

CHAPTER III

A CRITIQUE OF FOUNDATIONALISM

In his introduction to *The Foundations of Knowing*, Chisholm has stated that “...no serious alternative in epistemology to foundationalism has yet been formulated.”¹ Yet, the general theory of foundationalism and Chisholm’s own version of it are beset with various difficulties.

Foundationalism has always enjoyed a great popularity in the literature of epistemology. It has also been the focus of many criticisms. Attacks on foundationalism have tended to center on the notion of a ‘basic belief.’ There has been a tendency for the belief accorded special status to be a belief statement of first person perception, in some accounts hedged with certain locutions or terminology like “infallible”, “indubitable” or “incorrigible”. It is impossible for this call of beliefs to be false, subject to doubt or justifiably rejected or revised. The objection is that there is hardly any belief which is foundational in this sense. Even if there are any such beliefs, their numbers will be exceedingly limited – too limited to justify the multitude of statements about the external world. In fact every belief may turn out to be false, defeasible and subject to revision and change. Incorrigibility received scathing criticism from Austin’s arguments, many of which are contained in *Sense and Sensibilia*.² It was in any case connected with the protocol statements of positivism, and so declined when its influence was on the wane.

However, this objection does not dispose of foundationalism. It is true that the foundationalists, particularly, the strong foundationalists, have typically made stronger claims on behalf of basic beliefs characterizing them as infallible, indubitable or incorrigible and hence, are vulnerable to this charge. But this objection does not touch the foundationalism in its less vulnerable modest or weak version. – a version which Alston has called “minimal foundationalism”³ or Mark Pastin, “modest foundationalism”⁴. What minimal foundationalism

...requires of a foundation is only that it is immediately justified, justified by something other than the possession of other justified beliefs. And to say that a certain person is immediately justified in holding a certain belief is to say nothing as to whether it could be shown defective by someone else or at some other time.⁵

If the basic beliefs are immediately justified, if they are “logically independent” of other claims and therefore, unsusceptible of mediate justification, it would follow by the same token that they cannot be shown mistaken in the basis of other claims, or rendered false.

This objection to the foundationalist notion of a “basic belief” has been brought by Keith Lehrer⁶, among others. He attacks foundational beliefs both at the basic and non-basic levels. As to basic beliefs, he considers whether they basic beliefs are “self-justified”. Here Lehrer examines three alternatives (1) “self-justified” beliefs are beliefs, for the understanding of which, in his view, no information is needed over and

above “semantic information.” The difficulty he sees is: How are we to tell, on the basis of which epistemic principle, that these sorts of belief are self-justified?⁷ There are two alternative answers. (1) In a length argument Lehrer rejects the position that such principles are true by virtue of the semantic information that is needed for the understanding of their meaning.⁸ (2) The belief that the principle is true is basic and by being basic explains how other beliefs are self-justified.⁹ Lehrer’s objection to this is as follows:

This maneuver, though logically consistent opens the door to the rampant forms of speculation. Any one wishing to argue that he knows anything whosever can then *claims* that what he knows is a basic belief and if challenged his retort will be that what he knows is a basic belief. When asked to defend his claim, he can retort that it is a basic belief that the belief is basic and so on.¹⁰

Alston has made a detailed review of Lehrer’s criticisms. We shall follow him closely in our exposition of the problem. According to Alston this criticism is not damaging for Minimal foundationalism. Minimal foundationalism does not require that any belief be self-justified but only that some beliefs are immediately justified; being self-justified is only one possible form of the latter. A belief is self-justified, in a literal sense, if it is justified just by virtue of being the sort of belief it is. But that is, by no means, the only kind of immediate justification. Now, one may observe that although it is an important point that immediate justification is not confined to self-justification that does not really counter Lehrer’s objection. For whatever mode of immediate justification we think attaches to beliefs about one’s current states of consciousness, the question can still be raised as to

whether the epistemic principle that beliefs of this sort are justified under these conditions can be defended.

