part of the theory that basically justified belief *requires* or is in part constituted by possession of meta-justified belief. What I am calling the ‘first version’ of the meta-justification argument works on this latter assumption about the demand for meta-justification, while what I will call the ‘second version’ of the meta-justification argument does include the meta-justification requirement as a necessary condition for a belief being basically justified at all.

The first version of the meta-justification argument against strict empiricism is quite straightforward. The thesis of empiricism is a general proposition; one that says what epistemic justification is with regard to all possible reasons or experiences. But, given the generality argument, strict empiricism is not capable of explaining even basic epistemically justified belief in general propositions such as the thesis of empiricism itself. Thus, strict empiricism cannot satisfy even the weaker version of the meta-justification requirement; the requirement that it be possible, given the theory of epistemic justification embodied by strict empiricism, to have some kind of justification for believing that this theory is likely to be true, regardless of whether or not this justification is circular (involves appeal to the very kinds of reasons that the theory itself says are justifying). This problem is only augmented if the kind of reasoning involved in shoring up the empiricist position must make appeal to possible but non-actual situations and what would or would not be the case in them with regard to justification, insofar as, given the argument from modality, the strict empiricist cannot explain justified belief in these kinds of propositions either. Thus, given the truth of strict empiricism and the generality and modality arguments, strict empiricism entails skepticism about justified belief in itself.

By contrast, the rationalist is precisely committed to accounting for beliefs with general or modal content. Thus, given rationalism it would at least be possible for the rationalist to provide this first kind of meta-justification for her own account, insofar as the thought experiments, principles and theses involved in formulating and justifying rationalism are all of a kind that the epistemological resources of rationalism could play a role in justifying.

Thus, with regard to the issues of the generality problem, the argument from modality and the first version of the meta-justification argument, it seems clear that strict empiricism does have the skeptical consequences for justification regarding large domains of propositions that have traditionally been leveled against it. And this is no accidental feature of the empiricist position, but rather a straightforward consequence of the limits imposed upon it by its own conception of epistemic justification. In each case it seems that, assuming skepticism is to be avoided, some version of rationalism, a position that *prima facie* holds out the possibility of providing justification for the beliefs that empiricism leaves unjustified, is worth pursuing. In the next section I turn to consideration of the second version of the meta-justification argument against empiricism, and to a particularly trenchant response to this argument that has been proposed by Albert Casullo and others.

3. *The Strong Meta-Justification Argument*

The foregoing three arguments against strict empiricism all rested, in one way or another, on the fact that empiricism is too restrictive about the kinds of mental states it is willing to count as

sources of epistemic justification, and thus that it runs afoul of the non-inferential content principle, which is independently plausible for foundationalist internalism, resulting in skepticism about many propositions (such as those of science, mathematics, logic and philosophy) that we intuitively do seem to have at least some justification for believing. I now turn to consideration of the stronger version of the meta-justification requirement, the one according to which it is a necessary condition on a belief being basically justified that the subject have a meta-reason for that belief (or at least for the type of reason that the belief is based on, e.g. perception, inductive inference, reflection, etc.). This version of the meta-justification requirement, and the accompanying argument that gets leveled against empiricism on its basis, is a very strong one. Indeed, it is so strong that, as I will explore in more detail below, it seems to bring the issue between rationalism and empiricism face to face with the more general issue of skepticism about epistemic justification, and the question of whether or not either position has an acceptable non-question begging response. Interestingly, recent discussions of the issue of meta-justification with regard to the *a priori* have focused on this stronger requirement, and I think that exploring the matter here will both further demonstrate the problematic nature of the strict empiricist position, while simultaneously exhibiting the limits of both internalist foundationalist empiricism and internalist foundationalist rationalism.

I will proceed by first explaining this version of the meta-justification argument against empiricism and considering a *tu quoque* rejoinder to the argument that has been offered by Albert Casullo.⁶⁰ Casullo argues that the rationalist is in no better position than the empiricist to respond to the meta-justification problem, and that therefore the two positions are effectively stalemated regarding the matter. I agree with Casullo that the meta-justification issue is a difficulty for both positions; however, I will argue that, if the demand for this stronger version of meta-justification is understood, ultimately, as the demand for a response to the issue of skepticism about epistemic justification, then the rationalist position still comes out ahead of that of the empiricist.

