FOUNDATIONALISM

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Foundationalism is a much misunderstood position in epistemology. It is often criticized for excesses that are unnecessary additions to it. But, although it takes an important and illuminating stand on the structure of knowledge and rationality, its essential ingredients are rather minimal. When properly understood, its main tenets are virtually undeniable.

The best way to get at the heart of foundationalism is to take Aristotle as our guide, focusing on his famous regress argument in *Posterior Analytics* I, 3. Section I of this chapter will unpack that argument, first with a quick overview and then with a more careful presentation and defense. With that account of foundationalism on the table, section II will address some objections to foundationalism, both those based on misconceptions and those that resist its core theses. Section III will consider how foundationalism bears on the epistemology of theology.

I.   Explaining and Defending Foundationalism

A. Foundationalism Made Easy

As noted above, the starting point for understanding foundationalism is Aristotle's regress argument, which runs as follows. "Either all epistemic justification for beliefs depends on inference from another belief (i.e., from a reason) or not. If it requires inference from another belief, then that other belief must itself be a justified belief (because a belief can't become justified by inference from an unjustified belief). But if all justified belief requires inference

from another justified belief, then either justification can arise via an infinite chain of reasoning or it can arise via a circular chain of reasoning or justified belief is impossible. Unfortunately, each of those three options is quite implausible: clearly there can be justified beliefs, even though justified beliefs cannot be the product of an infinite chain of reasoning or a circular chain of reasoning. We must, therefore, reject the view that led to these three options (the view that all justification depends on inference from another belief—i.e., from a reason) and conclude that a belief can be justified even if it is not inferred from another belief." This argument can be used as the basis for defining foundationalism as follows: *it is the view that the premises and conclusion of the regress argument are true*.

The regress argument supports the conclusion that there are two different ways in which a belief can be justified: by being inferred from another belief and without being inferred from another belief. A belief that is not inferred from another belief is called a 'basic belief'. A basic belief that is in some way epistemically appropriate (e.g., justified or rational or an instance of knowledge) is called a 'properly basic belief'. So foundationalism says that, in addition to inferentially justified beliefs, there can be properly basic beliefs. This distinction, together with the regress argument, provides further insight into the nature of foundationalism by helping us to see that all foundationalist epistemic principles will fit the following generic format:

> *Generic Foundationalist Epistemic Principle*: A belief has positive epistemic status E if and only if *either*:
> (i)   it is not inferred from another belief and it satisfies conditions C *or*
> (ii)   it is inferred in way W from another belief with positive epistemic status E.

There are three schematic letters in this generic foundationalist epistemic principle. The first, E, takes as substitution instances various kinds of positive epistemic status: one can be a foundationalist about epistemic justification, rationality, knowledge, or warrant, and these epistemic properties can themselves be understood in different ways. I'll focus mostly on

justification. The second schematic letter, C, refers to the *conditions of proper basicality*—i.e., the conditions under which a basic (or noninferential) belief counts as properly basic. Some think that a belief is properly basic if and only if it is psychologically certain or adequately supported by nondoxastic evidence (i.e., evidence in the form of conscious mental states that are not beliefs); others propose, as conditions of proper basicality, that the belief is reliably formed or produced by properly functioning cognitive faculties. These differences regarding the conditions of proper basicality are the basis for some of the main distinctions between different kinds of foundationalism. The third schematic letter, W, refers to the different ways one belief can be inferred from another: some versions of foundationalism require that inferential beliefs be deduced with certainty if they are to be justified; others allow, in addition, that justification can arise via inductive inference from a representative sample or abductive inference to the best explanation.

Both the definition of foundationalism and the generic formulation of a foundationalist epistemic principle are motivated and inspired by Aristotle's regress argument. They capture the main ingredients of foundationalism and help us to see the common core to the many different versions of the view.

B. Foundationalism Made Precise

Aristotle's regress argument for foundationalism focused on knowledge or understanding, but other versions of the argument have focused on rationality or justification or warrant. From Aristotle onward, the emphasis in the regress argument has tended to be on actual beliefs and the epistemic goodness they can have by means of actual inference or in the absence thereof. For

this reason, it is natural to focus not on propositional justification (the justification a proposition has for a person in virtue of that person's evidence supporting that proposition, whether or not the person believes the proposition) but rather on doxastic justification (the justification a belief has in virtue of being based on the evidence that supports it). Thus, when I use the term 'justification', I will be speaking of doxastic justification rather than propositional justification.

To capture the core of the regress argument and related philosophical puzzles, it will be helpful to have before our minds the following six views:

> PB: a belief can be justified even if it is not inferred from (based on) a belief (i.e., there can be properly basic beliefs).
>
> JJ: a belief can be justified only if it is inferred from (based on) a *justified* belief (i.e., all justification requires prior justification).
>
> UF: a belief can be justified even if the belief(s) from which it is inferred (on which it is based) is/are not justified (i.e., a belief can be justified via an inference chain terminating in an unjustified belief—what might be called an 'unjustified foundation').
>
> CR: a belief can be justified via a circular inference chain (i.e., justification can arise via circular reasoning).
>
> IR: a belief can be justified via an infinitely long non-repeating inference chain (i.e., justification can arise via infinite reasoning).
>
> RS: there can be no justified belief (i.e., radical skepticism is true).