But this is a difficulty which, according to Alston, is not peculiar to foundationalism. He says:

This is a problem for any epistemology, foundationalism or otherwise, that employs the concept of epistemic justification. It is incumbent for any epistemology to specify the grounds for principles that lay down conditions for beliefs of a certain sort to count as justified. I believe that a sober assessment of the situation would reveal that no epistemology has been conspicuously successful at this job. Before using this demand as a weapon against foundationalism the critic should show us that the position he favors does a better job.¹¹

Let us now turn to Lehrer's consideration of (3) by taking basic beliefs as self-justified we will be able to explain how other beliefs are justified.¹² This alternative is rejected on the basis of the argument that foundationalism cannot account for the justification of non-basic empirical beliefs. Derivative justification of non-basic beliefs. He proceeds from what he calls "the fundamental doctrine of foundation theories, viz., that "justification, whether it is the self-justification of basic beliefs, or the derivative justification of non-basic beliefs guarantees truth."¹³ Lehrer's objection is that when we consider the justification of non-basic beliefs by

evidence, "The consequence which follows is that evidence never completely justifies a belief in such a way as to guarantee the truth of the belief unless the probability of the statement on the basis of the statement is equal to one."¹⁴ Same considerations are applicable to basic beliefs: "If we now consider the question how probable a belief must be in order to be self-justified, an analogous argument shows that the belief must have an initial probability of one."¹⁵ And this implies that practically no contingent beliefs will be justified. To explain why it would be so, Lehrer says:

For any strictly probabilistic function, no statement has an initial probability of one unless it is a logical truth, and in infinite languages no non-general statement has an initial probability of one unless it is a logical truth. Hence, with the exception of certain general statements in infinite languages, completely justified basic beliefs would have to be restricted to logical truths, and completely justified non-basic beliefs would have to be restricted to logical consequences of completely justified beliefs. We would be locked out of the realm of the contingent and skepticism would reign supreme there.¹⁶

The implications that Lehrer derives from the "fundamental doctrine of foundationalism" Alston observes are complex ones and one cannot go the whole way with it. One way of diffusing the force of the criticism is to question whether minimal foundationalism holds that "justification guarantees truth". A natural interpretation would be that it is impossible for a justified belief to be false and initially Lehrer also means that. But then he

has drifted to other meanings such as comparing epistemic guarantee of truth to a manufacturer's guarantee of soundness, carrying a strong presumption of truth and finally, in Chapter 6 of *Knowledge*, Lehrer introduces a conception midway between "necessitates truth" and "carrying a strong presumption of truth". Lehrer does not spell out what that is, except by reference to probability. What we are to understand by it is this: that a belief must have a probability of one if its justification is to guarantee its truth. To say that the justification of a belief guarantees its truth is to say that it comes as close as possible to necessitating the truth of the belief. On this interpretation, then, the claim that "justification guarantees truth" has the same consequence for both basic and non-basic beliefs – receiving a probability of one.

Alston makes the following remark: that doctrine is no part of Minimal Foundationalism. It is quite possible for some beliefs to be immediately justified and for other beliefs to be mediately justified on the basis of the former without any of them receiving a probability of one. At least there is nothing in the general notion of immediate and mediate justification to support any such requirement. No doubt, the higher the probability the stronger the justification but why should a foundationalist have to insist on a maximally strong foundation? What is there about foundationalism, as contrasted with rival orientations, that necessitates such a demand? The distinctive thing about foundationalism is the structure of justification it asserts; and this structure can be imposed on justification of varying degrees of strength. Once more a band of camp followers has been mistaken for the main garrison.¹⁷

What stand of Alston is revealed in his critique of Lehrer's criticism? He admits "there to be strong objections to any form of foundationalism, and that some kind of coherence or contextualist theory will provide more general orientation in epistemology... Nevertheless, if foundationalism is to be successfully disposed of, it must be attacked in its most defensible, and not in its most vulnerable form."¹⁸ "Thus though Alston does not project himself as an advocate of minimal foundationalism, it has been his aim to show that Lehrer's arguments leave untouched the more modest and less vulnerable form what he has called 'Minimal Foundationalism'.

