

Justification, Justifying, and Leite's Localism<sup>1</sup>  
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*Abstract:* In a series of papers, Adam Leite has developed a novel view of justification tied to being able to responsibly justify a belief. Leite touts his view as (i) faithful to our ordinary practice of justifying beliefs, (ii) providing a novel response to an epistemological problem of the infinite regress, and (iii) resolving the “persistent interlocutor” problem. Though I find elements of Leite’s view of being able to justify a belief promising, I hold that there are several problems afflicting the overall picture of justification. In this paper, I argue that despite its ambitions, Leite’s view fails to solve the persistent interlocutor problem and does not avoid a vicious regress.

In a series of papers (2004, 2005, 2008, 2011), Adam Leite has developed a novel view of justification. For Leite, for a belief to be justified is for one to be able to responsibly justify it. Thus, Leite places at the center of his view an ability shared by many human cognizers: the ability to justify our beliefs. Leite touts his view as (i) being faithful to our ordinary practice of justifying beliefs, (ii) providing an interesting response to the problem of the infinite regress that differs from some standard forms of foundationalism, coherentism, and infinitism, and (iii) resolving a problem of reasoned discourse, the “persistent interlocutor” problem (see below).

Leite’s account of what it is to justify a belief is quite promising. However, I hold that there are several problems afflicting the overall picture of justification. After setting out Leite’s view in section I, I argue that despite Leite’s aims, his view fails to solve the persistent interlocutor problem (section II) and it does not avoid vicious regresses (section III). The upshot is that, while justifying our beliefs is an important practice of ordinary life, the particular way Leite attempts to incorporate that practice into an account of justification is unpromising.<sup>2</sup>

### I. Leite’s Localism

On Leite’s view, justified believing is tied to responsible believing. Leite holds that a belief is justified only if it is responsibly held (2008: 425). On Leite’s view, this notion of justified belief extends beyond mere *blameless* belief (2005: 396).<sup>3</sup> Further, as he repeatedly emphasizes (2005: 396; 2008: 421; 2011: 162), the notion of justification here is, in some hard to specify sense, connected to truth. A justified belief need not be true, but a belief being justified “makes it more likely, in some appropriately objective sense, that one’s belief is true” (2005: 409-10).

Importantly, Leite sees the requirements of *justified* belief as the requirements of *justifying* one’s beliefs. He writes,

When we take someone to be justified in virtue of having successfully justified a belief, it is because we take him or her to have performed in a way that meets certain requirements. A theory of justification can therefore be developed by articulating those requirements. To put it sloganistically: to be justified is to be

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<sup>2</sup> Though the results here are mostly negative, I do provide a positive account of what it is to justify a belief, and situate it within a framework hospitable to foundationalism, in my (unpublished).

<sup>3</sup> For an argument that justification *must* be more than blameless believing, see Oliveira (2018).

able to meet the requirements which structure our justificatory practices. (2005: 409-10)

Leite's proposal, then, is to take the standards of justifying our beliefs in conversation with others as providing the standards for what it is for a belief to be justified. This is a methodological departure from authors like William Alston and Robert Audi, who urge that we should not understand justified belief in terms of the activity of justifying beliefs.<sup>4</sup> Leite defends this important methodological difference in his (2004). I do not have the space to discuss this dispute here, so I will set it aside.

Because justification requires justifying it is an implication of Leite's view that young children and animals lack justified beliefs (of the kind that Leite is interested in), since they do not and cannot justify their beliefs. Leite recognizes this consequence (2004: 243-5; 2005: 398 fn. 6; 2008: 422; 2011: 165). He finds it unproblematic. Given that mature human adults have different capacities than young children and animals, it should be unsurprising that our beliefs might have different evaluative properties than theirs. Though one might object to Leite's view on this point, I will not here.

Leite lays out a series of requirements that our ordinary practice of justifying beliefs reveals. His discussion is long and complex. My exposition will have two parts: a discussion of three general principles Leite endorses followed by a discussion of how to "terminate" a conversation in which one is justifying an assertion.

First, Leite accepts what I'll call *Adequate Reasons*:

*Adequate Reasons*: In order to be justified in believing that  $p$ , one must be able to provide a good reason (or reasons) for believing  $p$ .<sup>5</sup>

*Adequate Reasons* fits Leite's idea that justification is tied to truth. It is not sufficient, to be justified in believing that  $p$ , that the only reasons that one can cite are inadequate reasons, that is, reasons not connected to the truth of  $p$ . Justifying requires adequate reasons.<sup>6</sup>

Leite accepts a second principle, which I'll call *Justified Reasons*:

*Justified Reasons*: In order to be justified in believing any  $p$ , one must be justified in believing the considerations to which one might appeal in support of believing it.<sup>7</sup>

The idea behind *Justified Reasons* is natural enough. If I defend my belief that  $p$  by appealing to a consideration  $q$ , then I've not justified my belief that  $p$  if I'm not justified in believing  $q$ . This holds *even if*  $q$  would otherwise be an adequate reason for believing  $p$ .

Leite also accepts a third principle, which I'll call *Inferential Internalism about Justification* ('*Inferential Internalism*' hereafter):

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<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Alston (1989: 83 fn. 3), Audi (1993: 145). Alston and Audi were not the first to urge such a methodology; see Chisholm (1966: 24-5) for an earlier example.

<sup>5</sup> This is a quote from (2005: 402, 410), but see also (2011: 162). Leite calls this principle (2\*). I've changed the title to something more informative.

<sup>6</sup> Leite's ontology of epistemic reasons contains beliefs. He allows, in his (2011), that experiences can be reasons as well. For purposes here, I'll assume that only beliefs can be epistemic reasons. Permitting experiences as possible epistemic reasons would merely complicate some of the points I make.

<sup>7</sup> This is a quote from (2005: 402, 410). Leite calls this principle (3\*). I've changed the title to be more informative. Notice per fn.7 that this principle only applies to cases where one's reason is another belief. A more complicated principle would need to be provided for cases where one was appealing to an occurrent experience.

*Inferential Internalism about Justification*: If one's belief that P is justified in virtue of believing it on the basis of R, one must (i) believe that R evidentially supports P, and (ii) that belief must be justified as well.<sup>8</sup>

*Inferential Internalism* refers to believing P "on the basis of" R. Leite has in mind the basing relation. Leite defends a distinctive account of the basing relation. First, the basing relation is closely tied to "believing for a reason" (2004: 226ff.); to base one's belief that *p* on one's belief that *q* is to make *q* one's reason for believing *p*. Second, Leite rejects an account of the basing relation on which basing relations are not only established prior to the activity of justifying beliefs but are not directly changed by it. Rather, he holds that the reason for which one believes can be directly determined in the activity of justifying. Third, Leite permits that one's belief may be justified without being based on anything. The resulting picture of the basing relation is one that emphasizes the activity of justifying. Being justified does not require that one has *already* based one's belief on a reason. Rather, being justified is *being able* to provide an adequate justification, which allows that the justifying reason for which one believes is determined by the activity of justifying one's belief in a conversational context. Notice too that the requirements of *Inferential Internalism* only "kick in" once one has based one's belief on a reason. Thus, on Leite's view, a belief might be justified and yet not beholden to the requirements of *Inferential Internalism* because one has yet to base it on anything.