3.1 *The Problem of Meta-justification*

As noted above, the problem of meta-justification has been put forward as a reason for believing that strict empiricist accounts of justification are incomplete or even incoherent. However, Albert Casullo has argued that meta-justification is as much a problem for rationalist accounts of justification as it is for empiricism, and that this leaves the two positions at a stalemate regarding the issue of meta-justification.

The demand for meta-justification is the requirement that in order for a subject S to be justified in believing that P, not only must S have a first-order reason R for believing P (where R might be an appeal to perceptual experience, memory, testimony, or etc.), but also a second-order reason (a meta-reason) R* for believing that their first-order reason R is in fact justification for the belief in P (that is, reason for believing that R does make it likely that P is true). The demand for meta-justification thus requires that to be justified in believing a proposition P a subject S must not only have a reason R that makes it likely that P is true, but also a further reason R* for believing that R makes it likely that P is true. On this construal of meta-justification, possession of meta-justification is a *necessary* condition for being justified at all in believing that P on the basis of some reason R.

The problem of meta-justification is that for any source of first-order justification (perception, memory, discursive reasoning etc.) S, meta-justification for beliefs based on that

⁶⁰ Casullo, "The Coherence of Empiricism." For similar criticism of the rationalist position, see Beebe, "Bonjour's Arguments against Skepticism About the *a Priori*."

source will either appeal to S itself or it won't. If the meta-justification for S appeals to S itself, then it is circular. If it does not, then it must appeal to some other source of justification S* in order to meta-justify first-order beliefs based on S. The attempt to avoid circularity by appealing to some other source of justification S* raises problems in different ways for different accounts of justification.

The attempt to avoid circularity creates a problem for strict versions of empiricism because the most likely candidate for S* is a priori justification itself. But for a strict empiricist, who maintains that there is only empirical justification, appealing to any other source of justification amounts to abandoning strict empiricism. This fact has been taken by some to be a telling one against the strict empiricist position.⁶¹ Since the empiricist cannot provide a non-question begging account of justification for belief in their own position, which does not at the same time appeal to some other source of justification, and so falsify the central tenant of strict empiricism, strict empiricism must be false (or some kind of skepticism must be true).

However, Casullo has argued that the attempt to avoid meta-justificatory circularity also creates a problem for rationalism. The most likely candidate for S* on a rationalist account will be empirical justification. But if empirical reasons are appealed to in order to provide meta-justification for beliefs based on rational insight, then all of the problems that arose for strict empiricism at the level of first-order beliefs, e.g. the generality problem and the problem of justifying belief in propositions with modal content, will re-emerge at the level of meta-justification. This will either require another appeal to a priori justification, effectively resulting in a larger justificatory circle, or appealing to some third source of epistemic justification, S**, which will itself have to overcome the initial problem of meta-justification. Thus, Casullo contends, meta-justification is just as much a problem for rationalist as for empiricist accounts of justification.⁶²

Given this, a defender of the rationalist position has two options. Either provide a non-circular account of rationalist meta-justification that preserves the integrity of the rationalist position, or provide compelling reasons why it is appropriate to demand meta-justification as a condition on empiricist but not on rationalist accounts of justification. In the next section I will develop a rationalist response to the problem of meta-justification along the lines of the second option.

3.2 *Asymmetry in the Applicability of Skeptical Arguments to A Priori and Empirical Justification*

I take Casullo's point about meta-justification for rationalism to be essentially correct. The prospects of providing a non-circular account of meta-justification for rationalism that does not simply move the problem back a step seem slim. However, it is important to raise the question of whether or not it makes sense to require meta-justification for rationalist accounts. My contention is that it does not.⁶³

⁶¹ Husserl, *The Logical Investigations*, BonJour, *In Defense of Pure Reason: A Rationalist Account of a Priori Justification*.