Now consider two *uncontroversial* theses, about how these six views are related:

> T1: If
> > ~PB: a belief can be justified only if it is inferred from (based on) a belief
> then either
> > JJ: a belief can be justified only if it is inferred from (based on) a *justified* belief
> or
> > UF: a belief can be justified even if the belief(s) from which it is inferred (on which it is based) is/are not justified.
>
> T2: If JJ, then either
> > CR: a belief can be justified via a circular inference chain
> or
> > IR: a belief can be justified via an infinitely long non-repeating inference chain
> or
> > RS: there can be no justified belief.

The following argument can be constructed on the basis of these two uncontroversial theses:

> T1: If ~PB, then either JJ or UF.
> T2: If JJ, then either CR or IR or RS.
> T3: Therefore, if ~PB, then either UF or CR or IR or RS.

T3 captures the core uncontroversial thesis behind the regress argument for foundationalism.

Notice that T3 can be used as an initial premise in more than one argument. Consider, for example, these two:

> *Regress Argument for Foundationalism*
>
> 1. T3: If ~PB, then either UF or CR or IR or RS.
> 2. ~UF
> 3. ~CR
> 4. ~IR
> 5. ~RS
> 6. Therefore, PB.
>
> *Argument for Radical Skepticism*
>
> 1. T3: If ~PB, then either UF or CR or IR or RS.
> 2. ~UF
> 3. ~CR
> 4. ~IR
> 5. ~PB
> 6. Therefore, RS.

These two arguments share their first four premises but differ greatly in their conclusions. As already noted, the first is reminiscent of Aristotle's regress argument for foundationalism in the *Posterior Analytics* (I, 3). The second is similar to a skeptical argument found in Sextus Empiricus's *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (Book I, Chapter XV).

A helpful way to view both of these arguments is to consider this inconsistent set of claims:

> *The Inconsistent Set*: {~PB, ~UF, ~CR, ~IR, ~RS}.

T3 says that this set is inconsistent—that if the set member listed first is true, then at least one of the other members is false. Given that it's an inconsistent set, at least one of its members is false. The regress argument for foundationalism takes it that each of the last four members is more plausible than the first; so it concludes that the first member is false (i.e., PB is true). The

argument for radical skepticism takes it that each of the first four members is more plausible than the last; so it concludes that the last member is false (i.e., RS is true). Other similar arguments could be formulated with T3 as a starting point. For example, one might think that the second last member is the least plausible and conclude, on the basis of accepting each of the other four as more plausible and true, that IR is true. In short, what we have here is a classic example of a philosophical puzzle: each member of an inconsistent set of claims has at least some initial plausibility to it, and so we are forced, it seems, to reject at least one seemingly plausible claim.

There are five standard ways to respond to this puzzle, each of which denies just one member of the Inconsistent Set:

> *Foundationalism*: PB is true and UF, CR, IR, and RS are false. (I.e., the premises and conclusion of the regress argument are true.)
>
> *The "Unjustified Foundations" View*: UF is true and PB, CR, IR, and RS are false.
>
> *Linear Coherentism*: CR is true and PB, UF, IR, and RS are false.
>
> *Infinitism*: IR is true and PB, UF, CR, and RS are false.
>
> *Radical Skepticism*: RS is true and PB, UF, CR, and IR are false.

These aren't the only five ways to deal with the Inconsistent Set. But they're the natural ones to focus on because, by denying only one member of the set, each departs *minimally* from the starting point of thinking that each member of the set is at least somewhat plausible. So which of these five ways of resolving this philosophical puzzle is best?

C. Foundationalism Defended

In the view of most philosophers throughout history who have thought about this puzzle, foundationalism is hands-down the best solution to the puzzle highlighted by T3. Even if foundationalism has some initial implausibility, that implausibility pales in comparison to the

implausibility of the other four options. Moreover, careful reflection on foundationalism and its allegedly worrisome features enables us to see that whatever minor initial implausibility it has disappears upon further examination.

Let's briefly rehearse why UF, CR, IR, and RS seem so implausible. Consider first UF, the signature claim of the "Unjustified Foundations" view. Suppose you have two beliefs, B1 and B2, both of which are not justified at all and neither of which is based on any reasons or evidence. And suppose also that B2 implies B1, though at first you didn't realize this. Can B1 become justified to some degree *solely* in virtue of your later inferring it from the still unjustified belief B2, which you come to realize implies it? It seems clear that the answer is 'no'. Inference from reasons doesn't yield any justification if those reasons have nothing going for them, epistemically speaking.

A similar problem afflicts CR, which endorses circular reasoning. Suppose, once again, that you have two beliefs, B1 and B2, both of which are not justified at all and neither of which is based on any reason or evidence. This time suppose that each view implies the other view. (For example, suppose B1 is that figure X is a closed plane figure with three sides and B2 is that figure X is a closed plane figure with three angles.) Can B1 and B2 become justified to some degree *solely* in virtue of your later inferring B1 from B2 and B2 from B1? Again, it seems clear that the answer is 'no' and for the same sort of reason: inference from reasons doesn't yield any justification if those reasons don't already have something going for them, epistemically speaking. (See Plantinga 1993: 74-78 for more on the problematic nature of circular reasoning.)

