A Uniform Account of Regress Problems

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Abstract

This paper presents a uniform general account of regress problems in the form of a pentalemma – i.e. a set of five mutually inconsistent claims. Specific regress problems can be analyzed as instances of such a general schema, and this Regress Pentalemma Schema can be employed to generate deductively valid arguments from the truth of a subset of four claims to the falsity of the fifth. Thus, a uniform account of the nature of regress *problems* allows for an improved understanding of specific regress *objections* or *arguments*, and, correspondingly, of the general logical geography of the debate about infinite regresses.

This uniform approach is illustrated by a treatment of the classical epistemological problem of justification, but it encompasses a whole variety of cases including explanation and ontological grounding. Furthermore, this general account is compared and contrasted with the existing literature discussing argument schemata for regress objections, particularly with the work of Jan Willem Wieland. It is shown how such other schemata can be incorporated and superseded by the general Regress Pentalemma Schema.

Keywords: Infinite Regress, Regress Argument, Regress Objection, Regress Problem, Vicious Regress, Jan Willem Wieland, Justification, Agrippa's Trilemma, Explanation, Grounding.

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Introduction

Regress problems are common phenomena in philosophical debates on practically all topics. But what exactly is a regress problem?

Many regress problems are employed to formulate an objection against an opposing view. However, such regress objections are typically presented informally, and even when they are explicitly reconstructed as arguments, it is typically unclear which inference rules allow for deriving the conclusion. This is surprising since such regress objections are often regarded as particularly good arguments, and as arguments characteristic of a style of philosophy which prides itself for its clarity and explicitness. Further, to say that regress objections are typically regarded as good arguments is not to say that there is no disagreement about them. But it is not always clear what exactly such disagreement is a disagreement about. Are regress objections dismissed entirely or only in a particular case? How do vicious regresses differ from benign ones? These considerations show how important it is to investigate the exact structure of regress objections and the underlying regress problems.

The goal of this paper is to answer these questions. I propose a uniform analysis of regress problems, an account which sheds light on the way these may be employed to formulate specific regress objections. The uniform account of regress problems I shall propose is intended as an example of what is sometimes called 'logical geography'. That is, I offer a proposal to illuminate and structure debates involving regress problems in such a way that all proponents can agree on the nature of the problem in question, clearly identify the theses about which they disagree, and sometimes become aware of further assumptions which have so far been left implicit, but which they may want to discuss, as well. Thus, the aim is not to decide the matter of some specific regress problem, but to establish or improve a shared understanding of this problem which then allows for a clearer and more fruitful debate about all possible answers.

I shall begin straight away with the proposal I have in mind, and with a discussion of how this proposal can be employed to engage in just this sort of logical geography. While this will occupy section 1, the rest of the paper, sections 2 and 3, will then go on to present and discuss the existing literature on regress problems and regress objections. As I shall argue, the uniform account presented here can incorporate previous schemata and supersede them in a number of respects.

1 Regress Problems as Pentalemmata

The uniform account of regress problems I would like to propose has the form of a pentalemma – i.e. a set of five claims which cannot all be true. Each subset of four of these claims is consistent, but it also logically entails the negation of the fifth. Thus, the regress problem can be translated into the problem what speaks against and what speaks in favour of these five claims, given the knowledge that at least one of them must be false.[1]

To illustrate this account, I will begin in section 1.1 with an example, the classic epistemological problem of justification. On this basis, I shall go on to provide a general statement of the account of regress problems as pentalemmata in section 1.2. Finally, section 1.3 will show how this proposal is able to structure and illuminate the debate about the problem of justification.

1.1 The Pentalemma of Justification

I propose to understand the regress of justification problem as the pentalemma presented in table 1 on the following page. In such statements, I use labels for all five claims in order to facilitate the discussion about these elements of the problem. Let me briefly walk through them.

First, Phenomenon names the kind of thing which is under discussion – the very existence of justified beliefs. Then, Ground explains how these would have to be explained, grounded or otherwise accounted for – namely in terms of reasons which support them.

[1] This way of setting up philosophical problems or puzzles as inconsistent sets of claims is not new, of course. One explicit proponent of this methodology is Nicholas Rescher (cf. e.g. Rescher 1987). But even if many, or all, philosophical problems can be set up in this way, this does not mean that the distinctiveness of regress problems is lost. Instead, what makes a problem a regress problem are the specific forms of the five claims.

Table 1: The Pentalemma of Justification

Phenomenon There are justified beliefs.

Ground Every justified belief is a justified belief in virtue of some supporting reason which is distinct from it.

Recurrence Every supporting reason is a justified belief.

Finity No justified belief is a justified belief in virtue of an infinite chain of further justified beliefs.

Non-Circularity No justified belief is a justified belief in virtue of a circle of justified beliefs.

Here, and later, I employ the notion of something's being a certain way 'in virtue of' something else – in this case, of being a justified belief in virtue of a supporting reason. This 'in-virtue-of' relation underlying the whole of the regress problem is intuitively transitive, irreflexive, and asymmetrical. Paradigmatically, what such an 'in-virtue-of' relation amounts to is the relevant form of explanation, dependence or ontological grounding. Thus, in cases of explanation, we can also say that Phenomenon names the explanandum and Ground the explanans. Or, in cases of grounding or ontological dependence, one may say that Phenomenon names what is grounded and Ground names what it is that grounds it. As I will go on to show, this notion is crucial for every regress problem.[2] However, I shall leave further details open at this general level of abstraction. Different regress problems may employ different conceptions of such an 'in-virtue-of' relation.[3]

A crucial, arguably even the *defining* feature of a regress problem, is that the ground or explanans mentioned in Ground then *reappears*. The third

[2] Among other things, it also allows for an account of the distinction between vicious and benign regresses, as shown in section 3.2.

[3] I shall also leave open the possibility, recently defended by Jessica Wilson (2014), that there is no *general* uniform 'in-virtue-of' relation which is applicaple to *all* relevant cases in which philosophers use this locution. Instead, different cases may rely on different concepts, which merely share some general properties such as those of being transitive, irreflexive and asymmetrical. This, however, is entirely sufficient for the purpose of this paper.

claim, Recurrence, states that supporting reasons just are further justified beliefs. And the inconsistency arises because the chains of justified beliefs in virtue of further justified beliefs which are generated in this way are supposed to be neither infinite nor circular. This is maintained in the final pair of claims which make up the pentalemma.