Taking stock, on Leite's view, my belief that *p* is justified only if I'm able to provide adequate reasons, which are themselves justified. Of course, those reasons must be such that I could also provide an adequate defense of them. But prior to the activity of justifying any particular belief of mine, I need not have based my beliefs on any others. My belief that *p* will usually belong to set of beliefs on the same topic. Each of those beliefs, like *p*, is justified only if I'm able to provide adequate reasons for them too. So long as I have a sufficiently large set of beliefs on a topic, I can justify various beliefs by appealing to other background beliefs that are relevant. Justification is, in this sense, local.

These three principles come from the practice of justifying our beliefs. However, our ordinary practice also recognizes two disjoint cases.<sup>9</sup> Sometimes, in conversation, the burden of proof is on a person to justify her assertion; that is, it would be appropriate or otherwise correct to inquire after her reasons. Other times, such an inquiry is incorrect and inappropriate; the burden of proof is on the interlocutor, not the person making the assertion. For instance, in most conversations, if I were to assert that I remember having hash browns for breakfast, or that I'm currently awake, it would be bizarre and inappropriate for an interlocutor to demand justification. But if I were to assert who will win the next upcoming political election, or what the population of Toronto is, it would not be inappropriate to request justification.<sup>10</sup>

Leite introduces the term 'terminating claim' for those "claims... for which it is incorrect, for reasons internal to the structure of the activity of justifying, for the interlocutor to demand further justifying reasons and for which the defendant need not provide further justifying reasons even when sincerely engaged in the activity of justifying" (2005: 405). Though it is not explicit

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. (2008: 422). Leite actually formulates a more general version concerning any "positive epistemic status  $\emptyset$ ." The principled I formulated is just an instance of the more general one.

<sup>9</sup> What follows is not universally accepted. However, as it is common ground between Leite and myself, I won't defend it.

<sup>10</sup> At least, not *epistemically* inappropriate. It might be rude, unseemly, or redundant given a particular conversation. Like Leite, I believe we can distinguish between these ways of being inappropriate and a relevant epistemic sense. Further, I follow him in leaving these notions of appropriateness/correctness at an intuitive level and will not offer an analysis of it.

in this passage, Leite has in mind cases where it is inappropriate for an interlocutor to demand reasons *without* providing reasons to doubt one's assertions.

But 'terminating claim' is just a label for claims that play a particular role. Leite proposes that terminating claims are those claims a person correctly and responsibly takes there to be no reason to doubt (2005: 405, 407-10). The locution 'there is no reason to doubt *p*' is something of a technical term for Leite. For him, a reason to doubt is "a consideration whose truth tells against the truth of the belief in question or against the reliability of the way in which it was acquired" (2005: 411). To say that there is no reason to doubt is to say that "there are no true propositions which in fact tell against the truth of one's belief" (2005: 411). Thus, *there being* no reason to doubt that *p* is distinct from *my having* no reason to doubt that *p*. For I might lack any reasons to doubt *p* and yet there be reasons that do tell against *p* of which I am unaware. In that situation it will be true that I have no reason to doubt, even though there is reason to doubt.

Recognizing a bifurcation between cases where it is appropriate to request justifying reasons in conversation and cases where it is not, Leite proposes a principle I'll call *Bifurcated*:

*Bifurcated*: It is a necessary condition for being justified in believing *p* that:

A. Base Clause:

- a. There is no reason to doubt the truth of *p*,
- b. One is in a position to terminate a justificatory conversation by advertizing, in a responsible way, to the claim that there is no reason to doubt the truth of *p* (or to something to that effect)
- c. One does not currently believe *p* on the basis of some bad reason or in an irresponsible or irrational way

B. OR, Adequate Grounding Requirement:

- a. One is able to defend believing *p* by appealing to consideration *q*, or to a chain of good reasons beginning with a consideration *q*, which:
  - i. One believes,
  - ii. Is in fact a good reason for believing *p* (or a good reason for believing the next consideration in the chain of good reasons supporting *p*)
  - iii. Meets conditions (Aa)-(Ac) (substituting 'q' for 'p' as appropriate)<sup>11</sup>

Leite's idea here is straightforward. Sometimes when we assert our beliefs in conversation, it is appropriate to defend them. *Bifurcated sub B* is meant to apply to them. It implies that those beliefs are justified only if we are able to defend them by citing good reasons for them that we believe, which we can in turn defend by citing good reason for them that we believe, etc. But it is not required that this defending in conversation go on forever. Eventually, we reach a terminating claim. That terminating claim is justified so long as the belief it expresses meets the conditions of *Bifurcated sub A*. At that point, the burden of proof shifts to one's interlocutors. So long as they fail to provide a reason for doubting one's terminating claim, one is entitled to refuse further requests for justification from one's conversational interlocutors.

It is important to be clear: if a claim is a terminating claim, all that follows is that in a conversation I *need not* justify it. As a matter of fact, given Leite's various principles, it follows that I *must* be able to justify my belief, even if just to myself. Thus, an interesting feature of

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<sup>11</sup> This is a quotation from (2005: 410). I've done some minor rewriting of referring terms.

Leite's view is that the requirements of justification and the requirements of justificatory conversations come apart.<sup>12</sup>

But how am I to justify my belief, when it is a terminating claim? That is, suppose in conversation I assert:

(1)  $p$ ,

where  $p$  is a terminating claim. Of course, I may have other beliefs that support  $p$  that I could cite in defending my belief. But suppose that isn't the case. For instance, suppose all the other beliefs that provide good reasons for believing  $p$  I've already asserted in a justificatory conversation and are, themselves, based on  $p$ . In such a case, I couldn't appeal to them in my justification of my belief that  $p$  without reasoning in a circle. How might I, in such a situation, justify such a belief?

Leite points out that, on his view, if  $p$  is a terminating claim, there is no reason to doubt it. He then proposes that I could justify my belief that (1) by adverting to:

(2) There's no reason to doubt that  $p$ .

Of course, by Leite's earlier principles it must be the case that I can justify my belief that (2) as well. Leite's proposal is the same: one can justify one's belief that (2) by adverting to:

(3) There's no reason to doubt that there's no reason to doubt  $p$ .