⁶² Casullo, "The Coherence of Empiricism," 32-3. Once again, however, it is important to note that the scenario works this way only if basic justification for a belief that P is essentially dependent on possession of meta-justification for believing that one's reason for believing that P makes the truth of P likely. If the meta-justification condition were less exacting, or if it were formulated differently it would, among other things, be less clear to what extent empirical meta-justification for basically justified a priori beliefs would necessarily impugn their status as genuinely a priori.

⁶³ This section is thus an attempt to respond to the challenge raised by James Beebe in the context of a discussion of BonJour's rationalist account, "If the putative fact that there can be no non-circular argument in favor of radical

For any basic account of justification, whether rationalist, empiricist or some other, the question of meta-justification arises, it seems, because the account of justification given seems somehow insufficient to guarantee that beliefs formed on the basis of the criteria that it provides will be true or likely to be true. Meta-justification is sought precisely when an account of basic justification leaves some doubt or skeptical possibility open as to whether or not beliefs formed on the basis of it really are justified. The contention I will develop is that empiricist accounts do, while rationalist accounts do not, allow for the possibility of *justified* skeptical doubts as to whether or not the accounts of justification that they respectively offer really are adequate. The reason for this is that whatever justification a subject has for believing in skepticism about the existence of a priori justification will itself be a priori in nature. Thus, the very skeptical doubt that would motivate the demand for meta-justification does not even get off the ground, and so it is plausible to suggest that the demand is simply misplaced.⁶⁴ No analogous state of affairs holds for empiricism. It does seem possible to be justified in doubting whether or not empiricist justification really is a legitimate source of justification, and therefore the meta-justification requirement remains pertinent. I will illustrate these points by providing two skeptical arguments, the first against empiricist justification, and the second against rationalist justification, and then by commenting on each. Careful consideration of these arguments will, I hope, make clear the asymmetry between the two accounts of justification.

Two comments are in order before I provide the skeptical arguments themselves. First, the kind of skepticism I am concerned with here is the kind that, based on reasonable suppositions, possibilities and arguments, could or would convince an individual who carefully considered the matter that some or all of her beliefs may in fact lack justification. I am thus concerned with skeptical arguments that can be formulated, accepted or rejected by a solitary reasoning individual; not with the sort of dialectical argument that might take place between two individuals, the skeptic and the believer in epistemic justification, where the first dogmatically insists on the non-existence of justified belief regardless of what the second says.

Second, I am here concerned primarily with skepticism about justification, not with skepticism about knowledge. The skeptical arguments that I consider will thus follow the more or less standard format of presenting i) an intuitively justified belief, ii) the closure principle for justification, and iii) a skeptical possibility that the subject is intuitively not justified in denying, where a straightforward application of modus tollens results in the denial of justification to the originally intuitively justified belief. I will present a skeptical argument of this general format first against empiricism, then rationalism, and will comment on each.

A skeptical argument against empiricist justification can be formulated as follows,

P1) G. E. Moore is not justified in believing that he is not a brain in a vat.

P1*) G. E. Moore is justified in believing that "it is possible that G. E. Moore is a brain in a vat."

empiricism compromises the philosophical integrity of that view, why doesn't the fact that there can be no non-question-begging argument in favor of rationalism do the same for it? And why doesn't Bonjour conclude that "no account of the justification of the main rationalist thesis that is not in direct conflict with its truth seems to be possible"? Bonjour offers no answers to these pressing questions." Beebe, "Bonjour's Arguments against Skepticism About the *a Priori*," 262.

⁶⁴ Showing that skepticism about a priori justification is self-defeating is not, of course, the same thing as showing that a priori justifying reasons are truth conducive or reliable. But the discrepancy with regard to self-defeat is already sufficient to further challenge the claim that rationalism and empiricism are stalemated or equivalently affected by this version of the meta-justification argument.

P2) “I have two hands” implies “I am not a brain in a vat” and G.E. Moore is justified in believing both the first proposition itself, and that the entailment obtains between the two.⁶⁵

P3) G. E. Moore is justified in believing the *Closure Principle for Justification*: “If a subject is justified in believing P, and P logically implies \sim Q and the subject is justified in believing this, then the subject is or is in a position to be justified in believing \sim Q.”

C) G. E. Moore is not justified in believing that he has two hands.