Consider next IR, which says that a belief can be justified via an infinite non-repeating chain of reasoning. The problem with IR can be seen by comparing it with the view that all value is instrumental value. Something is *instrumentally* valuable if it is useful for obtaining

something else that is valuable; something is valuable *in itself* if it is valuable for its own sake. (For example, it's plausible to think that friendship is valuable in itself whereas chemotherapy is merely instrumentally valuable.) It seems impossible for all value to be instrumental value, always dependent on the value of some other thing, with nothing being valuable in itself. If all value were instrumental, there couldn't be any value on which instrumental value ultimately depends. There would instead be only an unending series of promissory notes never fulfilled; value would be "infinitely deferred, never achieved" (to adapt a phrase Schaffer 2010 uses in another context). In the same way, it seems impossible for the justification of every belief to be dependent on the justification of some other belief (in a non-repeating inference chain), with no belief having any degree of justification that is not dependent on the justification of some other belief. As noted above, a belief isn't justified via inference from another belief unless that other belief is justified. So being inferred from a belief generates no justification in itself. In order to get justification into the inference chain, there must be some source of justification apart from mere inference. And even if, *per impossibile*, a belief could be justified via an infinite non-repeating chain of reasoning, none of *our* beliefs is in fact based on an infinite non-repeating chain of reasoning, so none of our beliefs is justified in this way.

Let us turn, finally, to RS, the view that there can be no justified belief. Considered just on its own, RS is far more implausible than the view that it is possible for there to be justified belief. One would need an extremely powerful argument for the conclusion that justified belief is impossible. (And even then, one wouldn't want to conclude that one is *justified* in thinking that justified belief is impossible. RS is either false or no one is justified in believing it.) But, the main argument for that conclusion—the Argument for Radical Skepticism given above—has

at least one premise (i.e., ~PB) that is less plausible than the view to which the argument is objecting, namely, that justified belief is possible.

The considerations just rehearsed go a long way toward explaining why almost everyone rejects UF, CR, IR, and RS. Each of those four views is implausible in the extreme. As for PB, many people think it isn't the least bit implausible. Some might find it a little bit tempting to think, initially, that a belief is justified only if it is based on a reason and that a reason must be a belief. But once you see that that conjunction implies the falsity of PB and you have before your mind T3 and the entire Inconsistent Set, {~PB, ~UF, ~CR, ~IR, ~RS}, you see that if you accept that PB is false, you have to accept either UF, CR, IR, or RS. In light of that, it's natural and sensible to have serious misgivings about denying PB. Moreover, once you consider the view that a belief can be justified by being based on something other than a belief (e.g., an a priori mathematical seeming or an experience of pain), PB seems downright plausible. Nothing similar happens with further reflection on UF, CR, IR, and RS. There's nothing that makes them seem plausible in the way PB seems plausible.

Why then do some object to foundationalism? Does denying PB really force you to accept UF, CR, IR, or RS? Yes, given T3, which seems uncontroversial. Are UF, CR, IR, and RS really that implausible? Yes, for the reasons given in the preceding paragraphs. Does endorsement of PB and rejection of UF, CR, IR, and RS really commit one to foundationalism? Yes, given the definition of foundationalism provided above in terms of Aristotle's regress argument. Is that really a good definition of foundationalism? Again, yes. That regress argument has long been viewed as the main reason to endorse foundationalism. Why, then, do some object to foundationalism? This is a question I'll take up in the next section.

II. Objections to Foundationalism

A. Problems with Cartesian Foundationalism

Many objections to foundationalism fail to hit their intended target. Specific versions of foundationalism endorse generic foundationalism (saying that the premises and the conclusion of the regress argument are true) and add to that some claim detachable from it, such as a claim about what is required for a belief to be properly basic. Perhaps the most common misguided objections to foundationalism are those that object to Cartesian foundationalism, which endorses the following epistemic principle:

> *Cartesian Epistemic Principle (CEP)*: A belief is justified if and only if *either*:
> (i)   it is a noninferential belief produced with indubitable certainty via introspection or a priori intuition or clear memory *or*
> (ii)   it is deduced with indubitable certainty from a justified belief.

Cartesian foundationalism endorses not only CEP but also the claim that our perceptual beliefs can be justified inferentially, via arguments that meet the standards imposed by CEP. Objections to Cartesian foundationalism typically complain that (a) CEP has the unpalatable consequence of external world skepticism, given that our perceptual beliefs don't satisfy the standards specified in CEP or (b) CEP has the "self-referential" problem of implying that belief in CEP is itself unjustified, given that that belief fails to satisfy CEP-imposed requirements. Central to both of these objections is the thought that it is highly implausible to think CEP is true in requiring, for justification, that our beliefs are indubitable (or incorrigible or infallible) or that they are deduced with absolute certainty from such beliefs. But these objections to Cartesian foundationalism needn't be viewed as in any way threatening to generic foundationalism. Objecting to one species of foundationalism does not show that foundationalism itself is mistaken, especially

when the species in question is as unpopular as Cartesian foundationalism is among

contemporary foundationalists.