So long as one is able to keep iterating in this way—and Leite thinks one can—one can provide a series of justifying beliefs. As Leite insists (2005: 415), it is not that one must have already gone through this reasoning. Indeed, on Leite's view, most of our beliefs that are justified can be justified without ever thinking about this line of reasoning. Rather, what matters is that this kind of reasoning is open to one in those cases where one is required to justify a belief that is a terminating claim but one cannot appeal to other beliefs one already has.

Leite's view diverges from some standard articulations of other views. First, Leite's view differs from prototypical coherentism in two ways. First, some forms of coherentism (e.g. Bonjour (1985), arguably Elgin (1996)) require *global* coherence: a belief is justified only if it coheres with *all* of one's beliefs. Leite's view rejects global coherence in favor of a local structure. On Leite's view, even if I hold incoherent beliefs on some topic, so long as it is more or less irrelevant to a different set of beliefs, such incoherence is no barrier to my justification for believing the other set. Second, coherence theories can be seen as stating sufficient conditions for justification: that one's belief "coheres" with a larger set of beliefs (where "cohering" might amount to more than just logical consistency). Leite's view requires more than *just* coherence, but also the ability to justify one's beliefs and believe responsibly.

Second, Leite's view differs from foundationalism. At the very least, foundationalism holds that there are *basic beliefs*, roughly, beliefs that can be justified independently of the positive epistemic relations they might bear to other beliefs. Leite's view implies that there are no basic beliefs; for a belief is justified in virtue of there being other justified beliefs that are adequate reasons for it.

Finally, Leite's view is similar to Klein's "infinetism" (1999, 2007a,b, 2014). Comparing Leite's view to Klein's is difficult because there is some doubt that Klein's position is properly thought of as a form of infinitism (see Bergmann (2007, 2014)) and what Klein emphasizes is not always what Leite emphasizes. With that in mind, I'll point out one similarity and three differences. Both agree that some beliefs are justified only if there is an infinite series of beliefs that is in some sense "available" to a person. But for Leite some beliefs are justified by

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<sup>12</sup> Putting the point in terms familiar from Robert Audi's work (1993: 118ff.), Leite's has a foundationalist solution to the *dialectic* regress but not to the *structural* regress.

belonging to a set of localized beliefs on the topic. It is unclear if this is the case for Klein. Second, Klein would reject Leite's *Inferential Internalism* (1998: 922; 1999: 309). Finally, at least at one point, Klein rejects the principle that if a belief that  $p$  is justified by being based upon a belief that  $q$ , then the belief that  $q$  must itself be justified (2007b: 27). That rejection is in tension, if not formally inconsistent, with Leite's *Justified Reasons*.

With Leite's view firmly in mind, I turn to problems.

## II. The Persistent Interlocutor Problem

Suppose you try to justify your belief by citing some reason in favor of it. A persistent interlocutor is someone who, every time you provide a reason, asks you to justify that reason without offering reasons to doubt what you said. Ordinary practice is opposed to persistent interlocutors: we do not act as if the persistent interlocutor would always be behaving appropriately or correctly.<sup>13</sup> The problem of the persistent interlocutor is to state when exactly it is inappropriate for the persistent interlocutor to persist in her questioning. After all, there seems to be nothing inherently inappropriate or incorrect with requesting a justification for an assertion.

Recall that Leite uses 'terminating claim' for claims that it would be inappropriate for an interlocutor to challenge without providing reasons to doubt and for which the defendant need not provide any justifying reasons. To provide a plausible account of terminating claims would be to solve the persistent interlocutor problem. Leite's own proposal is that a claim is a terminating claim when the "defendant correctly and responsibly takes there to be no reason to doubt it" (2005: 405, 407). Three comments on this proposal. First, from the mere fact that I correctly believe that there's no reason to doubt  $p$ , it does not follow that  $p$  is a terminating claim; for I might have irresponsibly arrived at that belief. Second, it is possible for an interlocutor to be mistaken about reasons to doubt. But from the mere fact that an interlocutor mistakenly thinks there are reasons for doubting  $p$  it does not follow that  $p$  is not a terminating claim (2005: 408). Third, since reasons for doubt can change, so too terminating claims can change as well.

Leite's account of terminating claims is problematic. There are many claims that agents can correctly and responsibly take there to be no reason to doubt for which it is appropriate to request justification and for justification to be given. A number of cases illustrate this, including one of Leite's. He considers two partners engaged in the following conversation:

Stage I:

A (coming out of her study): 'My sister is unhappy with her job.'

A's spouse: 'Why do you think that?'

Stage II:

A: 'I just talked to my mother on the phone, and she said so.'

A's spouse: 'Why do you think it was your mother?' (2005: 404)

(Leite stipulates that A's spouse has no information which bears on the truth of A's statement at stage I.) Leite writes that "A's spouse's second question is obviously inappropriate, even ridiculous..." whereas this "contrasts sharply" with stage I, where "A's sincere engagement in the activity of justifying required A to offer justifying reasons" (2005: 404). Thus, by Leite's lights, A's claim at stage I is not a terminating claim—since it was appropriate to request justification for it—but A's claim at stage II is a terminating claim—since it was inappropriate to request justification for it.

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<sup>13</sup> Not everyone agrees. See Rescorla (2009a, b) for a dissenting voice. I don't have the space to discuss Rescorla's arguments, though I hope to in subsequent work.

The problem is that, given a natural way of understanding Leite's case, A responsibly and correctly believes that there's no reason to doubt at *either stage*. Though Leite does not develop this example, it is natural to suppose that this is a standard case where, e.g., A's sister really is unhappy with her job, she wouldn't lie to her mother about such things, she hasn't told A she is happy with her job, there is no strong evidence that she is happy with her job, etc. In short, it is natural to understand this as a case where there is no reason to doubt that A's sister really is unhappy with her job. Further, A is basing her belief in a responsible way, upon the testimony of her mother, and not on wish fulfillment or the like. And it is natural to understand A as maintaining that there is no reason to doubt A's sister is unhappy with her job. Thus, on a natural way of understanding this case, A responsibly and correctly believes that there is no reason to doubt that her sister is unhappy with her job. Thus, on Leite's official view of what terminating claims consist in, A's claim at stage I would be a terminating claim, even though it clearly is not.

In a fn. (2005: 408, fn. 18), Leite recognizes that his example "can be understood" so that A's claim at Stage I is one she correctly and responsibly takes there to be no reason to doubt. However, he says this is not "mandatory" and for his purposes "should not be understood this way." It is difficult to evaluate these comments as Leite says nothing about what exactly it would take for an understanding of this case to be one where A's claim at Stage I is one she correctly and responsibly takes there to be no reason to doubt. However, his *implication* is that his case is not naturally understood to be one where A's claim at Stage I turns out to be a terminating claim because it is not one she correctly and responsibly takes there to be no reason to doubt. I've suggested that this implication is wrong. Of course, it might simply be that Leite's case is simply too under described for it to be used to argue that his own theory fails to sort his own cases. So perhaps it is best to turn to other cases.