We agree with Alston that Lehrer's objections fail to get off the ground because the latter's stipulations are stronger than those which most of the foundationalists think necessary. Lehrer has been actually criticized to deal with a foundationalism which is not unanimously held by foundationalists themselves. However, Lehrer's reflections have many important points. According to him, any belief involves the application of terms and concepts and to be justified in such application, one requires the information justifying one in concluding that the conditions are the kind in which such a concept or term is correctly applied. He challenges the non-comparative use of concepts prescribed by foundationalists like Chisholm. For him, "...to be complete justified in believing it to be of that kind one must have the information needed to enable one to tell such a state from another."¹⁹

Equally important is Lehrer's difficulty pertaining to the communication of justification. His attack is really upon the supposed extremely private character of basic beliefs. If these are wholly subjective,

then there can be no going out of this solipsistic position. And if these are expressed in language, generality cannot be avoided. Chisholm's suggestion of the non-comparative use of "seem" and "appear" words provides no real solution. Application of concepts on any particular object makes the object transcend particularity in a sense, and join generality. In the transition, however obvious it may, from "I am in pain" to "someone is in pain" there is inference involved. That basic beliefs still retain their immediacy when inference occurs is not quite intelligible. One may wonder whether they remain uncontaminated by generality.

We shall now concentrate on another fundamental central contention of foundationalism that sensation, direct apprehension or some immediate experience of the believer is considered to be appropriate for the role of justifiers. This is known as the theory of the given and it has attracted vehement opposition from non-foundationalists who have dubbed it as the doctrine of the "Myth of the Given" or "Givinism". This doctrine has its source in C.I. Lewis and finds expression in his different works. According to Lewis, our knowledge of the external world can be justified, in the last analysis, only by indubitable apprehension of the immediate data of sense. He is often looked upon as one of the foundationalist who grounded knowledge in sense-data as he does write in loose, experiential terms about the given. The epistemological motivation for the theory of the given is the theory's bearings upon the regress problem of justification (and also his criticism of the coherence theory of justification). This epistemological motivation is exemplified in Lewis' frequent claim that without apprehension of the given there would be

no such thing as empirical knowledge and that we shall be “headed back the Bosanquet” thus, giving vent to his abhorrence for the coherence theory.

What exactly is the given in perception? An initial response to the question might be: something disclosed in experience.²⁰ More specifically, the given in Lewis’ theory is either a specific sensory “quale”(such as the immediacy of the redness or loudness) or something analyzable into a complex of sensory “qualia”.²¹ Lewis often calls such qualia, “sensa”, thus indicating that they are sense impressions of a sort. Accordingly, he holds that sensory qualia should be described by such expressive locutions as the following: “looks like”, “sounds like”, “smells like”, “feels like”, and “tastes like”.²² The key point to be made is that Lewis concedes that actual reports of the pure given are seldom, if indeed ever, made. And that they are difficult or impossible to make in ordinary language. Apprehension of the given does not depend in any way on being able to express linguistically what is thus apprehended, though such expression may in fact be possible through expressive language. “Expressive language” is not really ordinary, since considerable philosophical commentary is required to restrict the content of “looks like” statements to the pure given. Lewis holds the given to be present in every perception and this is buttressed by the regress argument. Lewis refuses to accept that regress is genuine, since no stopping place can be found. Although many, perhaps most propositional claims are justified in terms of further propositional claims, the regress ends at a level or variety of propositions which are justified not by other propositions, but by something non-propositional, the given. Chisholm, who shares Lewis’ intuitions that perception involves something like an element of presentation or givenness, says: “The expression ‘the given’ becomes a term of

contemporary philosophical vocabulary because of its use by C.I. Lewis in his *Mind and the World Order* (Scribner, 1929).”²³

He writes further:

What, then, is the status of the doctrine of “the given” or “the myth of the given”? In my opinion the doctrine is correct in saying that there are some beliefs or statements which are “self-justifying” or that among beliefs and statements which are “self-justifying” are some which concern appearances or “ways of being appeared to”.²⁴