According to Non-Circularity, circles of justified beliefs do not constitute proper grounds or explanantia. The intuition is that circles fail to provide any proper footing since they cannot account for an *initial* conferral of the relevant property of justification. What is supposed to be grounded is instead also appealed to as the thing which does the grounding, never mind the intermediaries in the transitive chain.

Similarly, Finity has it that infinite chains of justified beliefs also do not constitute proper grounds or explanantia. Intuitively, such cases lack the desired footing since the conferral of the relevant property of justification is, so to speak, forever delayed. Thus, even if there is such a thing as an infinite chain of beliefs, each allegedly justifying the previous one, none of this could count as a proper justification.

However, one may also hold Finity without such appeal to proper grounding and explanation. Even bracketing such questions, there are plausible standard accounts of what beliefs are, according to which finite minds cannot have infinitely many beliefs in the first place. This view entails Finity, given the uncontroversial assumption that if no infinite chains of beliefs exist, they therefore clearly cannot ground or explain anything.[4] Thus, an appeal to a *de facto* finity of the relevant chain constitutes a possible, and plausible, *reason* for Finity rather than an alternative to it. And it is better to include Finity in the pentalemma because this also allows for the possibility that infinite chains are not ruled out, but that only their power to ground or explain is denied.

As a final note, one may wonder why I have proposed a *penta*lemma in order to analyze a problem which is often understood as a *tri*lemma, and of-

[4] Likewise, one may also hold Non-Circularity without any appeal to proper grounding and explanation, but simply by asserting that there is no such thing as a circle of justified beliefs. This option, however, is less common, and anyway less plausible than the corresponding view about Finity.

Table 2: The Regress Pentalemma Schema

Phenomenon There are Ps.

Ground Every P is a P in virtue of some E distinct from it.

Recurrence Every E is a P.

Finity No P is a P in virtue of an infinite chain of further Ps.

Non-Circularity No P is a P in virtue of a circle of Ps.

ten attributed to Agrippa under that name. However, Agrippa's Trilemma is a trilemma only for those who wish to reject Agrippa's own sceptical conclusion – i.e. to maintain Phenomenon and to maintain the view that there are indeed justified beliefs. Thus, Agrippa's favourite option is clearly a *fourth* possible option next to the three alternatives which have been singled out to form the name 'Agrippa's Trilemma'. And as I shall go on to clarify in the next sections, it is equally important to separate Ground and Recurrence rather than to list merely their joint consequence, the claim I label 'Trigger' on the next page. For stated in this way, the full landscape of options to deal with the problem becomes visible more clearly. Doing so, however, makes for five options – a pentalemma.

1.2 The General Regress Pentalemma

I have presented an analysis of the regress of justification problem and elaborated the claims and concepts it relies on. However, this is only an example of the general schema I would like to propose.

To arrive at such a schema, one may generalize easily: Rather than of justified beliefs, one may speak schematically of Ps, where Ps are the phenomena which are held to be in need of explanation or grounding. Rather than of supporting reasons, one may schematically speak of Es, where Es are the explanantia or grounders which are held to account for the phenomena in question. These steps leads to the general schema presented in table 2.

To see precisely why and how these five claims are inconsistent, consider first that Ground and Recurrence jointly entail Trigger below. However, given that there is an analytic truth in the background, Alternatives, the inconsistency should become clear. For Trigger denies the first alternative stated in Alternatives, leaving only the other two – i.e. Dilemma.

Trigger Every P is a P in virtue of some further P.

Alternatives Either it is false that every P is a P in virtue of some further P,[5] or else every P is a P either (a) in virtue of an infinite chain of further Ps or (b) in virtue of a circle of Ps.

Dilemma Every P is a P either (a) in virtue of an infinite chain of further Ps or (b) in virtue of a circle of Ps.

But Dilemma is incompatible with Phenomenon, Finity and Non-Circularity. If Finity and Non-Circularity are true, then all justified beliefs are justified beliefs *neither* in virtue of an infinite chain *nor* in virtue of a circle. Dilemma, however, states that these are the only options. This would mean that justified beliefs would have to have incompatible properties, which immediately entails that there cannot be such a thing – i.e. that Phenomenon must be false. Conversely, if Phenomenon is true and there *are* justified beliefs, then there cannot be an incompatibility in their properties such that at least one of the other claims must go. Either Finity must be rejected, or Non-Circularity must be rejected, or Dilemma must be rejected. However, since Dilemma follows logically from Ground and Recurrence – given the analytic background principle Alternatives –, rejecting Dilemma requires rejecting either Ground or Recurrence.

The aim of this general schema is to allow for similar analyses of other regress problems – if all goes best, of *all* such cases. To do so, one needs to provide some phenomenon P in need of grounding or explanation, some explanans or grounder E, and maybe also some elucidation of the sense of

[5] In fact, if Trigger is false, there are *three* options next to (a) and (b) – namely, (c) some Ps are Ps, but *not* in virtue of *anything*, (d) some Ps are Ps in virtue of *themselves*, and (e) some Ps are Ps in virtue of something which is *not a further P*. However, since Trigger excludes all of (c), (d) and (e), I have stated Alternatives in a simplified form.

the 'in-virtue-of' relation which is supposed to hold between these (cf. page 3 above). If the five claims thus created are plausible enough – particularly the crucial element Recurrence –, then, voilà, a new pentalemma is created which instantiates the Regress Pentalemma Schema in table 2 on page 6. Let me briefly illustrate this with three further examples:

First, the classical cosmological argument for the existence of God can be understood as concerned with the phenomenon P = *being a contingent event* and the candidate ground or explanans E = *being an efficient cause*. In the resulting pentalemma, Recurrence has it that efficient causes are themselves further contingent events. If this pentalemma is then resolved by denying Recurrence, we have established an argument for the existence of at least one cause which is not contingent, which neatly fits the conception of God as the single necessary cause of the universe as a whole.

Second, the problem of the source of value can be put as a pentalemma with the phenomenon P = *being valuable* and the prima facie explanans or ground E = *being something from which such value derives*. This pentalemma would assume, with Recurrence, that something from which value derives must itself be valuable. And in this case, one may plausibly resolve the inconsistency by rejecting Ground, i.e. by claiming that at least some things are intrinsically valuable.

Third, broadly nominalist accounts of the existence of universals also lead to a vicious regress (cf. e.g. Armstrong 1974). This problem can be stated as a pentalemma which involves the phenomenon P = *being a universal* and the candidate ground E = *standing in a relation of instantiation to a particular*. The infinite regress arises because of Recurrence, the claim that standing in a relation of instantiation to a particular is itself a (second-order) universal. One option to resolve the pentalemma thus created is to reject Ground and instead endorse a platonist view of universals.