B. Defenses of Alleged Alternatives to Foundationalism

The view most commonly contrasted with foundationalism is coherentism. If we think of

coherentism as *linear* coherentism—the view that CR is true and that PB, UF, IR, and RS are

false—then we have a clear competitor to foundationalism. But it is difficult to find a serious

defender of CR's affirmation of circular reasoning. Moreover, there are versions of coherentism

that aren't competitors to foundationalism. Consider the holistic coherentist view that *a person's*

belief is justified if and only if it coheres with that person's other beliefs. This is a kind of

coherentism, even though it includes no endorsement of circular reasoning. But notice that a

holistic coherentist of this sort could endorse a version of foundationalism according to which

cohering with one's other beliefs is what makes a belief *noninferentially* justified. This position

is just a foundationalist one with an unusual proposal for a condition on proper basicality. (See

BonJour 1985: 89-93 on the distinction between linear and holistic coherentism. Sosa 1980,

Plantinga 1993: ch. 4, and Klein 1999 and 2000 argue that holistic coherentism is a version of

foundationalism.)

Susan Haack defends foundherentism, which she portrays as an alternative to both

coherentism and foundationalism.   And yet she agrees that there could be no inferential

justification for any of our beliefs unless there were first some noninferential justification that

our beliefs obtained independently of their being based on other beliefs. As she puts it, "there is

no danger of an infinite regress … [because] with empirical justification eventually we reach

experiential evidence" (Haack 1999: 289). It's true that she emphasizes that a belief with noninferential justification can become more justified if inferential justification is added to it. But the bottom line is that she accepts PB and rejects UF, CR, IR, and RS, which is enough to make her a foundationalist. Clearly, defending either coherentism or foundherentism does not, in itself, amount to an objection to foundationalism.

C. Can Justification Come From Experience?

Another common objection to foundationalism (see Sellars 1963, Rorty 1979: 173-92, and Davidson 1986) takes a stand against experiential justification by claiming that:

EJ: a belief can't be justified in virtue of being properly based on an experience.

Note that EJ is a weaker claim than the claim that all justification requires prior justification:

JJ: a belief can't be justified except by being based on another justified belief.

If JJ is true, then so is EJ. But, as Kvanvig (1995) makes clear, EJ can be true even if JJ is false. For although JJ (which conflicts with PB) is opposed to generic foundationalism, EJ is not, because it is compatible with the view that PB is true and that UF, CR, IR, and RS are false (to say belief isn't justified in virtue of being based on an experience isn't to say it can't be noninferentially justified). Hence, one can't object to foundationalism simply by defending EJ. Thus, even if Kvanvig (1995) is right in thinking that coherentism can be made more plausible if it endorses EJ rather than JJ, he's mistaken in thinking (1995: 263-4) that the truth of EJ would show that foundationalism is false. Nevertheless, because many foundationalists do think that beliefs can be noninferentially justified in virtue of being properly based on sensory experience, it is worth considering, if only briefly, what may be said on behalf of EJ.

There are two main arguments in support of EJ. First, causation is not justification, so the fact that a belief is caused by an experience (because it is based on it, and the basing relation is causal) "does not show how or why the belief is justified" (Davidson 1986: 311). All of this sounds right, but it doesn't support EJ. Opponents of EJ say that a belief can be justified in virtue of being *properly based* on an experience, not merely in virtue of being caused by it; and properly basing a belief on an experience requires more than being caused by it. Although there is no generally accepted account of the basing relation, it is widely acknowledged that basing requires more than causation, which is enough to show that this argument for EJ is inadequate. In addition, more is required for *proper* basing than for mere basing. There are, of course different accounts of proper basing on an experience: some think such basing requires that a belief epistemically fits the evidence consisting of the experience on which the belief is based; some think such basing requires that the belief is a properly functioning (i.e., cognitively healthy) response to that experience; and others say such basing requires that the experience is a reliable indicator of the belief's truth. But the main point is that this first argument for EJ fails insofar as it shows only that mere causation by experience is insufficient for justification, not that proper basing on such experience is insufficient for justification. (For critical discussion of Davidson's version of this argument, see Howard-Snyder 2002: section 1; for an examination of Rorty's and indirectly of Sellars' defense of this argument, see Triplett 1987.)

The other main argument for EJ claims that experience (e.g., sensory experience) lacks propositional content and, for this reason, it can't give justification to a belief properly based on it. But why think that all experience lacks propositional content? Seemings or appearances are, arguably, experiences and they have propositional content. And many philosophers (e.g., Byrne 2009 and Seigel 2010) think that sensory experience has propositional content. But even if we

focus solely on sensory experience and assume that it doesn't have propositional content, why think this implies that a belief can't be justified in virtue of being properly based on it? The idea seems to be that only propositions can stand in logical relations of entailment or probabilistic relations of confirmation. Consequently, beliefs can support other beliefs because the content of one can entail or probabilify the content of another. And if sensory experience has no propositional content, it cannot in this way support a belief and, hence, a belief can't be justified in virtue of its being based on a sensory experience. That's the thinking behind this defense of EJ.

But why think one mental state can evidentially support another only if they both have propositional contents that stand in these logical or probabilistic relations? Suppose that a belief is justified if it is an epistemically fitting response to the evidence on which it is based; and suppose that some belief B is, of necessity, an epistemically fitting response to a particular sensory experience E (which has no propositional content). Or suppose that a belief is justified if it is a properly functioning response to the evidence on which it is based; and suppose that, for some person, B is such a response to sensory experience E (which, again, has no propositional content). In either scenario, a belief would be justified in virtue of being based on an experience, despite the fact that the experience has no propositional content. In the one case it's because justification depends on a belief's fitting the experiential evidence (of necessity); in the other it's because justification depends on the belief's being formed in accord with proper function for the believer in question. In neither case does justification depend on logical or probabilistic relations between the propositional contents of the beliefs and the mental states on which they're based. Without a good reason to reject all such accounts of justification, defenders of this argument for

EJ have not made their case. (For further discussion of this argument, see Howard-Snyder 2002:

section 2.1.)