Here's a different case that illustrates the implausibility of Leite's account of terminating claims. Suppose I've carefully and meticulously studied a portion of tax law involving property in my home state, arriving at the belief that houses are ineligible for certain tax breaks if they were constructed between 1962-1975. I correctly and responsibly believe there is no reason to doubt this and it is based on careful, even painstaking, study.<sup>14</sup> If Leite's view is correct, then any conversation in which I assert this belief of mine will be one in which my assertion is a terminating claim. Thus, any conversation in which I assert my belief will be one in which it would be incorrect for others to request the reasons for my belief and correct for me to offer no justification for it. Clearly that isn't right. To take an obvious example, if a friend needed help filing his taxes and wanted to know if he could claim a certain tax break for his house and I said he could not given the year his house was constructed, it would be entirely appropriate and correct for my friend to request my reasons for that belief. This would be entirely appropriate and correct *even if* my interlocutor believed that that my assertion was one that I correctly and responsibly took there to be no reason to doubt. Assertions like "houses are ineligible for certain tax breaks if they were constructed between 1962-1975" are very different from assertions like (e.g.) "that was my mother on the phone just now" even if both can meet Leite's conditions for being a terminating claim.

Now Leite does draw a distinction between a subject violating some norm or rule and a subject being criticizable for violating that norm or rule (2005: 408). Sometimes an interlocutor's questions might be ridiculous, like when they are knowingly flaunting some rule. But other times an interlocutor might reasonably believe they are following the relevant rules of discourse even

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<sup>14</sup> If you dispute this, add further details to the case to get one where it is more convincing to you that this belief was reasonably arrived at and there is no reason to doubt it.

when they are not. In such a case, the subject may be violating some norm without being criticizable for violating it. But it is clear that this distinction will not help alleviate my criticism. For my criticism is not that a subject would be *uncriticizable* in asking for my reasons for thinking houses are ineligible for certain tax breaks if they were constructed between 1962-1975. My criticism is that it is clearly *appropriate* or *correct* to make such a request. It would be correct *even if* my interlocutor believed that that my assertion was one that I correctly and responsibly took there to be no reason to doubt. Subjects may (or may not) also be uncriticizable in making such a request. But my criticism does not require taking a stand on that issue.

### III. The Problem of Vicious Regresses

Given the principles Leite endorses, it is natural to wonder if his view about justified belief produces any vicious regresses.<sup>15</sup> Now not all “regresses” are vicious;<sup>16</sup> from the claims that 0 is a number and every number has a successor we generate an infinite “regress” of numbers, but few would object. Thus, the issue is (i) does Leite’s view license or require, in some sense, an infinite regress, and (ii) is that regress vicious?

I will argue that Leite’s view does require a regress and there is good reason for thinking the particular regress is vicious. But a clarificatory remark is in order. Frequently, in discussions of the regress of justification, the issue is framed as to whether a theory generates or requires a regress given *just* the assumption that the agent has an (inferentially) justified belief. It is natural to focus on such cases because it is the most minimal case. If a theory generates a vicious regress in the most minimal case, then we can set it aside as inadequate. But this is only one way for a theory to imply a vicious regress. And merely because a theory fails to generate a regress given such a minimal assumption does not mean that it is free of regress problems.

As a matter of fact, I do not think Leite’s view generates a regress given *just* the assumption that some agent has a justified belief. Nonetheless, given more complicated assumptions about how agents *could* and *do* base their beliefs, I will argue that Leite’s view does generate a regress and that regress is vicious. Since an adequate theory of justification needs to be sensitive to not just the most minimal case but other cases as well, the fact that Leite’s view generates a regress in these more complicated cases is a problem for his view.

#### A. Regress Generating?

To see if Leite’s view generates a regress, let’s focus on a person with a finite number of beliefs. By focusing on a case of finite beliefs we can model Leite’s idea that justification is a local matter, concerning a subset of a subject’s beliefs which are adequate reasons for one another. So let’s suppose a subject—call her “Selina”—has three beliefs, *p*, *q*, and *r*, where each is an adequate reason for the others. Suppose now:

(4) Selina’s belief that *p* is justified.

By *Adequate Reasons* Selina must be able to provide a good reason for her belief. Let’s suppose that in a moment of reflection alone in her room Selina utilizes this ability so that:

(5) Selina provides *q* to herself as a good reason for *p*.

Let us suppose that Selina does not just provide *q* as a good reason for her belief, but that she *bases* her belief on *q*. Since Selina adverted to *q* in justifying her belief, it follows from *Justified Reasons* and (5):

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<sup>15</sup> Notice that I’m here concerned with Leite’s account of justified beliefs *not* his account of assertions justified in a conversational context. Thus, the argument here does not require indexing to a conversation context. Further, since we are concerned with beliefs, and not assertions in a context, Leite’s claims about terminating claims and the like are not relevant.

<sup>16</sup> See Huemer (2014) for a discussion of non-vicious regresses.



(6) Selina's belief that  $q$  is justified.

Again, by *Adequate Reasons*, Selina must be able to provide a good reason for her belief. Suppose, reflecting more, Selina utilizes this ability:

(7) Selina provides  $r$  to herself as a good reason for  $q$ .

Let us suppose again that Selina also bases her belief  $q$  on her belief  $r$ . By *Justified Reasons*, it follows from (7) that:

(8) Selina's belief that  $r$  is justified.

At this point a problem emerges. For by *Adequate Reasons*, Selina must be able to cite something in defense of  $r$ . But there's nothing for Selina to cite! Citing  $r$  would be to reason in a (very tight) circle. But given the way she has based her beliefs, citing either  $q$  or  $p$  would be to reason in a circle as well. And Leite, like most epistemologists, accepts a prohibition on circular reasoning.

Clearly this reasoning didn't depend upon the particular number of beliefs Selina has. Analogous reasoning would show, in cases of four beliefs or ten beliefs, that eventually the subject would not conform with Leite's principles. The basic recipe for an infinite regress is here: if a subject bases her beliefs sequentially on adequate reasons, she will have to keep going, appealing to more and more beliefs.

Notice, additionally, that I've yet to refer to Leite's *Inferential Internalism*. His acceptance of that principle will raise the specter of further regresses. For instance, once Selina bases her belief that  $q$  on her belief that  $p$ , she'll have to justifiedly believe:

(9)  $q$  is a good reason for believing  $p$

But the reasoning just rehearsed applies to (9) as well. Thus, in the course of basing one's belief on a series of reasons, several distinct regresses might loom: the "lower order" one as well as a series of higher-order ones at each junction where one base one's belief on a reason.