However, this is not the place to simply list further regress problems and analyze them according to the Regress Pentalemma Schema.[6]But these three

[6] An impressive list of such cases has been assembled in Wieland (2014). These examples are presented in the vocabulary of Wieland's own argument schemata, but as I shall argue in sections 2 and 3, these can be integrated into my proposal.

cases exemplify at least part of the range of applicability of my proposal.

A final point which these examples help clarify is the breadth of the 'in-virtue-of' relation involved in regress problems. As indicated on page 3, this relation encompasses cases of explanation as well as cases of ontological dependence or grounding. One may view a regress problem like the regress of justification primarily as an *epistemic* problem concerning the way in which we *explain* and *understand* beliefs and reasons. But other regress problems are less epistemic in nature. How universals exist and whether or not they are grounded in particulars are *ontological* questions which can be construed in entirely non-epistemic terms. For example, in the literature on grounding, it is generally assumed that what grounds what is independent of whether we can grasp, know or explain it. Instead, it solely depends on the structure of reality itself.[7] One virtue of the Regress Pentalemma Schema is that it is applicable to such a variety of 'in-virtue-of' relations.

1.3 Structuring Debates about Justification

In table 1 on page 4, I have presented an analysis of the regress of justification problem in the form of a pentalemma. Thus, each of the five claims *can* – and one of them *must* – be rejected. Correspondingly, the pentalemma contains all the ingredients for a total of five deductively valid arguments, each accepting a subset of four claims as its premises and thereby deriving the negation of the fifth.[8] I shall call such arguments *Regress Refutations* of the respective claim. For example, the cosmological argument I alluded to on the previous page would be classified as a Regress Refutation of Recurrence.

To illustrate this approach, but even more to demonstrate the analytical power of the Regress Pentalemma Schema as a whole in illuminating a philosophical debate, I shall now turn back to the debate about justification. As I shall show, one can understand some classic arguments for pertinent views

[7] For discussions of ontological grounding, see e.g. Schaffer (2009), Audi (2012), and Fine (2012).

[8] By the same token, one may create a total of *ten* deductively valid arguments, each accepting a subset of *three* of the claims in the Regress Pentalemma as premises and inferring the conclusion that the remaining two claims cannot both be true – or that one is false if the other is true. Likewise for arguments assuming subsets of two claims.

(or families of views) in the debate about justification as Regress Refutations.

First, *scepticism* amounts to a denial of Phenomenon. The sceptical answer to the problem of justification is that there are no (truly) justified beliefs. And a classical argument for this position is just what is often referred to as 'Agrippa's Trilemma'. But as discussed on page 5, this argument comes down to a Regress Refutation of Phenomenon, inferring the falsity of this claim from the truth of the other four claims in the pentalemma.

Second, *foundationalism* typically amounts to a denial of Ground. On this view, there are justified beliefs, but at some point these are not justified beliefs in virtue of supporting reasons, but simply because they constitute the secure foundation from which one can then proceed. Understood in this way, one may argue in favour of foundationalism with the aid of a Regress Refutation of Ground, inferring the negation of Ground from the other four claims in the pentalemma.

However, foundationalism may be more fruitfully characterized not by what it rejects, but by what it holds on to. A foundationalist will typically stick to Phenomenon, Finity and Non-Circularity, and then go on to reject at least one of the other two claims. Next to Ground, a foundationalist may also deny Recurrence, for example in the form of an externalist foundationalism, according to which some supporting reasons are no beliefs at all, but instead, say, suitable causal connections to facts or objects in the external world. On this view, a foundationalist may employ a Regress Refutation of Recurrence.

Clearly, however, such an argument would require Ground as a premise, which not all foundationalists will welcome. To solve this problem, foundationalists may also take these options together and mount a Regress Refutation of the *disjunction* of Ground and Recurrence – an argument with Phenomenon, Finity and Non-Circularity as premises and the negation of the disjunction of Ground and Recurrence as its conclusion. At least one of these two claims has to go, but foundationalists do not have to decide which.

Third, there are *default and challenge models of justification*. This family of views holds that a justification is not always a supporting reason, thereby denying Ground. Instead, a belief may also be justified by default. Such a default status may be challenged, and only then would it require a supporting reason to maintain or re-establish its status as justified. Again, such a position can be supported with the aid of a Regress Refutation of Ground.

Fourth, there is *infinitism*. As the name already reveals, this view rejects Finity, roughly along the following lines. Something may be a justified belief in virtue of some supporting reason. But it is not always true that these supporting reasons are themselves further justified beliefs. Even if these series can in principle continue to infinity, it is still true that, at some point, finite parts of these infinite series are sufficient as supporting reasons. Arguments for infinitism can then have the form of Regress Refutations of Finity.

Fifth, one may endorse *coherentism* and reject Non-Circularity, among other things by denying that justification is indeed irreflexive and asymmetrical. While the transitivity of justification is upheld, coherentism allows for reflexive and symmetrical justification, at least at some point in the transitive chain. The circles thus created are to be welcomed rather than shunned. Thus, justified beliefs require nothing over and above further justified beliefs for their justification. Clearly, one way to establish this view is via a Regress Refutation of Non-Circularity.

These characterizations are very rough, of course, and some attributions may well be hasty or too unclear.[9] But my aim here is merely to provide a first sketch and to show what a rich landscape of logically possible positions becomes clearly visible once we employ the schema of regress problems as pentalemmata.

Another general lesson one may draw from this analysis is this. Once all proponents in the debate become aware of this structure of the regress problem as a pentalemma, it becomes clear that everybody involved can formulate a Regress Refutation of one of the five claims involved in the pentalemma in order to defend their respective view. In doing so, all families of proponents assume something as a premise which all other four families of proponents reject. Now, if this were *all* that ever happens in the debate, then everybody would be begging the question against the others. This is no flaw of

[9] I have deliberately avoided naming particular philosophers as endorsing the views sketched here. Even if I should have failed to correctly characterize certain specific accounts, I still hope to have provided a rough sketch of the general terrain of the debate.

the analysis of regress problems a pentalemmata, however. It is a virtue of this account that it makes this threat of a stalemate visible. And by the same token, the proposal shows that the crucial task for all is to formulate *further independent* arguments, both to defend the claims they would like to maintain and to reject the claim they propose to give up.