The doctrine of the given has attracted criticism both from the non-foundationalists who are not explicitly coherentists and coherentists themselves. The crux of the objection is that non-propositional states/attitudes cannot serve as justifiers of beliefs which are propositional states/attitudes. We shall dwell specially on the reactions that the doctrine has elicited from Wilfred Sellars, which reactions have triggered off fresh criticism. He is indeed the path-finder. The discourse on the “given” is without question one of the targets of Wilfred Sellars’ influential critique of the notion of “the whole framework of givenness”. Sellars’ papers on the topic are numerous, mostly very long and extremely condensed and extremely difficult and to treat only a small portion of Sellars’ work, which we are doomed to do, would not be doing justice to him, and would also be to place it in the worst light, perhaps senses could put one

One of the things Sellars is attacking is the idea that something that was merely given by the senses could put one in a position to be justified in

making a judgment about the empirical world. The given in the sense is a myth, because one cannot be given what one is not in a position to receive. In the case of experience Sellars' position is that one's experience cannot serve as the basis of one's beliefs unless one is able to bring the experience, in some way, into the "logical space of reason". Sellars' rejection of the doctrine consists in showing that even the knowledge that something *looks* red presupposes nothing less than knowing what it is for something to *be* red. A mind which does not possess the concept of something's actually *being* red could not frame any true judgment containing the term 'red'. "...*being* red"; Sellars argues, "is a logically prior notion than "*looking* red".²⁵ Sellars claims that, far from presupposing no prior concepts, one's taking something to have a property presupposes 'whole batteries' of conceptual abilities for identifying features of *public* objects. Knowing even as simple a fact as a is red "involves a long history of acquiring piecemeal habits of response to various objects in various circumstances..."²⁶ Perceptual takings are, as Quine might say, theory-laden.

I am able to 'see at a glance' that something is red only because I have a conceptual picture of myself being in a situation consisting of such and such objects thusly located in Space and Time, a picture which I am constantly checking and revising, a picture any part of which and any principle of which can be put into jeopardy, but cannot be put into jeopardy all at once.²⁷

In his correspondence with Chisholm, Sellars writes:

In your first letter you expressed agreement 'with much of what [I] have to say about "the myth of the given"'. Well, of a piece with my rejection of this myth is my contention that before those people come to know non-inferentially (by 'introspection') that they have thoughts, they must first construct the concept of what it is to be a thought.²⁸

At this point, Sellars refers to the central thesis he maintains against the notion of the givenness. According to Sellars, the basic confusion behind the Myth of the Given is that

... instead of coming to have a concept of something because we have noticed that sort of thing, to have the ability to notice that sort of thing is already to have the concept of that sort of thing and cannot account for it.²⁹

A related aspect of the entire polemical exercise is that no non-propositional states, sensations or some immediate experience of the believer can serve as justifiers of beliefs which are propositional states/attitudes. It has been argued that nothing justifies a belief except another belief. Justification of beliefs is to be found within the 'web of belief' alone. It is true that our experiences start with sensory stimulations; these are first or primitive cognitions expressive of certain sensations. These lead, through

appropriate processes to belief formation. But appeal to sensation or sensory stimulation is of no help in justifying a belief. For epistemic content-wise, there is an irreducible qualitative difference between sensation and belief. Beliefs are judgmental, characterized by the use of concepts; concepts are conspicuously absent in sensation. To justify a belief is to justify it as true. And that which is devoid of truth-value can never justify something which is true. It is only our beliefs in sensation that can serve as the justifier of another belief. Even to believe that one has certain sensation one must have a belief about the connection between the senses and something objective, e.g., between “looks red” and “is red”. If a person other than the believer in question tries to justify the latter’s belief, then also he can do so only if he entertains beliefs about the connection between the latter’s sensation and the world outside. In any case nothing short of a belief can justify another belief.