D. Does Justification Require Other Justified Beliefs?

The most important objections to foundationalism —because they manage to target

foundationalism itself—defend JJ. One such argument (found in BonJour 1985: 30-32), runs as

follows:

> *First Argument for JJ*
>
> 1. A belief is justified (or reasonable) only if it is based on a good reason.
> 2. A belief is based on a good reason only if it's based on another justified belief.
> Therefore, JJ: a belief can't be justified except by being based on another justified belief.

The problem is that if we endorse premise 2, thinking of reasons as beliefs (and good reasons as

justified beliefs), then it is no longer plausible to endorse the premise 1 claim that a belief is

justified only if it is based on a good reason. It is no longer plausible because (a) premise 1

would then imply ~PB and that, together with T3, entails the implausible claim that either UF,

CR, IR, or RS is true and (b) it's natural and plausible to think that a belief based on an a priori

mathematical seeming or an experience of pain can be justified, despite the fact that such beliefs

aren't based on other justified beliefs.

> Peter Klein (2011: 250) captures one of the most prominent arguments for JJ:
>
> *Second Argument for JJ*
>
> 1. For any allegedly noninferentially justified belief B of any person S, S can be asked what property B has that makes it justified and whether having that property makes B more likely to be true and S can either answer the question or not.
> 2. If S does not answer the question, then it is arbitrary for S to hold B, in which case B is not justified.

3. If S does answer the question, then either (a) S identifies a property B has that makes it justified and says that having that property makes B more likely to be true or (b) not.
4. If (a) then B is an inferential belief, in which case it is not noninferential.
5. If (b) then B is not justified.
6. Therefore, no allegedly noninferentially justified belief B of any person S is in fact noninferentially justified (i.e., only inferential beliefs can be justified). [from 1-5]
7. If a belief is inferentially justified, the belief on which it is based must be justified. Therefore, JJ: a belief can't be justified except by being based on another justified belief. [from 6-7]

Premises 1 and 3 are uncontroversial. Premise 7 is basically the denial of UF and that denial is extremely plausible, for reasons mentioned in section I.C. That leaves premises 2, 4, and 5. If even one of those premises is problematic, the argument fails. Unfortunately, all three are problematic.

Premises 2 and 5 say that if the question in premise 1 is not answered or it is answered differently than the way specified in 3(a), then the allegedly justified belief B is not in fact justified. We can see as follows that both premises are mistaken. Jill has a friend Jane who is obsessed with epistemology and likes to ask questions such as "what makes that belief of yours justified?" and then, if she gets a direct answer, loves to keep asking further questions of the same sort about whatever answer is given. Jill often finds this habit of Jane's rather annoying. Now suppose Jill stubs her toe and starts hopping around on one foot saying, "ouch, I am in so much pain," and Jane says "in virtue of what is that belief that you're in pain justified?" And suppose Jill either ignores Jane, refusing to answer her, or answers her *not* by giving the response specified in 3(a) but by telling her to shut up or by saying that it's a question she doesn't want to discuss. Would that show, as premises 2 and 5 say, that Jill's belief that she's in pain is not justified? Obviously not.

Consider next premise 4. It says that if the question in premise 1 is answered in the way specified in (a), the belief is inferential. But that isn't true. Even if S agrees that (i) B is justified in virtue of its having some property F and that (ii) B's having F makes it likely to be true, it

doesn't follow that she infers B from these two truths. It's possible for some of a person's beliefs to lend support to another belief of hers even though she doesn't infer the latter belief from those other beliefs. For example, Holmes might playfully give Watson the following two clues to solving a crime: (i) it's false that *Albert and Bertha are innocent while Clyde is not* and (ii) *if Albert is innocent, then if Bertha is innocent, then if Albert is innocent, then so is Clyde*. Watson might believe both clues on the basis of Holmes' testimony without inferring either from the other even though each supports the other because they are logically equivalent. Another example: suppose I believe both that I'm thinking and that *if I'm thinking, then I exist;* it doesn't follow that my further belief that I exist is inferred using Descartes' inference "I think, therefore I am". So this second argument for JJ fails as well. (For further discussion of these responses to the second argument for JJ, see Howard-Snyder and Coffman 2007: sections 1 and 2 and Bergmann 2014: section 5.)

In short, foundationalism (understood as the endorsement of the premises and conclusion of the regress argument) is extremely plausible and the objections to it are either missing their target or they depend on arguments that are flawed in some way (or both).

III.   Foundationalism and Theology

A. Reformed Epistemology and Natural Theology

One of the main distinctions in the epistemology of religious belief is between Reformed epistemology and natural theology. Reformed epistemologists say that belief in God can be justified noninferentially, in the absence of theistic arguments. (Reformed epistemology has

nothing particularly to do with Protestantism or Calvinism other than the fact that Calvin's

advocacy of the view inspired its name; there is no reason why Catholics or even Muslims, Jews,

or Hindus couldn't endorse the view.) Natural theologians emphasize that belief in God can be

justified inferentially, on the basis of good theistic arguments with widely shared premises.

These two positions are compatible. But some thinkers go further and insist that belief in God

can be justified *only* noninferentially or that belief in God can be justified *only* inferentially.