2 Incorporating Existing Schemata

The account of regress problems as pentalemmata just discussed owes much and more to the existing literature on what is typically called 'regress arguments' or 'regress objections'. So far, I have left this debt shamefully implicit. In this section, however, I finally present some of the proposals for analyzing such arguments which are already on the table. My aim is to show how my own Regress Pentalemma Schema can integrate and improve on this previous work. However, this should not be seen as purely, or even mainly, a critical take. Instead, it was precisely thinking through these existing proposals which even made it possible for me to come up with a new, uniform account. But having developed this new account, it proved easier to begin there and only now discuss its relation to ealier proposals.

In fact, there is a substantial body of work on the role of infinite regresses in philosophy.[10] Thankfully, however, Jan Willem Wieland has recently provided an illuminating and encompassing assessment of this debate – especially in Wieland (2013a) and Wieland (2014). I will therefore be able to rely solely on Wieland's work and still cover all of the most important aspects of the debate so far.

Wieland proposes what I shall call a 'dualist' account of two kinds of theories of regresses and two corresponding schemata of regress arguments. As I will argue, my Regress Pentalemma Schema can be used to derive both of Wieland's schemata as special cases of what I have called 'Regress Refutations', and it can also be used to account for further phenomena which are

[10] This work notably includes, but is not exhausted by Gratton (1994; 1997; 2010), Jaquette (1989; 1996; 2015), Taşdelen (2014), and Wieland (2011a; 2011b; 2012; 2013a; 2013b; 2014).

covered by neither. This, I take it, is very much in the spirit of Wieland's work, and I suggest that my account of regress problems as pentalemmata should be seen as a welcome unification.

Wieland's dualism is the dualism between what he calls the Paradox Theory and the Failure Theory of infinite regresses, which goes hand in hand with different argument schemata for regress objections. Wieland traces back the Paradox Theory to Oliver Black (1996) and the Failure Theory to John Arthur Passmore (1961), but for my purposes, it will suffice to discuss Wieland's own presentation of these approaches. Section 2.1 will discuss the Paradox Schema and show how it can be accounted for on the basis of the uniform account of regress problems as pentalemmata. While section 2.2 will then propose the same for the Failure Schema, the next and final section 3 will deal with Wieland's arguments for the idea that these two schemata are substantially different. As I shall argue, my uniform proposal sheds new light on these considerations and reveals that indeed nothing stands in the way of unifying them as special cases of certain argumentative routes within the regress pentalemma.

2.1 Accounting for the Paradox Schema

The first of Wieland's approaches is the Paradox Theory, according to which a regress objection establishes that a certain view is false, typically a universally quantified proposition which purports to be a philosophical account of, say, a certain concept. This view is false, the idea goes, because its truth would lead to an infinite regress. On this view, the regress of justification can be presented as table 3 on the following page, quoted entirely from Wieland.[11]

While (1) is a premise, (2) is merely a hypothesis for the sake of argument, which is then rejected via *reductio ad absurdum*. This is clearly labeled in Wieland's general Paradox Schema of which this example is an instance, here quoted entirely as table 4 on the following page.

How does this proposal relate to the general Regress Pentalemma Schema

[11] It should be noted that the inference from (1) and (2) to (3) is invalid as it stands. I come back to this on page 16.

Table 3: The Regress of Justification: Paradox Schema (Wieland 2013a, 98)

(1) At least one proposition is justified to a subject S.

(2) For any proposition x, x is justified to S only if S has a reason y for x and y is justified to S.

(3) There is an infinity of propositions which are justified to S (each being a reason for their predecessor). (1-2)

(4) ∼(3): There is no such infinite regress.

(C) ∼(2): There is at least one proposition which is justified to S yet S has no reason for it which is justified to S. (1-4)

Table 4: The Paradox Schema (Wieland 2013a, 97)

(1) Premise: At least one item of type i is F.

(2) Hypothesis: For any item x of type i, x is F only if there is a new item y of type i such that x stands in R to y and y is F.

(3) Infinite regress: There is an infinity of items of type i that are F and stand in R to their successor. (1-2)

(4) Premise: ∼(3): There is no such infinite regress.

(C) ∼(2): For at least one item x of type i, x is F and it is not the case that there is a new item y of type i such that x stands in R to y and y is F. (1-4) presented in table 2 on page 6?

Obviously, Phenomenon is equivalent to (1) in the Paradox Schema. However, (2) in that schema, the hypothesis for *reductio*, is no single constituent of the Regress Pentalemma, but corresponds instead to the joint conclusion of Ground and Recurrence – what I have labelled 'Trigger' on page 7 above. Thus, Wieland mixes the proposal for grounding or explaining the phenomenon under discussion with a *further* commitment – the conjunct "and x is F" – stating that the explanation again presupposes what is supposed to be explained. Correspondingly, the conclusion of Wieland's Paradox Schema matches the negation of Trigger – i.e. it matches the negation of the disjunction of Ground and Recurrence. But throwing together these distinct claims is problematic, as different views may be distinguished precisely by the question which of these are rejected, as shown in section 1.3.[12]

Thus, there are only two elements of the Paradox Schema so far not accounted for – the intermediary conclusion (3) and its negation, premise (4). This premise simply asserts that there is no infinite regress in the case at hand. Compare this with the Regress Pentalemma, where there is no flat-out denial of the existence of an infinite regress, but instead the premise Finity, which merely has it that, even if such an infinite regress exists, it is not suited to ground or explain the phenomenon in question. Stated this way, Finity is both less demanding and more encompassing of other attempts to formulate the objection. For as discussed on page 5 above, Finity is not limited to, but nevertheless allows for the special case stated in Wieland's (4) – the case that the infinite regress does not provide the explanation or grounding needed simply because does not exist.

Now, all elements of Wieland's Paradox Schema have been derived and explained in the terms of the Regress Pentalemma Schema. However, one element of the latter seems to be absent in the former – Non-Circularity. But in fact, it is crucial to include this claim in order to achieve the goal

[12] In a slightly improved variant of his Paradox Schema, Wieland has rectified this and formulated this schema in such a way that it can only be analyzed as a refutation of Ground, assuming Recurrence (cf. Wieland 2014, 11-13). While this is clearly an improvement in clarity, it is also a loss in scope since the possibility to reject Recurrence rather than Ground is left out.

of structuring the landscape of logically possible views as best as possible. Wieland shares this goal. He writes:

> It is worth noting that the justification case as just set out is a common argument for foundationalism. Opponents of foundationalism do not buy it, and on the basis of the Paradox reconstruction it is easy to explain how they try to resist it: coherentists deny the step from (1)-(2) to (3), and suggest that finite series of propositions can justify one another; infinitists deny (4), and suggest that there can be infinite regresses of reasons; and sceptics reject (1) rather than (2), and suggest that no item of type i is F: no proposition is justified to anyone [...]. (Wieland 2013a, 99)

This is an exercise in precisely the kind of debate structuring and logical geography which I have also undertaken in section 1.3. And in fact, my analysis parallels Wieland's in many respects. But my account allows us to make *further* controversial aspects *explicit*. As Wieland has it, coherentists do not reject any of the relevant claims, but only an inference of the argument. This, however, is a flaw of the schema which reveals that the inference in question cannot be deductively valid and requires further explication. If all goes best in the enterprise of logical geography, then all proponents in the debate should be able to agree on questions of validity and then proceed to discuss the plausibility of premises.

