A defense of coherentism involves two things: direct support by developing a detailed account of coherentism and indirect support by giving a strong argument against the competing theory, foundationalism. In this paper, I will critically examine a way of doing the latter.

Coherentists typically argue for what I shall call the requirement of metajustification: S's belief that p is justified only if S is justified in having a metajustificatory belief about the reasonableness of her belief that p. From the requirement of metajustification, a strong anti-foundationalist argument can be derived. Suppose first level justification requires metajustification. If so, for a belief to be justified, a further belief must be justified as well, namely a metajustificatory belief. Therefore, the coherentist can argue, foundationalists are mistaken in maintaining that there are basic beliefs, for a basic belief is supposed not to depend for its justification on the justification of any further belief.

There is a strong and a weak version of the requirement of metajustification, depending on how it is construed. I shall argue that either of these versions leads to skepticism. As a result, the coherentist faces the following dilemma. Endorsing the requirement of metajustification allows the coherentist to reject foundationalism on the grounds that there are no basic beliefs, but leads him into skepticism. Rejecting the requirement of metajustification avoids the consequence of skepticism, but deprives the coherentist of the strong anti-foundationalist argument he would have were he to endorse it.
2. BASIC BELIEFS AND THE REQUIREMENT OF METAJUSTIFICATION

Let us begin by considering the notion of a basic belief. It is important to see that the foundationalist need not characterize basic beliefs using notions such as indubitability, infallibility, or incorrigibility. The role basic beliefs play in a foundationalist epistemology is that of regress terminators. Suppose a belief \( B_1 \) is justified by a belief \( B_2 \), which is justified by a belief \( B_3 \), and so on. Such a chain of justifying reasons, the foundationalist argues, cannot go on ad infinitum. It must stop in a belief which can confer justification on other beliefs without deriving its own justification from any other belief. And clearly, there is no contradiction involved in assuming that a belief can have this capacity, that is, play the role of a regress terminator, without being infallible, indubitable, or incorrigible. Basic beliefs, then, should not be burdened with features they do not need in order to terminate a regress of justifying reasons. For a belief to be basic, just one feature is essential: it must be such that it does not depend for its own justification on any other justified belief.

Let us say that a belief, if it has this feature, is epistemically independent. The foundationalist argues that, unless some beliefs are epistemically independent, the regress of justifying reasons cannot be stopped. The coherentist argues that the foundationalist solution of the regress problem falls because there are no epistemically independent beliefs. Now if justification required metajustification, then indeed there couldn't be any epistemically independent beliefs, for every belief would depend for its justification on a metajustificatory belief. It is therefore understandable that the coherentist is attracted to making the requirement of metajustification a cornerstone of his theory.

3. DOXASTIC AND EPISTEMIC LEVEL ASCENT

Sellars, for instance, in ‘Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind,’ argues that, for \( S \) to be justified in a perceptual belief such as ‘This is green,’ \( S \) ‘must know that tokens of ‘This is green’ are symptoms of the presence of green objects in conditions which are standard for visual perception.’ Roughly, this means that, for \( S \) to be justified in believing