(This latter view is sometimes called 'evidentialism' or 'theistic evidentialism,' but it would

perhaps be better to refer to it as *theistic inferentialism*, given that the term 'evidentialism' has

other uses in epistemology, referring to a view that allows for noninferentially justified belief.

See Conee and Feldman 2004.) But Reformed epistemologists and natural theologians both tend

to agree that beliefs can be justified noninferentially and that UF, CR, IR, and RS are false. They

are, therefore, two kinds of foundationalist religious epistemology, each with distinctive

proposals about which religious beliefs are likely to be properly basic.

Reformed epistemologists take Reid's response to Descartes one step further: Descartes

thought that perceptual belief and theistic belief had to be justified inferentially; Reid denied this,

insisting that perceptual belief could be justified noninferentially. Reformed epistemologists say

the same thing about theistic belief. Just as we have a faculty of perception by which we form

justified noninferential perceptual beliefs based on sensory experience, so also we have a *sensus

divinitatus* or some sort of belief-forming capacity by which we form justified noninferential

belief in God based on theistic seemings (i.e., experiences of its seeming to us that God has

certain features or is doing certain things). Alston (1991) and Plantinga (2000) are two of the

main proponents of Reformed epistemology. They are both externalists in epistemology (see

Plantinga 1993 and Alston 1989), thinking that what matters for justification or warrant is that

your beliefs are formed in the right way, not (as internalists insist) that you are *aware* that they are formed in the right way. But Reformed epistemology is compatible with both internalism *and* externalism in epistemology, just as Reidian views on the noninferential justification of perceptual beliefs are compatible with both internalism and externalism (e.g., Pryor 2000 is an internalist who takes perceptual belief to be noninferentially justified, Goldman 1979 is an externalist who takes perceptual beliefs to be noninferentially justified, and Tucker 2011 defends an internalist version of Reformed epistemology). Given that Reformed epistemologists think belief in God can be noninferentially justified (or properly basic), they obviously agree with PB. They also tend to agree that UF, CR, IR, and RS are false—for the same reasons that almost everyone thinks they are false.

Although natural theologians emphasize that belief in God can be justified inferentially via arguments based on widely shared premises, they too incline towards foundationalism, thinking that UF, CR, IR, and RS are false (again, for the same reasons that most people think they are false). Their idea is not that *all* beliefs are justified inferentially. Rather, the thought is that belief in God is like belief in electrons: because both God and electrons are invisible, we aren't noninferentially justified in believing in them on the basis of perception; instead, we typically must infer that they exist on the basis of arguments pointing to their existence. The main theistic arguments employed are teleological arguments, cosmological arguments, and moral arguments, but there are others as well. (For discussion of teleological arguments for theism, see Manson 2003 and Ratzsch 2013; for cosmological arguments, see Reichenbach 2013; for moral arguments, see Byrne 2013; for a discussion of other arguments for theism, see Plantinga 2007.) What's important for our purposes is that these arguments have premises, which (according to their proponents) are either justified noninferentially or formed inferentially,

ultimately via arguments that have premises that are justified noninferentially. Thus, although

natural theologians emphasize that belief in God can be justified inferentially, this is compatible

with insisting that this justification bottoms out in beliefs that are justified noninferentially. As

noted earlier, this is *not* to insist that all justification depends on beliefs that are absolutely

certain or are infallibly justified or anything of the sort. What natural theologians are endorsing

is generic foundationalism, not Cartesian foundationalism.

B. Biblical Studies

The distinction between Reformed epistemology and natural theology is relevant in thinking

about different accounts of what is required for rationally believing the teachings of the Bible.

(It's no easy matter to determine what the Bible teaches or asserts but I'll be assuming that it's at

least plausible that the Bible asserts some contested historical claims such as that the exodus and

conquest occurred and that Jesus performed miracles and rose from the dead.) Historical

Biblical Criticism (HBC) focuses on what it is reasonable to believe about Biblical teaching in

light of evidence shared by religious believers and unbelievers alike, evidence such as:

> E1: archaeological evidence and historical research indicating potential conflicts with or
> potential support for Biblical accounts of past events.
> E2: apparent contradictions in the Biblical text.
> E3: evidence about human nature pertaining to how likely it is that the human authors of
> the Bible were accurate in all their claims (given their various limitations and agendas).
> E4: widely shared moral intuitions suggesting that much of what, according to Biblical
> teaching, is approved of or endorsed by God is morally problematic or worse.
> E5: philosophical arguments for the reliability of the Bible and its teachings (e.g.,
> Swinburne 2007).

(For a summary of much of the evidence associated with E1-E4, see Sparks 2008.) Some

proponents of HBC argue that, all things considered, E1-E5 support the conclusion that what the

Bible asserts is often false (e.g., the stories of the exodus and conquest or the miracles of Jesus, including his resurrection). Other more theologically conservative proponents of HBC argue that E1-E5 support the conclusion that what the Bible asserts is always true (including the stories of the exodus and conquest and the miracles of Jesus). Both groups claim to be employing a methodology that is similar to the methodology advocated by natural theologians, i.e., relying only on arguments from premises shared by believers and unbelievers alike to arrive at conclusions about whether what the Bible teaches is true. (Although each group claims to be doing this, both are accused of failing to rely only on such premises: those who are less theologically conservative are sometimes accused of relying on the controversial assumption that miracles are impossible; those who are more theologically conservative are sometimes accused of being independently committed to the truth of scriptural teaching before they look into the evidence, and of letting that color their interpretation and assessment of the evidence.)