What Sellars’ criticism seems to point to is perhaps the Kantian picture of concepts and intuitions getting together to produce knowledge. Let us not speculate on that. What we can assert with certainty is that the premise of Sellars’ argument is that there is no such thing such as justified belief which is non-propositional, and no such thing as justification which is not a relation between propositions. So to speak of our acquaintance with redness or with an instantiation of redness as “grounding” of our knowledge that “this is a red object” or that “redness is a color” is always a mistake. He keeps raw feels and justified true beliefs apart and deprives raw feels of their status of privileged representation.

The existence of raw feels – pains, whatever feelings babies have when looking at colored or lighted objects is an obvious objection to this

theory of Sellars. To counter this objection Sellars invokes the distinction between awareness-as-discriminative behavior and awareness as what Sellars calls 'being in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says.'³⁰ Awareness in the first sense is reliable signaling manifested by rats and amoebas. Awareness in the second sense is found only by beings whose behavior is manifested in the utterances of sentences with the intention of justifying the utterances of other sentences.

Children and photo-electric cells both discriminate red objects, but pre-linguistic children are thought to "know what red is" in some sense in which the photo-electric cells cannot. But how can the pre-linguistic child know what pain is or what red is if all awareness is a linguistic affair? Sellars' answer would be, the child knows what pain is like without knowing what *sort* it is. The former is just to have pain, but not to know what it is. The child does not know what pain is, until and unless he comes to grasp the relevant vocabulary. It is not that the child feels differently before and after language learning. He *feels* the same thing and it feels just the *same* to him before and after language learning. All that language acquisition does is to let him enter a community whose members exchange justifications of assertions and other actions with one another. So what Sellars is saying to the supporters of the "Myth of the Given" is that knowing what things are like is not a matter of being justified in asserting a proposition.

To this the supporters of the "given", such as Roderick Firth, have argued that such a view confuses concepts with words. Firth notes that a problem is created regarding the relation between "looks red" and "is red". If we say, "we cannot understand 'looks red' unless we possess the contrasting

concept 'is red', then it would seem that it is *not* logically possible to have the concept 'looks red' *before* we have the concept 'is red'. Firth says:

...the underlying paradox is easily dissolved if we do not confuse concepts with words used to express them. It is a genetic fact, but a fact with philosophical implications, that when a child first begins to use the word 'red' with any consistency he applies it to things that look red to him... To call this a "primitive form" of the concept "looks red" is to acknowledge that in some sense the child cannot *fully* understand adult usage until he is able to distinguish things that merely look red from things that really are red; but we must not suppose that the child somehow *loses* his primitive concept when he acquires a more sophisticated one.³¹

Sellars does not address this problem in his reflection on Firth's paper.³² But his answer can be gleaned from his other works. There are several plausible answers: (1) to have a concept is to have the use of a word, (2) to remain content with the dilemma of either granting concepts to anything that can respond to stimuli, babies, amoeba and computers in their current stage of development or explain why draw a distinction between conceptual thought and its primitive predecessors, looks red, feels hot on a plane different from having acquired a language and in the process of learning.

Richard Rorty who claims that the doctrines of Sellars and Quine have destroyed the pretensions of the traditional theory of knowledge that knowledge needs foundations puts, the argument between Sellars' and his critiques on the point raised above as follows:

Sellars can say that he will give up the term concept to those who wish to endow record-changers or their protoplasmic counterparts as long as he can have some other terms to indicate what we have when we can place classifications in its relation to other classifications in the way language-users do when they argue about what class a given item would fall in. Once again, Sellars falls back on saying that justification is a matter of social practice, and that everything which is not a matter of social practice is no help in understanding of human knowledge, no matter how helpful it may be in understanding its acquisition.³³

It is a matter of debate whether we are to accept the whole of what Sellars has said, but as Rorty claims, Sellars has shown convincingly that the sensory given could never play epistemologically critical roles the foundationalist requires of it. Justification is not a reduction to some sensory and non-conceptual 'given' to which representational concepts are more or less accurately related. Rather it can only be understood in a contextual setting. It is a matter of what we are willing to settle for, and what we still ask for further explanation of, in a given social or even conversational context. The response of Sellars on givenness is his "commitment to the thesis that justification is not a matter of special relation between ideas (or words) and objects, but of conversation, of social practice."³⁴ Rorty also says we understand social

justification of belief and have no need to view it as accuracy of representation.³⁵