This goal is indeed achieved in the Regress Pentalemma Schema. To see this, consider that (1) and (2) in Wieland's Paradox Schema do not entail (3) because they are compatible with a single proposition's justifying itself or a pair of propositions mutually justifying each other. The inference becomes valid, however, as soon as one assumes that justification is transitive, asymmetric and irreflexive. But assuming this comes down to assuming the remaining claim of the Regress Pentalemma Schema – Non-Circularity.

In sum, then, the Regress Pentalemma Schema can be used to account for Wieland's Paradox Schema. The latter can be derived from the more general Regress Pentalemma Schema as a special case – as a Regress Refutation of

Table 5: Regress of Justification: Failure Schema (Wieland 2013a, 100)

(1) You have to justify at least one proposition.

(2) For any proposition x, if you have to justify x, you provide a reason for x.

(3) For any proposition x, if you provide a reason y for x, then you justify x only if you justify y first.

(4) For any proposition x, you always have to justify a further proposition first (i.e. before justifying x). (1-3)

(C) If you provide a reason for any proposition that you have to justify, then you never justify any proposition. (1-4)

either Ground or Recurrence. And these resulting arguments are better and more encompassing statements of the relevant considerations.

2.2 Accounting for the Failure Schema

This brings me to Wieland's second approach. According to what he calls the Failure Theory, an infinite regress does not establish the falsity of a specific claim, but rather shows that a certain solution proposed to solve a given problem fails at this task. As he points out, this can then be taken as an argument for the impossibility of solving this problem at all, or, given plausible alternative proposals, for favouring one of these over the one leading to an infinite regress. Again, Wieland relies on the regress of justification as an example, here quoted entirely as table 5.[13]

And again, Wieland provides a statement of the general structure of infinite regresses on the Failure Theory – the Failure Schema quoted here entirely as table 6 on the next page.[14]

[13] Problematically, both inferences in this schema are invalid. I will come back to the first inference from (1), (2) and (3) to (4) on page 21. And I shall discuss the second inference from (4) to (C), where Wieland deliberately suppresses an additional premise, on page 21.

[14] For the purposes of my discussion, I will bracket two complications. First, I shall ignore

Table 6: The Failure Schema (Wieland 2013a, 99)

(1) Problem: You have to φ at least one item of type i.

(2) Solution: For any item x of type i, if you have to φ x, you ψ x.

(3) Extra premise: For any item x of type i, if you ψ x, then there is a new item y of type i, and you φ x only if you φ y first.

(4) Infinite regress: For any item x of type i, you always have to φ a further item first (i.e. before φ-ing x). (1-3)

(C) If you ψ any item of type i that you have to φ, then you never φ any item of type i. (1-4)

How can the Failure Schema be accounted for in terms of the general Regress Pentalemma Schema pesented in table 2 on page 6? At a first glance, this task may seem impossible. Wieland writes:

> The rationale of the Paradox Schema is that some claims cannot hold together because jointly they entail a contradiction, via an infinite regress. The rationale of the Failure Schema is that a certain solution never solves the problem it is meant to solve because it gets stuck in a regress (i.e. of problems which are to be solved before the initial one is solved). (Wieland 2013a, 100)

However, the Regress Pentalemma Schema is precisely a schema which shows "that some claims cannot hold together because jointly they entail a contradiction". If the Failure Schema has an altogether different structure which

the markers "Problem" and "Solution" behind (1) and (2), since the succeeding sentences are clearly used as premises despite of these, as explicitly stated by the notation of the derivations of (3) and (4). Also, Wieland has meanwhile published a pair of slightly altered versions of his Failure Schema (cf. Wieland 2014, 21-24), which do not contain these markers anymore. But these new schemata are the second thing which I will bracket here. For Wieland's new "Failure Schema B" is exactly the one I discuss here and his new "Failure Schema A" differs from it only in that (3) is replaced by two claims which jointly entail (3) and add the requirement that not only those reasons which support a justified belief must be justified themselves, but that *all* reasons whatsoever must be justified. Now, this much more general claim may well be problematic. But I shall leave this problem aside.

contrasts with precisely this feature, then it clearly cannot be derived from the Regress Pentalemma Schema.

However, the structure of the Failure Schema is not so different at all. First, there is no sharp contrast between showing "that a certain solution never solves the problem it is meant to solve" and showing that a certain claim is false because showing the former *just is* is showing that it is *false* that that the solution *does* solve the problem. By the same token, this claim that the solution *does* solve the problem can be part of a set of claims for which it is then shown that they "cannot hold together because jointly they entail a contradiction", which provides a reason to reject one of them.

Thus, there is at least no *general* structural problem with accounting for the Failure Schema in terms of the Regress Pentalemma Schema. But does this work in detail?

Before walking through the individual elements of the schemata, there is a conceptual difference to resolve. On the one hand, we have a *problem* and a candidate *solution*, and on the other hand, we have a *phenomenon* and a candidate *ground* or *explanans*. But these different concepts can be brought together. The problems under discussion are problems as to what grounds and explains something. And the solutions proposed are candidate grounds or explanantia.

Let me spell this out for the example of the regress of justification. Where the Failure Schema states the *problem* that propositions *need* justification and discusses the *solution* of support by reasons, the Regress Pentalemma Schema states the *phenomenon* that there *are* justified beliefs and discusses the candidate *ground* or *explanation* that what *makes* them justified beliefs are supporting reasons. However, the problem stated in the Failure Schema only arises because it is highly plausible that justified beliefs are real, i.e. that Phenomenon in the Regress Pentalemma Schema is true. This is what creates the need for a solution of this problem, namely for a ground or explanation for the existence of justified beliefs.