If G. E. Moore is justified, based on perception, in believing “I have two hands”, then by (P2) and (P3) G. E. Moore should also be justified in believing that he is not a brain in a vat (on the assumption that brains in vats do not have hands). But since G. E. Moore is both justified in believing that “it is possible that I am a brain in a vat” (P1*) and is not justified in believing that he is not a brain in a vat (P1), the conclusion (C) that G. E. Moore is not justified in believing that he has two hands follows. Further, for any particular belief based on perception, and thus justified on empirical grounds, it will be possible to formulate an argument of this basic form that calls into question the justification of that belief, thus perception as a legitimate source of epistemic justification can itself be called into question.⁶⁶

A skeptical argument against rationalist justification, similar in form to the argument just given, can be formulated as follows,

P1) Descartes is not justified in believing that “There is not an evil deceiver who so arranges things that some proposition is both true and false.”

P1*) Descartes is justified in believing that “It is possible that there is an evil deceiver who so arranges things that some propositions are both true and false.”

P2) “Necessarily, no proposition is both true and false” implies “It’s impossible that there is an evil deceiver who so arranges things that some proposition is both true and false” and Descartes is justified in believing both the first proposition and that the entailment between the two obtains.

P3) Descartes is justified in believing the *Closure Principle for Justification*: “If a subject is justified in believing P, and P logically implies \sim Q and the subject is justified in believing this, then that subject is or is in a position to be justified in believing \sim Q.”

C) Descartes is not justified in believing that “necessarily no proposition is both true and false.”

As in the previous argument against empiricist justification, this argument begins with a belief that intuitively seems to be justified on a priori grounds (Descartes’ belief in the law of non-contradiction), and formulates a skeptical hypothesis (P1* & P1) such that, in conjunction with the closure principle for epistemic justification (P3) and modus tollens, the subject is not really justified in believing the original proposition (in this case, the law of non-contradiction). A similar argument could be formulated for any proposition belief in which appears to be justified a priori, and thus a priori justification as a legitimate source of epistemic justification is

⁶⁵ Or at any rate, “I have two hands” and “brains in vats do not have hands” taken together imply “I am not a brain in a vat”.

⁶⁶ The only novelty in this skeptical argument is the explicit introduction of (P1*). However I take it that no skeptical argument would ever get off the ground if the subject for whom it was an argument did not believe herself to be in possession of some kind of reason to believe that the skeptical hypothesis was itself possibly true. It is only if G. E. Moore has some reason for believing that he could be a brain in a vat that he can fail to be justified in believing that he is not. Indeed, what better defeater for the claim that “I am not justified in believing that I am not a brain in a vat” for a given subject could there be, than for that subject to come to the realization that she is justified in believing that “It is impossible for anything to be a brain in a vat”? Thus, though it is not formally necessary for the argument to go through, I include (P1*) in order to fully capture the epistemic situation of a subject for whom this argument might be a proof.

itself called into question.⁶⁷ It is here, however, that the asymmetry between skeptical arguments against empirical and a priori justification begins to become clear.

In the skeptical argument against empiricism, the key premises, epistemologically speaking, are (P3) the closure principle for justification, and (P1*) G. E. Moore being justified in the belief that it's possible that he is a brain in a vat. The skeptical dilemma would not arise if the closure principle was rejected, and G. E. Moore would have no reason for thinking he might be a brain in a vat (P1) unless he had some reason to believe in the possibility that he could be (P1*⁶⁸). The most important thing about these crucial premises is that whatever justification G. E. Moore or any other subject has for believing in them, and hence for believing in the skeptical argument against empiricist justification, will be a priori in nature. The closure principle is a highly general principle concerning epistemic justification, and in light of the discussion of the generality argument provided above, it seems clear that it is not the sort of proposition belief in which could be justified based on perceptual experience alone. The proposition "it is possible that G. E. Moore is a brain in a vat" is a straightforwardly modal proposition and, assuming that G. E. Moore has never seen an actual brain in a vat, the only justification he or anyone else could have for believing that it is true is a priori in nature, requiring as it does consideration of how things could be on other possible worlds. Additionally, recognition of the validity of the skeptical argument itself, whether based on application of the inference rule *modus tollens* or on some more direct comprehension of its validity, is also justified, if at all, on a priori grounds. Thus it seems possible to have justified skeptical doubts about the veracity of empirical justification as such precisely because justification for belief in the key premises of the skeptical argument against it is a priori, not empirical in nature.⁶⁹