Rorty, in his reflection on Sellars, in effect, defends a coherence theory saying “nothing counts as justification unless by reference to what we already accept and ... there is no way to get outside our beliefs and our language so as to find some test other than coherence.” Rorty begins his extended arguments against foundationalism with a quote from Sellars:³⁶

...*all* awareness of sorts, resemblances, facts, etc., in short, all awareness of abstract entities – indeed, all awareness even of particulars – is a linguistic affair... [N]ot even the awareness of such sorts, resemblances and facts as pertain to so-called immediate experience is presupposed by the process of acquiring language.³⁷

Rorty sees his own arguments against foundationalism as a restatement of Sellars’ arguments. Hence, we would not stop to discuss Rorty’s critique of foundationalism to prevent repetition.

Laurance Bonjour, one of the most prominent coherentists of our time has argued against foundationalism in his seminal works. In the paper “Can Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?”³⁸ Bonjour’s anti-foundational arguments are directed against the Myth of the Given.

He says:

...the givinst is caught in a fundamental dilemma: if his intuitions or immediate apprehensions are construed as

cognitive, then they will be both capable of giving justification and in need of it themselves; if they are non-cognitive, then they do not need justification but are also incapable of proving it.³⁹

Solution may be had from a half-way, intermediate position, having the mongrel features of being a semi-cognitive or quasi-cognitive state which “resembles a belief in its capacity to confer justification, while differing from a belief in not requiring justification itself. In fact some such conception seems to be implicit in most, if not all givivist positions. But when stated thus baldly, this solution to the problem seems hopelessly contrived and *ad hoc*. Pending such a regress-stopper our problem could not be solved.

In his book, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*,⁴⁰ Bonjour returns to his anti-foundationalist stance. He presents his anti-foundationalist argument which has several steps.

(1) Suppose that there are basic empirical beliefs that is empirical beliefs (a) which are epistemically justified, and (b) whose justification does not depend on that of any further empirical beliefs.

(2) For a belief to be epistemically justified requires that there be a reason why it is likely to be true.

(3) For a belief to be epistemically justified for a particular person requires that the person be himself be in cognitive possession of such a reason.

(4) The only way to the cognitive possession of such a reason is to believe with justification the premises from which it follows that the belief is likely to be true.

(5) The premises of such a justifying argument for an empirical belief cannot be entirely *apriori*; at least one such premise must be empirical. Therefore, the justification of supposed basic empirical belief must depend on the justification of at least one other empirical belief, contradicting (1); it follows that there can be no basic empirical belief, contradicting (1); it follows that there can be no empirical basic beliefs.⁴¹

We have already mentioned in Chapter II that central to any successful foundationalist theory is an account of how any basic or (directly evident) propositions, which serve as the foundation for knowledge, can confer justification on 'indirectly evident' propositions. We want to know how far Chisholm's foundationalism provides such an account. It has been pointed out that Chisholm's foundationalism provides no such account for his epistemic principles and definitions do not explain how a directly evident proposition can confer evidence upon an indirectly evident one, in spite of the fact that they appear design to explain this. This has been shown differently by philosophers writing on Chisholm have shown it in different ways.⁴² We shall begin with Timm Triplett's observations. He has made the stronger claim that directly evident propositions do not entail indirectly evident ones. Even if we take Chisholm's epistemic principles to be necessarily true.⁴³ One of the most important of the principles set forth in Chapter 4 of the second edition of *Theory of Knowledge*, principle (C), which, moves us from the directly to the indirectly evident is as follows:

(C) For any subject *S*, if *S* believes, without ground for doubt, that he is perceiving something to be *F*, then it is evident for *S* that he perceives something to be *F*.⁴⁴

In the above principle, the predicate letter *F* can be substituted by those predicates, which connote sensible characteristics, e.g., being white, pertaining to the ways in which we sense or are appeared to. If we follow Chisholm's use of the word 'perceive', then, it is apparent that if *S* perceives something to be white, then it follows that there is some ordinary external object which *is* white.