Importantly, in so far as these regresses are generated it is because a subject bases her belief on others. At this point, Leite might object. After all, he holds that a subject can justifiedly believe  $p$  even if she's yet to base that belief on anything. And Leite might claim that allowing for that possibility is all that is needed to block the regress.<sup>17</sup>

This response is not convincing. Recall my earlier remarks about ways that a view about justification might generate a regress. One way is that it generates a regress given *just* the assumption that Selina's beliefs are justified. I'm willing to concede that Leite's view does not generate a regress given just that claim and for the reason he claims, to wit, that Selina's beliefs could be justified even if she has yet to base them on anything. But it does not follow that there is *no* way for Leite's view to generate a regress. More specifically, even if Leite's view does not generate a regress given some assumptions about Selina's beliefs, it is consistent that it generates a regress given *other* assumptions about Selina's belief. And my claim is that given the assumption that Selina has based her beliefs sequentially, Leite's view generates a regress. Pointing out that Leite's view does not imply an infinite regress in a simpler case does not show that I am wrong. Further, the kind of case I'm focusing on is one where the agent does base her beliefs in certain ways. Thus, the explanation Leite might give for why an agent's beliefs do not generate a regress in certain cases—namely, the agent has not based her beliefs in certain ways—does not apply to the kinds of cases I'm focusing on.

One might try to block the regress by saying that once Selina has based her belief that  $p$  on  $q$  she is required to not base her belief that  $q$  on her belief that  $r$ . If she does not base her belief that

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<sup>17</sup> See (2008: 434) where Leite writes, "To break the threatened regress, you only have to say [some beliefs are justified without being held on the basis of particular considerations]." Cf. (2004: 242).

$q$  on  $r$ , then the regress fails. For if  $q$  is not based on  $r$ , then Leite's *Justifying Reasons* would not imply that  $r$  is justified. And thus the regress is cut short. However, this kind of response is *ad hoc* and is best avoided.

One might reply, on Leite's behalf, that he *has* given an explanation for why Selina can refuse to base her belief that  $q$  on something given that she has already based her belief that  $p$ . Leite might appeal to the fact that her belief that  $q$  is one that she correctly and responsibly takes there to be no reason to doubt. Further, such a status does not seem to be an *ad hoc* one.

This reply is mistaken for an instructive reason. It fails to carefully distinguish between when an agent is entitled to not do something and when an agent is required to not do something. Leite might maintain that if Selina's belief that  $q$  is one which she correctly and responsibly takes there to be no reason to doubt, then she is entitled to not base it on something. But to block the threatening regress it needs to be maintained that if Selina's belief that  $q$  is one which she correctly and responsibly takes there to be no reason to doubt, then she is *required* to not base it on something else. But in no way does it follow that if one is entitled to not  $\Phi$ , then one is required to not  $\Phi$ . (At many restaurants, I am entitled to not order an appetizer. It does not follow that I am required to not order one.) Thus, *even if* Selina's belief that  $q$  is one which she correctly and responsibly takes there to be no reason to doubt and *even if* that means she is entitled to not base it on anything, none of that by itself explains why Selina is required to not base her belief that  $q$  on  $r$ .

Additionally, this proposed response seems to assume that *anytime* a belief is one that an agent correctly and responsibly takes there to be no reason to doubt, then the agent is required to not base it on anything else. This idea is not very plausible on the face of it. Additionally, as we saw earlier, agents might acquire beliefs that they correctly and responsibly take there to be no reason to doubt because they based those beliefs on other beliefs they correctly and responsibly take there to be no reason to doubt. This proposal implies that such agents are not believing as they ought. That is surprising and implausible.

To avoid the problem of the previous paragraph, this proposed response could be refined as follows. *Sometimes* when an agent has a belief that she correctly and responsibly takes there to be no reason to doubt, she is required to not base that belief on anything else. But to block the regress I described, the refinement will have to say that she is so required when basing her belief would generate an infinite regress. The refined proposal then becomes: beliefs an agent correctly and responsibly takes there to be no reason to doubt are such that agents are required to not base them on other things when doing so will result in an infinite regress. But now the proposed response is just as *ad hoc* as I claim.

I've argued that given certain assumptions about ways an agent has based her beliefs, Leite's view generates a regress. But there's a second argument that Leite's view generates a regress. This argument does not turn on assumptions about how, as a matter of fact, an agent has based her beliefs but how she *could*. For instance, even if Selina has yet to base her beliefs on anything, it's nonetheless true that *if* Selina bases her belief that  $p$  on  $q$ , then she *cannot* base her belief that  $q$  on  $p$ , on pain of reasoning in a circle. And if she bases her belief that  $p$  on  $q$  and her belief that  $q$  on  $r$ , then she cannot base her belief that  $r$  on either  $p$  or  $q$ . Thus, even if Selina has yet to base any of her beliefs on any others, a prohibition on circular reasoning does place *some* constraints on how Selina *could* base her beliefs.

Suppose Selina's beliefs are justified, so that (on Leite's view) she is able to justify each. Suppose Selina is able to sequentially base her beliefs on adequate reasons, one after another, so that the beliefs form a sequence that she might appeal to in justifying her beliefs. No matter how

Selina might try to sequentially base her beliefs on adequate reasons, she would violate Leite's principles. For instance, if she justifies  $p$  by basing it on  $q$ , and then justifies  $q$  by basing it on  $r$ , she would have to provide an adequate reason for  $r$  when she has none, violating Leite's principles. But obviously there was nothing special about that particular sequence of basings. So there are no ways for Selina to base her beliefs sequentially on adequate reasons and not violate Leite's principles even if she has yet to base her beliefs.

This argument does contain one additional assumption, which was not needed for the prior argument in which Selina did base her beliefs in certain ways. That assumption was that Selina is able to sequentially base her beliefs on adequate reasons one after another—this is something she can possibly do. Without this assumption, the argument would not go through. So one way of resisting the argument is to deny this assumption.

But I do not see any reason for rejecting this assumption. It is obvious that agents can and do sequentially base their beliefs on adequate reasons. Additionally, if anything, this assumption sits quite well with Leite's overall theory of basing. For instance, Leite's (2004) theory of basing permits that agents can establish basing relations deliberately; in fact, Leite writes as if one could *make* or *decide* what it is one's beliefs are based on. Thus, there is no reason why Selina could not base her belief that  $p$  on  $q$  and then her belief that  $q$  on  $r$  by making or deciding those things are so.