Thus, neither is there a general structural problem nor a general conceptual problem with accounting for the Failure Schema in terms of the Regress

Pentalemma Schema.[15] But, again, how does this work in detail? Now we are finally in a position to walk though all elements of the Failure Schema.

Premise (1) is most closely associated with Phenomenon in the Regress Pentalemma Schema. But while (1) has it that something has to be *done* – i.e. at least one belief has to be justified –, Phenomenon merely asserts that there *are* justified beliefs. Thus, (1) can be understood as the demand that Phenomenon be *established* in the first place – the existence of justified beliefs is to be established by an act of justifying a belief.

However, Phenomenon is more encompassing than (1). One option is to accept Phenomenon because one accepts (1) and furthermore holds that the demand to establish Phenomenon stated in (1) is indeed fulfilled. But a second option is to accept Phenomenon without any requirement that it be *established* in the first place – as a brute fact, a phenomenon without explanans or ground. Finally, a third option is to accept Phenomenon and to accept the demand that it be explained or grounded, and still to reject (1) because of its restriction to a kind of explanation which requires that somebody *does* something – to a belief's becoming justified by an *act* of justification. On this third alternative, one would hold that what makes a belief justified need not be an act performed by somebody, but can also be, say, a suitable causal connection to a fact or object in the external world as an externalist foundationalist may have it (cf. section 1.3).

These considerations about (1) and Phenomenon carry over to (2) and Ground. Ground holds that the phenomenon *is* accounted for in one way or another. This is compatible with the idea that this has to be established by *doing* something, as in (1) and (2). But it does not require this.

This limitation of (1) and (2) to *acts* of problem-solving or explaining is a particularly striking manifestation of the limitation of the Failure Schema to *epistemic* 'in-virtue-of' relations. In contrast, the Regress Pentalemma Schema cannot only incorporate these cases, but also account for regress problems with non-epistemic 'in-virtue-of' relations such as ontological grounding (cf. page 9).

[15] In section 3, I will expand on these points and respond to Wieland's further arguments for structural differences between his two schemata.

The next claim, (3), is almost equivalent to Recurrence. Again, one must translate between the vocabulary of what one must do in order to provide grounds or explanantia on the one hand and statements as to what explains or grounds on the other hand. And again, the Regress Pentalemma can incorporate the former, but include other cases, as well.

This leaves two of the five claims of the Regress Pentalemma, Finity and Non-Circularity. How, if at all, do these play a role in the Failure Schema? As I shall argue, they are required as additional premises in the inferences to the intermediary conclusion (4) and, from there, to the final conclusion (C).

Consider first the three premises of the argument, (1), (2), and (3). As they stand, they do not entail (4), but merely the claim that there is at least one belief such that you justify it only if you justify some reason for it first. But this is compatible with the reflexive justification of a single proposition, with the symmetrical justification of pairs of propositions, and with larger circles of justifying propositions. In order to derive (4), then, one needs to assume precisely what Non-Circularity states, namely that these very cases are no proper grounds or explanantia for justified beliefs.[16] Thus, not only can the Regress Pentalemma Schema be used to explain this inference in the Failure Schema. It is furthermore superior to the latter because it makes explicit what the latter implicitly requires – a commitment which at least some proponents in the debate about the respective regress problem may want to deny.

As for the second inference, the one from (4) to (C), let me first note that Wieland later acknowledges that a further suppressed premise is required here. He states this premise as follows:

"(II) For any item x of type i, if you always have to φ a further item of type i first (i.e. before φ-ing x), then you never φ x." (Wieland 2013a, 108)

This line, Wieland holds, "is suppressed in the schema, for it seems completely general. An instance of (II) is for example: If you always have to make a further, new decision before making any decision, then you never make any decision." (Wieland 2013a, 109) Wieland is certainly correct to point out the

[16] I have made the same point with respect to the Paradox Schema on page 16.

high generality of this premise. But I take it that this is still not sufficient grounds for suppressing it. Instead, if the whole variety of regress problems and of options for answering them should become visible, even such a highly general principle must be stated.

And, as a matter of fact, principle (II) is derivative of the claim Finity in the Regress Pentalemma. For one may ask why this principle should be true, that is why you never justify any belief if you always have to justify a further belief first. The answer has two parts. First, if you always have to justify a further belief first (i.e. before justifying some initial belief), then you have to justify an *infinite chain* of further beliefs. Second, if you have to justify an infinite chain of further beliefs, then, given my considerations on page 20, you are faced with the demand to establish the existence of an infinite chain of *further* justified beliefs in order to establish the existence of some *initial* justified belief. But why should this demand lead to the conclusion that you never justify any belief? The answer is that this is a demand which can never be met, just as Finity states explicitly: "No justified belief is a justified belief in virtue of an infinite chain of further justified beliefs." Thus, (II) holds – it is indeed true that you never justify any belief if you always have to justify a further belief first. Why? Because this would require the fulfillment of a demand which – as Finity states – cannot be fulfilled at all.

Thus, Finity – or (II) – is a crucial element of the regress problem which needs to be stated explicitly. After all, this is where infinitists would object to the regress of justification. But it is also important to formulate this claim carefully, with reference only to the explanation or grounding of the phenomenon at hand – as in Finity, and unlike in (II). Of course, it is possible that we may be able to settle the question whether or nor all grounds or explanantia can be infinite in general and once and for all. But my proposal also allows for the possibility that each of these instances merits independent discussion. This option is real and plausible since, for example, one may be an infinitist about justification, denying this specific instance of Finity, without thereby accepting every other infinite regress as benign.

Finally, having appealed to all of the five claims of the Regress Pentalemma, one final element of the Failure Schema needs to be accounted for

– its conclusion, (C). This conclusion is stated in conditional form, which reveals that (2), unlike (1) and (3), is used not as a pemise, but as a hypothesis for conditional proof. Thus, (C) corresponds most closely either to the claim that Phenomenon is false if Recurrence is true, or to the claim that Phenomenon is false if Ground is true.[17]

In sum, then, the Regress Pentalemma Schema can be used to account for Wieland's Failure Schema. The latter can be derived from the more general Regress Pentalemma Schema as a special case – as a conditional Regress Refutation. And these resulting arguments are clearer and more encompassing satements of the relevant considerations.

3 Unifying Paradox and Failure

In section 2, I have argued that both of Wieland's schemata for regress arguments can be accounted for in terms if the Regress Pentalemma Schema, which can incorporate these schemata as specific instances. Thus, my proposal surpasses Wieland's dualist conception of regress *arguments* in that it reveals the uniform structure of the regress *problem* which underlies these specific argumentative routes *within* the problem.