Just as in the skeptical argument against empiricist justification, so in the skeptical argument against rationalist justification the key premises are (P1), (P1*) and also (P3). However, since justified belief in these premises, as well as in the validity of the skeptical argument against rationalist justification itself, will be a priori in nature, a sort of paradox arises: *belief in the skeptical argument against a priori justification can itself be justified, if at all, only on a priori grounds*. Unlike the skeptical argument against empirical justification where it is possible to doubt the legitimacy of empirical justification as such on a priori grounds, justified belief in the skeptical argument against rationalist justification itself requires that rational intuition or insight be a legitimate form of epistemic justification.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ As in the previous argument, (P1*) here is an extra premise that is not formally required but that I believe helps to render explicit the epistemic situation of the subject for whom this argument might be a proof.

⁶⁸ The epistemic principle at work here would seem to go like this. In order for S to be justified in believing that P, S must also be justified in believing that P is indeed possible. Alternatively, if S is not justified in believing that P is possible, then S cannot be justified in believing P (to be the case; to be actual).

⁶⁹ Here a strict empiricist might point out that if formulating skepticism against empiricism can only be achieved by appealing to certain a priori justified beliefs, then this is all the more reason to be a strict empiricist. Strict empiricism comes out looking like a position that, if true, cannot be objected to on skeptical grounds. The cost of such a move, however, is to accept that no beliefs in principles of logical inference, in propositions with modal content or in generalizations based on induction can be justified; but this just amounts to skepticism about all but the most basic perceptual beliefs.

⁷⁰ It is important here to distinguish between skepticism about the justification of belief in a specific proposition, such as "I have two hands" and skepticism about the justification of beliefs based a kind or source of justification, such as perception or discursive reasoning. The point here is that both kinds of skepticism can be coherently formulated against empiricism, thus calling empiricist justification itself into question, whereas only particular a priori justified beliefs can be called into question by skeptical arguments, not the legitimacy of a priori justification itself as a source of justification.

Thus skeptical doubts about the legitimacy of a priori justification cannot even be formulated without presupposing its veracity, and so it seems that the demand for meta-justification is misplaced insofar as there is not really serious room for skeptical doubt about a priori justification to begin with, or at least not for skeptical doubt of the sort that arises for empiricism. It is here that a response to the problem of meta-justification for rationalism is to be found. While Casullo is most likely correct to contend that rationalism can no more provide a non-circular account of meta-justification than can empiricism, he is incorrect to assume that the demand itself applies to both positions with equal force. Since the formulation of skeptical doubts about rationalist justification cannot even get off the ground without presupposing its veracity, the motivation for requiring meta-justification in the first place is lacking for rationalism in a way that it is not for empiricism. Thus, meta-justification is a problem for empiricist accounts of justification, a problem that can be solved, if at all, only on a priori grounds, whereas it is not a problem for rationalism because the reasons for requesting it are absent.

3.2.1 *A Possible Rejoinder*

An objection that might be raised against the argument that I have just provided is the following: it could be argued that the asymmetry that I have drawn between empiricism and rationalism is not really fair insofar as the skeptical argument against empiricism succeeds only by appealing to premises that are justified, if at all, on a priori grounds. However, since the strict empiricist denies the existence of such sources of justification, it is not dialectically fair to appeal to them in structuring a skeptical argument against empiricism. I am willing to concede that this feature of my argument may, to some extent, distort the genuine epistemic position of a strict empiricist. However, assuming that what I have said about the rationalist position holds, a sort of dilemma arises for the strict empiricist.

On the one hand, it could just be accepted that the argument that I have just sketched is effective against strict empiricism. The skeptical argument against empiricism is justified a priori, but it shows that empiricist sources of justification do require meta-justification of a sort that they themselves cannot provide.