Additionally, denying that assumption will not avoid the problem. I've been assuming a case where none of Selina's beliefs are yet based on anything. This is to be hospitable to Leite's idea (2004) that sometimes beliefs are justified without having yet been based on something. But of course sometimes our beliefs are already based on other beliefs, perhaps because we've already thought through the relevant subject matter or because of the particular way we acquired the beliefs. For instance, I might believe that there are moles in my backyard. This belief might be already based on other beliefs given the way I formed it. E.g., yesterday I saw that there were round tunnel mounds in my backyard and I believe, in general, moles are frequently responsible for such mounds. These beliefs caused me to believe that there are moles in my backyard in such a way so that this belief is based on them. In this case, my belief that there are moles in my backyard is already based on other beliefs of mine. (To be sure, I also have many background beliefs about moles—e.g., that they are mammals, are relatively small, live underground, etc. But my belief that my backyard has moles is not based on any of these. At best, some of them causally support my belief that moles are frequently responsible for mounds. Nor do any of these background beliefs provide a reason for me to believe that there are moles in my backyard—after all, I had those background beliefs before I saw the mounds in my backyard and before then they did not justify a belief that there were moles in my backyard.) Thus, instead of focusing on a case where an agent has yet to base her beliefs sequentially on adequate reasons, we could just focus on a case where she already has. The result will be the same as the case with Selina. Thus, denying this assumption will not help Leite avoid the problem.

Thus far I've focused on cases where the only adequate reasons that Selina might advert to are other beliefs. If Selina were to appeal to occurrent experiences, would that help avoid a regress? There are two reasons for thinking appealing to occurrent experiences would not help Leite here. First, though our occurrent experiences are epistemically relevant to some of our beliefs, they are only relevant to a small fraction of our justified beliefs. So, at best, experiences would help a fraction of our justified beliefs avoid a regress.<sup>18</sup> Second, Leite is no foundationalist; he does not think the regress can be avoided by appealing to one's experiences.

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<sup>18</sup> I've made this point at greater length in my (2018).

So allowing Selina to appeal to her occurrent experiences will not help Leite keep the regress from generating.

Another objection. Leite might object that agents sequentially basing their beliefs is unnecessary for justification. Further, it would be silly for agents to sequentially base their beliefs. The silliness might be obscured since the Selina case is a toy case with just three beliefs. But if we imagine a normal cognizer, with a complex set of beliefs on some subject matter, it is more apparent how silly and unnecessary it would be for an agent to base their beliefs sequentially on such reasons.

However, it is not at all clear that such a thing is silly. First, there is nothing silly in general with sequentially basing one's beliefs on adequate reasons. In fact, we do it all the time. It is doubtful that there is anything silly with basing our beliefs even if we correctly and responsibly take there to be no reason to doubt them. In the earlier example, I correctly and responsibly took there to be no reason to doubt that houses are ineligible for certain tax breaks if they were constructed between 1962-1975. Clearly there is nothing silly in me basing that belief on various other beliefs resulting from my careful study of the law.

But even if it is unnecessary for agents to sequentially base their beliefs on adequate reasons and even if it is silly for agents to do so, human beings *could* base their beliefs in this way. Further, this is not some remote or strange possibility. Most normal human adults could spend a little time in the afternoon doing this. To be clear, we are not focusing on any kind of global justification of all of a subject's beliefs. We're focusing on a small set of particular beliefs in some subject matter. And even if an agent has a large number of beliefs on that subject matter, it is unlikely that most of them will provide adequate reasons for a small set of particular beliefs in that subject matter. And I'm not suggesting that Leite's view requires that agents sequentially base their beliefs on adequate reasons in that subject matter. Rather, I'm focusing on what would result, given Leite's theory, from the possibility of an agent sequentially basing some particular beliefs on a localized topic on adequate reasons. And, I've argued, in such circumstances it generates an infinite regress. An adequate theory of justification should be beholden to such possibilities. Thus, such possibilities are fair to use when evaluating a theory of justification like Leite's.

A final objection. One might defend Leite's position as follows. Perhaps sequentially basing or justifying one's beliefs is an important epistemic practice—but only in moderation. Engaging in this practice can, eventually, cost one's beliefs of justification if taken to extremes. Thus, even if it is right that Leite's view does generate a regress, and even if that regress is vicious in that it robs a subject of justification, it does not follow that this is a problem for Leite's view. Perhaps the right lesson to learn is that one should not sequentially justify one's beliefs on adequate reasons until one runs out of them.

As an exegetical matter, it is very doubtful that Leite would countenance this response. For instance, when he does consider the kind of case I'm interested in (2005: 414), he does not consider this response and instead seems to think that a regress of reasons is open to agents that could provide justification. Additionally, this response is *ad hoc*. Why wouldn't it be problematic for a view that it sometimes generates a vicious regress? This kind of response looks like special pleading.

We can put the main argument of this section more abstractly as follows. Suppose an agent has a finite set of justified beliefs. Suppose, further, that agent sequentially bases those beliefs on adequate reasons. And, finally, suppose that the set of justified beliefs that the agent uses in basing her beliefs is finite. Given Leite's view, a contradiction follows—Leite's view will imply

that one of the subject's beliefs is unjustified when *ex hypothesis* it is justified. Thus, if Leite's view is correct, this case is not possible. But clearly it is possible for an agent to have a finite set of justified beliefs. Equally clearly it is possible for an agent to sequentially base all of the belief in that finite set on adequate reasons. Thus, if Leite's view is correct, it must be the case that if an agent has a finite set of justified beliefs and is sequentially basing them on adequate reasons, she must be able to appeal to an infinite set of justified beliefs.<sup>19</sup>

The main argument shows that an agent cannot sequentially base her beliefs on some subject matter by appealing to a finite set of adequate reasons but must be able to appeal to an infinite set. But it is not hard to see that the set is infinite because Leite's view is forcing a regress in this case. More precisely, when an agent tries to base her beliefs, sequentially, on some topic she will eventually reach a belief—*b*—which she cannot justify by appealing to the other beliefs on that topic. By Leite's principles, she will need some further adequate reason for believing *b*, which she could advert to in basing her belief *b*, and would be justified. Suppose she can meet these requirements with a belief, *b* + 1. By Leite's principles, she will need some further adequate reason for believing *b* + 1, which she could advert to in basing *b* + 1, and would be justified. Suppose she meets these requirements with a belief, *b* + 2, etc. There's an infinite regress here of adequate, justified reasons that an agent could use to provide a sequence of justifications.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, there is a possible case in which Leite's view generates a regress. In fact, there are many *actual* cases in which Leite's view generates a regress, as sequentially basing one's beliefs on adequate reason in a subject matter until one runs out of beliefs on that subject matter is not some remote possibility but something that many people have done. But the mere fact that Leite's view generates a regress in certain cases is not essentially problematic. What matters is whether the particular regress is *vicious*.<sup>21</sup>

There are three reasons for thinking this regress would be vicious. First, the "finite mind" problem: the regress might require human beings to have an infinite number of beliefs, and they don't. Second, the regress might require human beings to grasp increasingly complex propositions, and they can't. Third, the regress might require human beings to have an infinite number of adequate reasons and they don't. Leite treats these possible problems at various points. I'll treat each individually.