A further reason why my proposal also surpasses Wieland's dualism is that it easily incorporates many *other* such argumentative routes through the regress problem – i.e. Regress Refutations of claims not or not explicitly considered by Wieland. But I take it that this is entirely in Wieland's own spirit, given that he already sketches some further options in the case of the regress of justification, as quoted on page 16 above. However, for reasons unclear to me, Wieland pursues this goal only with respect to his Paradox Schema and remains silent on the question if something similar is also possible with the Failure Schema. Given my uniform account, this asymmetry disappears.

Finally, I have already stressed that my proposal relies on a more general

[17] And maybe it is even intended as stating that Phenomenon is false if both Ground *and* Recurrence are true. All of these variations are perfectly possible on the Regress Pentalemma Schema (cf. footnote 8 on page 9).

‘in-virtue-of’ relation which encompasses the cases of explanation or problem-solving which Wieland has in mind, but also allows for different notions underlying the regress such as ontological grounding. This is a further place in which my proposal is more general – it is applicable to a larger number of regress problems (cf. section 1.2).

However, Wieland puts a strong emphasis on the difference between the Paradox Schema and the Failure Schema. In fact, he denies that there is one uniform structure of regress problems which underlies these specific regress argument schemata and instead maintains that these schemata rely on different *theories* as to what the infinite regress is and how it arises. If this is true, however, how can I claim to unify the two?

Part of the answer has already been given in section 2.2, particularly in my discussion of the quotation on page 18, where I proposed a way to account for problems and their solutions in terms of phenomena and their grounds or explanatia. Still, I would like to expand on these considerations by looking at Wieland's further arguments for structural differences between the two schemata. He writes:

> The main structural differences are three-fold: the theories differ regarding what infinite regresses consist of, regarding whether an extra premise is needed to draw a conclusion from an infinite regress, and finally regarding their conclusion. (Wieland 2013a, 101)

In the final pair of sections, I shall discuss these alleged differences in what the regresses consist of (section 3.1) and in which premises are employed (section 3.2). As I will argue, none of these actually makes for a clear-cut distinction. In fact, the features which are alleged to distinguish between the two schemata will at times be shown to mutually depend on one another. However, the third difference concerning the conclusions of the arguments does not create any further problems. For this difference does not establish a difference in the nature of the underlying regress problem. As discussed in section 2, the different conclusions correspond to different argumentative routes through one and the same regress problem.

Again, I think that such a unification should be welcomed. As a final reason, consider Wieland's remark that the two schemata are different, but that nevertheless *one and the same* regress problem can be used both as an instance of the one *and* as an instance of the other (cf. e.g. Wieland 2013a, 96). But if the differences between the schemata are indeed so deep, this fact must appear somewhat strange. By contrast, if both derive from an underlying uniform regress problem, this is just what we should expect.

3.1 Different Constituents?

First, Wieland has it that the two theories under discussion lead to different verdicts as to what kinds of things infinite regresses consist of:

> According to the Paradox Theory, infinite regresses consist of steps where each step is a necessary condition for the previous step. [...] According to the Failure Theory, by contrast, infinite regresses consist of steps where each step is either a problem, or a solution for the previous step [...] Hence these are two different views on infinite regresses. (Wieland 2013a, 101)

I contend, however, that this difference is a difference in perspective and notation at the most. In fact, these descriptions of the nature of the infinite regress depend on each other.

Start with the Failure Theory. According to Wieland, the regress of justification starts like this and goes on from there:

> "(a) you have to justify p_1;
> (b) you provide a reason p_2 for p_1;
> (c) you have to justify p_2;
> (d) you provide a reason p_3 for p_2;" (Wieland 2013a, 101)

However, I do not see how this establishes Wieland's claim that no necessary conditions are involved here. To see this, note first that Wieland's steps alternate between a modal and a non-modal form – a form specifying what one *has to do* and a form specifying what is actually *done*. I shall therefore discuss three versions of this series – Wieland's own mixed series, an entirely modal series, and an entirely non-modal series. In all cases, I hold, necessary conditions for previous steps are vital.

Here is the entirely modal version, in with those elements which are changed with respect to Wieland's series are marked with a star:

(a) you have to justify p_1;
(b*) you have to provide a reason p_2 for p_1;
(c) you have to justify p_2;
(d*) you have to provide a reason p_3 for p_2;

In this series, however, it is clear that the regress problem relies on the claims that (b*) is indeed a necessary condition for (a), and that (c) is a necessary condition for (b*), and so on. If you have to justify p_1, then you have to provide a reason p_2 for p_1, simply because providing such a reason is what it *is* to justify p_1. And if you have to provide a reason p_2 for p_1, then you have to justify p_2, because it is only if p_2 is itself justified that it can serve as a reason for p_1. This, at least, is the idea of the regress objection.

Along these lines, it should also be straightforward to see why the entirely non-modal version also constitutes a series of necessary conditions. Again, I have marked the elements changed with respect to Wieland's schema:

(a*) you justify p_1;
(b) you provide a reason p_2 for p_1;
(c*) you justify p_2;
(d) you provide a reason p_3 for p_2;

As just explained, the idea of the regress is that (b) is necessary for (a*) because (b) constitutes (a*). And (c*) is neccessary for (b) because only justified propositions can be reasons for something else in the first place.

Given that both the entirely modal version and the entirely non-modal version clearly involve necessary conditions, it is somewhat unclear what motivates Wieland's decision to choose the mixed version and to claim that the succeeding steps are not necessary conditions of the preceding ones.

First, my discussion of the other two versions immediately entails that, even in the mixed version, there are two mutually intercepting series of necessary conditions. After all, being a necessary condition is a transitive relation. (c) is necessary for (a) since (c) is necessary for (b*), which, in turn, is necessary for (a). And (d) is necessary for (b) since (d) is necessary for (c*), which, in turn, is necessary for (b). Second, (c) is clearly a necessary condition for (b). After all, what you provide as a reason, according to (b), constitutes such a reason only if (c) is both true and the demand it states fulfilled. Third, while (b) may not be a necessary condition for (a), it is clear that (b) is what, according to (a), you have to do. Then however, (b) is indeed necessary for (a), given the further assumption that the acts of explanation or problem-solving which are demanded are actually performed.

Taken together, these three considerations show that the series clearly involves necessary conditions, after all. Thus, however one conceives of the regress series of the Failure Theory, Wieland is wrong to claim that it does not involve a chain of necessary conditions.