On the other hand, it could be argued that, insofar as the generality and modal arguments against empiricism that were considered earlier are sound, the skeptical argument against empiricism cannot be formulated as I have done (given its reliance on general and modal propositions), thus by parity of reasoning for the rationalist case, vindicating empiricism from the possibility of genuine skeptical doubts against beliefs based on it, and thus also from the demand for meta-justification. But this move comes at the price of acknowledging the soundness of the generality and modal arguments against empiricism, which entail a skepticism just a little bit less global than the full blown version considered above. Thus, avoiding issues of skepticism and meta-justification for the strict empiricist would come at the cost of embracing skepticism about belief in propositions that are general or modal in character, or both, which is a high epistemological price to pay.

Thus, whether it is fair to motivate the demand for meta-justification against strict empiricism by launching a priori justified skeptical arguments against it, or whether these must be abandoned insofar as appeal to empirical justification alone cannot support either general or modal beliefs, it seems that rationalism, whatever other problems it may have, still comes out ahead regarding the issue of meta-justification as well.

4. Conclusion

One traditional line of argument in favor of the existence of a priori justification has been that strict empiricist accounts of epistemic justification entail justificatory skepticism about large classes of propositions that we normally take ourselves to be justified in believing. Thus, assuming skepticism to be the most implausible alternative, some form of a priori justification must exist, or at the very least it is a well-motivated enterprise to develop an account of a priori justified belief.

In this paper I have suggested that the most appropriate context for understanding the traditional rationalist arguments against empiricism is that of foundationalist internalism. If one is a foundationalist internalist, it is plausible to argue that the non-inferential content principle (according to which no mental state can non-inferentially justify belief in a proposition the content of which goes beyond what is presented in the state in question) is true. Given this, and some plausible assumptions about the nature of sensory and introspective experience (such as that it is of particular objects and that it does not present modal features, such as properties of necessity or possibility of objects or states of affairs), it is plausible to argue against strict empiricism based on the generality argument, the argument from modality, and what I have called the first version of the meta-justification argument. I have articulated and defended each of these arguments, and strict empiricism on this understanding does have clear and wide-reaching skeptical implications.

In addition, I have considered the extent to which empiricism and rationalism are able to respond to the second or stronger version of the demand for meta-justification, which I have suggested is ultimately the demand for a response to skeptical doubts about epistemic justification. While this is a difficult problem for both positions, I have argued that skepticism about a priori justification is self-undermining, insofar as justified belief in a skeptical argument against the existence of a priori justification would itself be justified a priori, if at all. However one understands the situation of the strict empiricist with regard to this issue, it seems clear that rationalism comes out ahead.

The upshot of all of this is that if one is a foundationalist internalist and skepticism about justification is false, then one must be committed to some account of a priori justification. Strict empiricism alone is simply not an option. With regard to the question of whether the arguments I have presented here apply against any other versions of empiricism, I have a few closing thoughts.

Regarding coherence empiricism, a common objection to the position is that the justification for beliefs about whether or not a given belief is coherent, in the relevant sense of ‘coherent’, with the other beliefs of a subject, will itself need to be justified in an immediate or non-discursive way. Further, the content of such beliefs is usually understood to involve the application of general epistemic principles (those governing what coherence is), or the determination of whether or not such principles are satisfied in a given case. If this is all correct, then the most likely candidate for non-discursively justifying beliefs about coherence itself, especially in light of the arguments given above, would seem to be a priori justification of some sort.⁷¹

⁷¹ For further discussion of this issue regarding Coherentism, see BonJour, *In Defense of Pure Reason: A Rationalist Account of a Priori Justification*, chapter 3, Laurence BonJour and Ernest Sosa, *Epistemic Justification: Internalism Vs. Externalism, Foundations Vs. Virtues* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), Piazza, *A Priori Knowledge : Toward a Phenomenological Explanation*, chapter 4.

With regard to epistemic externalism, it is less clear what to say. While there have been some attempts to say what a naturalized or externalist account of the a priori might look like,⁷² it is not entirely clear whether these accounts really capture anything like the traditional distinction between rationalism and empiricism. It is thus especially difficult to say in what sense, if any, the arguments I have considered above might apply to strict “externalist empiricism”.

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⁷² Antony, "A Naturalized Approach to the a Priori ".

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