#### B. *Leite's Response to the "Finite Mind" Problem*

The finite mind objection is that human beings, being finite, cannot have an infinite number of beliefs. We can make this objection more precise by marking a three-fold distinction. Let us call an "occurrent belief" a belief a person has that they are occurrently thinking about. Let us call a "non-occurrent belief" a belief a person has but are not currently thinking about. Finally, let us call a "disposition to believe" a disposition to form a belief in suitable circumstances where one does not yet have that belief.<sup>22</sup> Thus, while cooking dinner, I might occurrently believe that I'm out of cumin and dinner will be ready soon, non-occurrently believe that I have a brother and

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<sup>19</sup> This argument does not assume foundationalism. It does assume that two things are co-possible—an agent has a finite set of justified beliefs and an agent can sequentially base those beliefs on adequate reasons. But that assumption does not imply foundationalism. For it is consistent with Leite's view and Leite's view implies that foundationalism is false.

<sup>20</sup> The kind of ability under discussion is (crudely put) an ability that can be exercised reflectively, without gathering additional information about the world or suddenly gaining intellectual skills one lacks. I circumscribe this kind of ability at greater length in (unpublished).

<sup>21</sup> For what it is worth, I think Leite would concede the generating of such a regress, merely contesting its viciousness.

<sup>22</sup> For a defense of the difference between a disposition to believe and a non-occurrent belief, see Audi (1994).

Frege wrote *The Foundations of Arithmetic*, and have a disposition to believe that the center of the sun does not contain any baby whales, or that my aunt is not the kind of thing that evenly divides 10.

Leite's view does not require that one have an infinite number of occurrent beliefs or non-occurrent beliefs. At best, it requires that one have an infinite number of dispositions to believe. As he puts it, his view requires one to have the ability "to justify one's belief by offering good reasons, for which one can offer good reasons, etc." (2005: 415). More specifically, Leite's view requires that if one justifiedly believes that  $p$ ,<sup>23</sup> then one has a disposition to believe  $q$  and advert to it in justifying  $p$ . Further, one is disposed to have the disposition to believe  $r$  and advert to it in justifying  $q$ , were one to believe  $q$ ... *ad infinitum*. Notice that some of these dispositions to believe are actually second-order dispositions to believe: dispositions to form certain beliefs, given that one has formed other beliefs.

Obviously people cannot have an infinite number of occurrent beliefs; thinking of something takes time, and we only have so much time. Plausibly, people cannot have an infinite number of non-occurrent beliefs. If beliefs are anything like representations or the storage of information—as I think they are—then it is very implausible that we have an infinite number of representations or store an infinite amount of information. Perhaps Cartesian souls or divine minds could handle so much, but our brains are only so big. So Leite's view avoids the problems associated with claiming that human beings have an infinite number of occurrent or non-occurrent beliefs. But is it plausible to suppose that human beings have an infinite number of dispositions to believe, in the particular sequence that Leite proposes?

I do not think so. To see this, consider two dispositions in this sequence: the disposition to have the disposition to believe  $p_{n+1}$  and advert to it in justifying  $p$ , were one to believe  $p$ , and the disposition to have the disposition to believe  $p_{n+2}$  and advert to it in justifying  $p_{n+1}$ , were one to believe  $p_{n+1}$ . Clearly, one could have the first disposition without having the second disposition. But one could also have the second disposition without the first. (Keep in mind that Leite's view isn't that one *must* of metaphysical necessity have these dispositions, only that one must have them for *justification*.) Thus, neither disposition supervenes on the other. Thus, the supervenience bases for them differ. But these two dispositions were just an arbitrary case of a disposition and the one that followed it. So for *any* two dispositions, one of which follows the other in this sequence, they will have different supervenience bases. And since there are an infinite number of dispositions in this sequence, it plausibly follows that there are an infinite number of supervenience bases one has for the infinite number of dispositions one has, given Leite's view.<sup>24</sup>

Leite might challenge the claim that the supervenience bases for the dispositions could differ. Rather, he might maintain that one gets all of the dispositions "for free" simply in virtue of "responsibly and correctly believing that there is no reason for doubt regarding  $p$  and understanding how the relevant reasons work" (2005: 415, italics removed). However, even if an

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<sup>23</sup> For some appropriately chosen  $p$ . After all, some of the time, we already have formed the relevant beliefs and dispositions to justify. We're here focusing on some limit case where that has yet to happen.

<sup>24</sup> Notice that there may be an infinite number of supervenience bases *even if* an infinite number of dispositions supervene on the supervenience base of a single disposition. (For instance, if the dispositions that are at level 3, 5, 7, etc. all supervened upon the supervenience base of disposition 1, there may still be an infinite number of supervenience bases, those corresponding to the dispositions that are at levels 2, 4, 6, etc.) While it may be logically consistent to hold that (i) there is an infinite number of dispositions, and (ii) for any two in the sequence such that one follows the other, they have different supervenience bases, nevertheless (iii) *all* of the dispositions supervene on a finite number of supervenience bases, I cannot see any reason for thinking this would be true.

agent understands how claims about “there’s no reason to doubt” could be iterated to provide further reasons, I do not see how such understanding would guarantee an infinite number of dispositions as Leite needs. To use an analogy, I understand how to add 1 to a natural number and how iterating that operation identifies additional natural numbers. But it does not necessarily follow that I have an infinite number of dispositions to add 1 to each and every natural number.

It is very implausible that we do have such an infinite number of dispositions. First, it is very hard to see what all of the different supervenience bases are. Presumably, the supervenience bases are facts about our mental lives; but without a story of what the particular supervenience bases are for these dispositions, it is implausible to think we really have them. But even supposing supervenience bases could be found for this infinite number of dispositions, there is a second problem. The epistemic status of the justification of one’s belief is closely tied to having *all* of these dispositions. If one lacked *any* of the dispositions, then one would be robbed of justification. But given the modal independence of these dispositions—from the mere fact that one has a disposition it does not follow that one has the next one in the sequence—it is incredibly unlikely that anyone has *all* of them. After all, there is (literally!) an infinite number of ways that one can fail to have the dispositions necessary for justification. So even if it were possible for human beings to have the necessary number of dispositions, it is very unlikely that anyone with any frequency does in fact have them.

A third problem is pointed out by Adam Podlaskowski and Joshua Smith (2011: 520ff.). (They are criticizing Klein’s views, but the difference between Klein and Leite are immaterial on this point.) They point out that—setting aside issues of immorality and the afterlife—human beings have a finite amount of time. But many of the dispositions in this infinite sequence of dispositions are ones that “could not be cited within the course of S’s lifetime... [and] S does not possess any dispositions to act beyond her lifetime” (2011: 521-2). Consequently, S could not have an infinite sequence of dispositions. What Podlaskowski and Smith write is plausible, but too strong. As John Turri points out (2013: 793), it is possible to have a disposition to do something in certain conditions, even if those conditions do not obtain in one’s lifetime. (I may have the disposition to enjoy watching the 150<sup>th</sup> Super Bowl, even if the 150<sup>th</sup> Super Bowl would not be played during my lifetime.) Fortunately, a weaker point is all that is needed. All that is needed is the eminently plausible point that, for those dispositions that could not be actualized within the course of S’s lifetime, S lacks *one* of them. One can accept Turri’s point that we might have *some* dispositions that could not be manifested in our lifetime, without thereby holding that we have *an infinite number* of such dispositions sequenced in the needed way for justification given Leite’s view.<sup>25</sup>

So, I conclude, there are serious problems arising from the finitude of human beings for Leite’s view.