The Paradox Theory, on the other hand, is described by Wieland *only* in terms of necessary conditions and *not* in terms of solutions to problems. He spells out the beginning of the regress of justification as follows:

> "(a) p_1 is justified to S;
> (b) S has a reason p_2 for p_1 and p_2 is justified to S;
> (c) S has a reason p_3 for p_2 and p_3 is justified to S;
> (d) S has a reason p_4 for p_3 and p_4 is justified to S;" (Wieland 2013a, 101)

However, I do not see how this establishes Wieland's claim that there are no problems and solutions in this series (cf. Wieland 2013a, 101). Note that every step from (b) onwards is a conjunction of two claims, one stating that there is reason for a proposition, and another stating that the latter is justified. This correlates with Wieland's formulation of premise (2) in the Paradox Schema. As shown in section 2.1, this premise also throws together two elements which must be distinguished. Similarly, I contend that separating these conjuncts and understanding their relationship brings problems and explanations back in.

To see this, take step (b). The first conjunct says that S has a reason p_2 for p_1. But this fact creates a problem – i.e. this phenomenon requires an explanation. How can it be that p_2 is a reason for p_1 at all? And the problem has an obvious solution: p_2 is a reason for p_1 in part in virtue of the fact that p_2 is *justified* to S. It is p_2's status as justified which *makes* it a suitable reason for p_1. Thus, we have a problem and we have a solution – a phenomenon and an explanans –, but the solution is not stated in a *new* line, but as the second conjunct of the *same* line. Next, what about p_2? If it is justified, there needs to be a reason p_3 for p_2. And so line (c) begins and the regress continues, first with the second half of (c) and then onwards.

I conclude that this alleged core structural difference between the Paradox Schema and the Failure Schema is no difference at all. Infinite regresses can and must be understood both in terms of chains of necessary conditions and in terms of problems and solutions, of phenomena and grounds or explanatia.

3.2 Different Premises?

This leaves only one further argument from Wieland. He writes:

> The second main difference between the Paradox and Failure Theories is that the former requires an extra premise after the infinite regress, while the latter does not. Specifically, the Paradox Theory requires that the infinite regress conflict with something else (i.e. the premise that the infinite regress does not exist) such that we obtain a contradiction, and can reach a rejection by reductio. The Failure Theory does not require this: it follows immediately from an infinite regress of problems and solutions that the initial problem (i.e. as specified in line (1)) is never solved by the given solution (i.e. as specified in line (2)). (Wieland 2013a, 101)

However, the reader is led to a footnote and to the appendix, where Wieland points out that "the Failure Schema does make use of a suppressed line (II). Yet, this line is rather different from the kind of premise required by the

Paradox Schema." (Wieland 2013a, 101) This line has already been quoted on page 21, and, given my discussion in section 2, the difference Wieland points to is much smaller. The Paradox Schema features a *specific* premise which has it that, in this particular case, no infinite regress exists. The Failure Schema involves a *general* premise which states that infinite regresses cannot be part of problem-solving at all, never mind if there are any.

Still, Wieland has a point here. It seems to be part of the concept of explanation or grounding that there is never such a thing as a proper ground or explanans which requires an infinite regress of further, ever more fundamental elements. On the other hand, it is indeed correct to assume that certain infinite regresses are unproblematic – cases where (4) in the Paradox Schema is false – i.e. where (3) is true. For example:

(1) There are natural numbers.

(2) For any natural number, there is a new natural number which is the successor of the former.

(3) There is an infinity of natural numbers and each stands in the successor relation to the one before it. (1-2)

Thus, the second difference Wieland stresses may be smaller than initially stated, but it seems indeed important and substantial.

Not so. For all we have seen so far, it is an open question why (4) in the Paradox Schema is plausible in some cases and implausible in others. When can we plausibly claim that there is no such thing as an infinite regress?

To begin with, recall that the problem is less whether an infinite regress *exists*, as in the Paradox Schema, but instead whether infinite regresses can explain or ground anything (cf. pages 5 and 15). If no infinite regress exists, as (4) holds, then it also cannot explain or ground anything, as stated in Finity in the Regress Pentalemma Schema. As discussed in section 2.1, only this consequence Finity is crucial for the Paradox Schema. It does not matter whether or not it is inferred from (4).

This reveals the decisive difference between the infinite regress of justification and the infinite regress of natural numbers. The latter is unproblematic because each natural number has a successor, which is also a natural number, but the succeeding number *does not explain, ground or otherwise account for* the preceding one. Here we have necessary conditions alone, but no grounding or explanation. To the contrary, it is the successor-relation which accounts for the infinite series of natural numbers (at least in part). If, on the other hand, the succeeding elements of an infinite regress *do* play a role in grounding or explaining the preceding ones, as in the case of justification, then it is indeed plausible to assert premise (4) of the Paradox Schema – or, better, Finity, which follows from (4), but encompasses other cases, as well. However, this is just what Wieland presupposes in the Failure Schema and eventually makes explicit as the suppressed premise (II) (cf. page 21).

In sum, Wieland's second alleged difference between the Failure Schema and the Paradox Schema is no difference at all. Both schemata require premises which speak against the infinite regress, and as section 2 has argued, both are best understood as requiring the same premise, Finity.

To conclude, I would like to point out that these considerations can be generalized. This yields a general account of the distinction between vicious and benign regresses. An infinite regress is *benign* if the preceeding elements are sufficient for the succeeding ones, but the latter *do not explain or ground* the former. In this case, Ground is false and no pentalemma arises. Conversely, an infinite regress is *vicious* if the succeeding elements *do* ground or explain the preceding ones. Thus, if an infinite regress is supposed to be vicious and create a regress *problem* in the first place, it must crucially include Ground. This shows that the uniform account of regress problems as pentalemmata also explains the distinction between benign regresses and vicious ones.

Conclusion

I have argued that the dialectics of debates about regress *objections* should be understood in terms of a unified analysis of the underlying regress *problems* as pentalemmata. This view has been contrasted with Wieland's dualism between two different kinds of regress argument. Both of these have been incorporated into the general account of regess problems as pentalemmata.

However, as with every argument schema, the decisive question is practical utility. I have shown how my proposal can shed light on the debate about epistemic justification. But it requires much further work to elaborate and defend this analysis, and to see if the proposal can be helpful in other cases, as well. Such utility in illuminating and structuring philosophical debates is what the whole enterprise of argument reconstruction and of characterizing argument schemes is all about.[18]

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