An alternative account of what is required for justified belief in the teachings or assertions of the Bible is inspired by Reformed epistemology (see Plantinga 2000: ch. 12 and Evans 1996). On this view, we can know the things the Bible teaches by accepting (in the right way) what it says, without relying on arguments from evidence such as E1-E5. Upon hearing or reading what the Bible asserts, it might seem to a person that the teaching is true; it may also seem to that person that God is teaching the truth in question. On the basis of these seemings, such a person might believe what the Bible teaches and perhaps also that the Bible is God's word and true. According to this account, these seemings are produced by the work of the Holy Spirit and the beliefs based on these seemings are justified. The person who believes the Bible's teaching on this basis might acknowledge that much of what the Bible asserts is not strongly supported by E1-E5; the person might even acknowledge that, while not strictly inconsistent with

the truth of Biblical claims, E1-E5 support the falsity of some of the things the Bible teaches.

Nevertheless, the person believes what the Bible says on the basis of the seemings, because the

strength of the evidence provided by these seemings outweighs the strength of any

counterevidence provided by E1-E5. This is much like what happens if a man framed for a

crime believes in his innocence despite the strong evidence, presented in court, for his guilt. Just

as the man framed for the crime relies on his memory seemings, despite agreeing that the

evidence presented to the jury strongly supports his guilt, so also the person who believes the

Biblical teaching relies on the seemings that the things asserted in the Bible are true, despite

agreeing that E1-E5 support the falsity of at least some of those teachings. And just as the

accused man can't give his memory seemings to the jurors (he can only report them), so also the

person who believes the Bible's teachings can't give others her seemings that the Bible is true.

In that sense, the evidence isn't shareable. This Reformed Epistemologist approach to

explaining justified belief in Biblical teaching doesn't deny that the evidence in E1-E5, along

with other evidence, is relevant to the reliability of the seemings that the Bible's teachings are

true. But the fact that such evidence is relevant to their reliability doesn't automatically

undermine those seemings any more than the fact that the evidence presented in court is relevant

to the reliability of the memory seemings of the person framed for the crime automatically

undermines that person's memory seemings of her innocence.

Obviously, there are many questions that can be raised about these different accounts of

how people could be justified in forming beliefs with regard to Biblical teaching. What is

relevant for our purposes is that all of these approaches tend to endorse foundationalism. Both

the less theologically conservative and the more theologically conservative proponents of the

methods of HBC are likely to agree with the foundationalist view that belief in Biblical teaching

is justified only if the believer has some noninferentially justified beliefs on the basis of which she forms justified beliefs with respect to the evidence (E1-E5) and from which she properly infers that the Bible's teachings are true. Thus, although they differ in their conclusions about the Bible's teachings, both those who are more conservative and those who are less conservative are likely to accept PF and deny UF, CR, IR, and RS. Something similar can be said about those who endorse the Reformed epistemologist approach to explaining how belief in Biblical teaching is justified. They differ from the previous two positions insofar as they think belief in the teachings of scripture can be noninferentially justified whereas the proponents of the methods of HBC (whether they are theologically conservative or not) think that belief in Biblical assertions can, at best, be justified only inferentially on the basis of evidence such as E1-E5. Nevertheless, those endorsing the Reformed epistemologist approach tend to agree with the foundationalist's acceptance of PF and rejection of UF, CR, IR, and RS. Thus, we have a dispute between different foundationalist epistemologies of scripture, with competing views concerning which beliefs about Biblical teaching, if any, are properly basic and which, if any, are inferentially justified. It should, by now, go without saying that none of these three approaches is committed to Cartesian foundationalism, with its requirement of absolutely certain properly basic beliefs and airtight deductions in support of all justified inferential beliefs.

C. Post-Foundationalism

In their influential book, *Beyond Foundationalism: Theology After Modernity*, Grenz and Franke discuss the development of theology in a post-foundationalist world, where "a growing number of theologians are becoming cognizant of the demise of foundationalism in philosophy" (Grenz

and Franke 2001: 46). However, it's simply a mistake to think that philosophers have given up on foundationalism. Grenz and Franke show some signs of recognizing this when they say:

> In its broadest sense, foundationalism is merely the acknowledgement of the seemingly obvious observation that not all beliefs we hold (or assertions we formulate) are on the same level, but that some beliefs (or assertions) anchor others. … Defined in this manner, nearly every thinker is in some sense a foundationalist. (29)

Although this doesn't adequately capture what foundationalism is, they are right to acknowledge how widely held and plausible foundationalism is. But they go on to say:

> In philosophical circles, however, "foundationalism" refers to a much stronger epistemological stance than is entailed in this observation about how beliefs intersect. At the heart of the foundationalist agenda is the desire to overcome the uncertainty generated by our human liability to error and the inevitable disagreements that follow. Foundationalists are convinced that the only way to solve this problem is to find some means of grounding the entire edifice of human knowledge on invincible certainty. (30)