### C. Leite’s Response to the Complexity Problem

In response to the complexity problem, Leite claims that we can appeal to “demonstrative or pronominal formulations” (2005: 415). (A similar response is suggested by Klein (1999: 307) and Crisp (2010).) Spelling this idea out, consider the following sequence:

- (10)  $p$
- (11) There’s no reason to doubt  $p$ <sup>26</sup>
- (12) There’s no reason to doubt that there’s no reason to doubt  $p$

<sup>25</sup> For a different response to Turri’s objection, see Smith and Podlaskowski (2013: 126-7).

<sup>26</sup> Recall that appealing to iterated ‘there’s no reason to doubt’ is Leite’s only suggestion for securing an infinite number of propositions that can serve as adequate reasons.

(13) There's no reason to doubt that there's no reason to doubt that there's no reason to doubt *p*.

(14) There's no reason to doubt that there's no reason to doubt that there's no reason to doubt that there's no reason to doubt *p*

Etc.

Leite is correct that the mind “boggles” when looking over (14). Imagine how hard it would be to understand (1165) in this series! His response is to urge that all his view requires is:

(10) *p*

(11\*) There's no reason to doubt *that* [referring to (10)]

(12\*) There's no reason to doubt *that* [referring to (11\*)]

(13\*) There's no reason to doubt *that* [referring to (12\*)]

(14\*) There's no reason to doubt *that* [referring to (13\*)]

Etc.

Leite's idea, then, is that while one might be unable to justifiedly believe (14) one *could* justifiedly believe (14\*). This is because, given the use of directly referring expressions, (14\*) is easier to understand than (14). Further this holds for any further propositions in the infinite sequence. As one keeps producing additional propositions in this sequence, the use of directly referring expressions enables us to understand the propositions being expressed.

But why is (14) hard to understand? Presumably, because it takes time to understand (14) (cf. Audi (1993: 127)). That is, because (14) is a long sentence, in order to understand what proposition it expresses, one must take the time to figure out how all the parts of (14) fit together. But then appealing to demonstratives like ‘that’ will not help with the complexity problem. For to understand (14\*), one must understand the referent of (14\*)'s ‘that.’ But to understand the referent of (14\*)'s ‘that’, one must understand the referent of (13\*)'s ‘that.’ (After all, if all one was given were (14\*) and (13\*), one wouldn't know what proposition (14\*) expressed.) Thus, to understand what proposition is expressed by (14\*), one has to keep in mind the various referents of the ‘that's in a way that takes time. So if it takes a long time to understand what proposition (14) expresses, the same will hold for (14\*).

Thus, appealing to demonstrative or pronouns like ‘that’ cannot help stem the complexity problem. Eventually human beings will be unable to understand, and thus believe, a proposition in the infinite sequence of propositions. This result should be unsurprising. While ‘that’ can be useful as a pronoun, understanding sentences in which it occurs requires understanding its referent. And if understanding the referent of ‘that’ takes time, so too will understanding the sentence that contains it. ‘That’ does not decrease semantic complexity, just sentence length.

#### *D. Leite's Response to the Adequate Reason Problem*

Even if human beings were able to form an infinite number of beliefs and able to understand the propositions expressed by these infinite sequences, this would still not be enough to save Leite's view from regress problems. For it must be the case that each of these propositions in the sequence provides *an adequate reason* for the one before it. Is that possible?

Leite thinks so. He holds that if there's no reason to doubt that *p*, then there is an adequate reason for thinking so, namely, *there's no reason to doubt that there's no reason to doubt that p*. He writes:

...if one's belief, that there is no reason to doubt *p*, is true, then it will also be the case that there's no reason to doubt *it*. For if there were reason to doubt it, then it wouldn't be true after all, since anything which tells against the claim that there is



no reason to doubt  $p$  constitutes a reason to doubt  $p$  (even if only a very weak one). (2005: 414)

Leite's point here is that a necessary condition for it being true that there's no reason to doubt that  $p$  is that it is also true that there's no reason to doubt that there is no reason to doubt that  $p$ . After all, if it is *true* that there is a reason to doubt that there is no reason to doubt that  $p$ , this suggests there is something that tells against the truth of  $p$ , which means that there is a reason to doubt that  $p$ .

Leite's response to the adequate reason problem is his strongest. I have one worry about it. It is not obvious that there being no reason to doubt that  $p$  is actually, itself, a reason for believing  $p$ . Rather, there being no reason to doubt that  $p$  is more like a report of the non-existence of reasons against  $p$  than a consideration in favor of  $p$  itself. Compare with an analogous case: if I assert  $p$  and you asked me to justify it, you would not take as a satisfactory response "there's lots of reasons for  $p$ ." For I have merely reported the existence of reasons; I have not provided them. To provide a consideration in favor of  $p$  I would have to provide the reasons themselves; a report doesn't cut it. Likewise, adverting to there being no reason to doubt that  $p$  may not itself be a reason in favor of  $p$  but a certain kind of report. But if it is not, then Leite's response to the adequate reason problem fails.

In response, Leite might point out that it's true that (i) there's no reason to doubt that  $p$  only if it is also true that there's no reason to doubt that there's no reason to doubt that  $p$ , and even (ii) given the way the world works, these statements are materially equivalent. But even conceding both points, those features are insufficient for providing an adequate reason. To see this, consider another analogous case. It's true that  $p$  only if it's true that it's true that  $p$ . Further, it is trivial that given the way the world works those claims are materially equivalent. Nonetheless, its being true that it's true that  $p$  is not a good reason for believing it's true that  $p$ ; no one would be impressed if you offered up the former in defense of the later.

A fuller defense of this worry would require a fuller account of epistemic reasons—something I cannot provide here. I'll simply note that it is dubious that a theory of epistemic reasons should have the result that there being no reason to doubt that  $p$  counts as an adequate reason for  $p$ . Since Leite's response to the adequate problem turns on that, it is dubious as well.

#### IV. Conclusion

Leite's localism is a novel theory of justification that puts at its center the ability to justify our beliefs. Nonetheless, I've argued, there are some problems for Leite's view, specifically, it does not solve the persistent interlocutor problem, and it leads to vicious regresses. While I've not provide a positive account of justification or justifying one's beliefs, I've hope to have shown that we may look elsewhere for such accounts.

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