As a characterization of the philosophical perspective on foundationalism, this is simply not true. Descartes may have had such an agenda and perhaps this agenda has been popular at times in the history of philosophy. But since the 1970s at least, it is only a small minority of philosophers who are interested in pursuing this agenda in the Cartesian way. Moreover, the generic term 'foundationalism' as it is used in philosophy has long been detached from this sort of position. As even Grenz and Franke recognize, "[t]his quest for complete certitude is often termed 'strong' or 'classical foundationalism'," rather than foundationalism proper. (30)

But then why speak, so misleadingly, as if foundationalism has been rejected, when it is only the Cartesian version of it that is found wanting? Why speak of going beyond foundationalism or of the need to find alternatives to foundationalism when other non-Cartesian versions of foundationalism are completely acceptable? Why speak of foundationalism's demise when, upon reflection, no alternative to foundationalism seems plausible? Grenz and Franke speak as if theologians are concerned to engage what is going on "in philosophical circles":

> [A] growing number of theologians are becoming cognizant of the demise of foundationalism in philosophy and are increasingly concerned to explore the implications of this demise for theology. They believe that theology must take seriously the postmodern critique of Enlightenment foundationalism and must capitalize on attempts of philosophers to formulate alternatives. Convinced that the quest to move beyond foundationalism is crucial for theology, they draw insights for their own work from the emerging nonfoundationalist theorists. (46)

It's true that Enlightenment (i.e. Cartesian) foundationalism is widely viewed as flawed. But it is simply a mistake to think that philosophers have, for this reason, moved beyond foundationalism to nonfoundationalist views, either rejecting PB or affirming UF, IR, CR, or RS.

The natural response to what I've been saying is to point out that there is an ambiguity in the term 'foundationalism'. It could refer to generic foundationalism, of the sort explained and defended in this chapter, or it can refer to one species of that generic foundationalism, famously espoused by Descartes. And, this response continues, Grenz and Franke and many others are simply objecting to the latter, not the former. That may be so, and perhaps that is somewhat understandable, given that the term has been too often used in that latter more narrow sense. But the problem is that this leads to confusion when, as happens repeatedly, people think that rejecting the narrow version of foundationalism requires the adoption of alternatives to generic foundationalism. It would be far more helpful if these objectors would simply say that Descartes' agenda was mistaken, but Aristotle's insight was right: there are no plausible alternatives to foundationalism even though it seems to be a good idea to reject Descartes' version of it. It is Aristotle, not Descartes, who is the father of foundationalism; Descartes is merely the founder of one species of it, based on what many now think was a misguided quest for certainty. Alleged alternatives to foundationalism are really just non-Cartesian versions of it. Being careful to emphasize this explicitly would go a long way toward avoiding further error and confusion.

D. Future Research in the Epistemology of Theology

One area in which future work would be beneficial is the anti-foundationalist literature within theology. Two things would be involved here. First, it is important to expose and correct alleged objections to foundationalism that target only specific (often currently unpopular) versions of it. Of particular interest here are the cases where authors conclude that generic foundationalism is false on the grounds that Cartesian foundationalism is mistaken. Second, it is important to understand and preserve the valuable insights and arguments that have been shrouded in anti-foundationalist rhetoric. The anti-foundationalism itself is typically misguided—either attacking only a Cartesian view that very few hold today or jumping to the unsupported conclusion that generic foundationalism, one of the most plausible and widely held views in the history of philosophy, is false. But that doesn't mean there is nothing of value, nothing worth defending, in the anti-foundationalist literature. Clarifying and developing what that valuable remaining core is would be a worthwhile endeavor.

There are other investigative possibilities that don't challenge or defend generic foundationalism but focus instead on different versions of it and their disagreements about which beliefs are or can be properly basic. For example, there are several promising avenues for future research in connection with Reformed epistemology and natural theology. One is the exploration of which theological and religious beliefs, for which people, are plausibly viewed as noninferentially justified (or properly basic) and what sorts of positive epistemic status, besides epistemic justification, noninferential theological beliefs might have. There are other intriguing questions in the same neighborhood. For example, if Reformed epistemologists are right that

there is noninferentially justified religious belief in the existence of God (or even in the teachings of the Bible), what is the value and role of natural theology (or HBC)? Can they be developed or reformulated in conjunction with the Reformed epistemologist's insights? Some fine work has already been done on these latter topics by philosophers of religion (see Evans 2010, Plantinga 2011: ch. 8, and Ratzsch 2003), but further work bringing theological expertise to bear on these questions would be valuable.

In connection with Biblical studies, the Reformed epistemologist's approach, with its nonstandard suggestion about what belongs in the "foundations" when doing serious scholarly work on scripture, seems to be under-developed. Biblical scholars have not taken kindly to this approach, whose advocates have been, for the most part, philosophers. (Defenses of the Reformed epistemologists approach by philosophers can be found in Plantinga 2000: ch. 12 and Evans 1996, with criticisms, by philosophers, of HBC appearing in work by Alston 2003, Stump 1989 & 1994, and van Inwagen 1993.) If this approach is to bear any fruit, what is required is that those with expertise in the field of Biblical studies (and other fields within theology) understand it better and explore how it might be developed in ways that are friendly to and respectful of the insights, tools, and results of decades of extremely valuable research in Biblical criticism. It's true that there already is some fine work by Biblical scholars on this topic—see Brinks (2013) and some of the papers in Bartholomew et al (2003). But much more work is needed, including continued engagement with and input from philosophers. Given how untrodden this ground is in Biblical studies and theology, the opportunities for exciting and beneficial research in this area are legion.[1]

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