What is troubling us is that even principle (C), which moves us from the directly evident to the indirectly evident, does not express this as a matter of the directly evident entailing the indirectly evident. Triplett says that this can be shown if we consider the following two states of affairs.

(*p*) *S* believes without ground for doubt that he perceives something to be white.

(*q*) *S* does perceive something which is white.

(*p*) can be directly evident to *S*, but (*p*) does not entail (*q*) which it should do by principle (C), which tells us that it is necessary that if (*p*) is true then (*q*) is evident to *S*. But it does not follow that (*q*) itself must be true, for this may be one of those cases in which a proposition is both

evident and false. This possibility of a proposition to be both evident and false, is not our invention, Chisholm explicitly allows it. He says:

... it is possible that some false propositions are such that it is more reasonable for us to believe those propositions than it is for us to withhold them. Indeed, we will find this: it is possible that there are some propositions which are both evident and false.⁴⁵

Let us try to understand Chisholm's intent: what does it mean for one proposition to be a basis for another? Chisholm provides the answer in the following definition:

DG.1 e is a basis of h for $S = \text{Df } e$ is self-presenting for S ; and necessarily, if e is self-presenting for S , then h is evident for S .⁴⁶

This definition requires that there be some self-presenting proposition e such that if e is self-presenting for S , then some proposition h is directly evident for S . Suppose h is the proposition that S appears to perceive something to be white and what is the e ? It is a proposition incorporating a belief which is without ground for doubt being self-presenting e cannot be the proposition that S believes that he is perceiving something to be white. For although this proposition is self-presenting, it is not the case that necessarily, if it is so, h is evident (indirectly) for S . For there may be cases in which the proposition that S believes that he is perceiving something to

be white is true and is self-presenting for *S*, and yet *h* is not evident to *S*. This becomes plausible when there exist grounds for *S* to doubt this belief.

Chisholm has revised his definition of self-presenting restricting it to 'certain' as distinguished from the evident.

h is certain for *S* = Df *h* is beyond reasonable doubt for *S*
and there is no *i* such that accepting *i* is more reasonable
for *S* than accepting *h*.⁴⁷

By Chisholm's definition of 'certain' the proposition that *S* is perceiving something which appears *F* is not certain but is more reasonable for *S* than accepting the proposition that he is perceiving something to be *F*. And on the basis of one proposition being more reasonable to accept than another, there is the possibility of a proposition coming in between. Thus the self-presenting proposition, *S* believes that he is perceiving something to be *F* (also: *S* is being appeared to *F*-ly) is more reasonable to accept than the proposition, *S* is perceiving something that looks *F*, compared to the proposition, *S* is perceiving something to be *F*. it may be possible to distinguish another level of proposition between the first and second, namely, *S* is perceiving something which looks *F* to him irrespective of how it looks to others or to his own self at other times. If there are any propositions in between two levels then it becomes difficult to say that self-presenting propositions provide bases for indirectly evident propositions. The 'in-between' propositions seem, when true, to be more reasonable for *S* to accept than the proposition's which Chisholm christened as 'certain'.⁴⁸

As such Chisholm's revision of the definition of self-presenting does not help us to understand the relation between basic and non-basic beliefs.

There is not only problems in defining the relationship between self-presenting, states, and the directly and indirectly evident propositions, there is also problems regarding how Chisholm's principles safeguard the transition from one to the other. In setting out a summary statement of his methodology at the beginning of Chapter II of *Theory of Knowledge* (2nd edn.) Chisholm is adumbrating a foundationalist doctrine of just this. But Alston observes:

None of these principles are of the "transfer of evidence" form. None of them say that if a proposition with a certain kind of content is evident to a subject, *S*, then a proposition with a certain related sort of content will also thereby be evident for that subject. So ... they doing toward enabling us to show how other propositions derive evidence from directly evident propositions.⁴⁹

Perhaps Chisholm was not completely unaware of the problem, and he writes:

What, then, of our justification for those propositions that are indirectly evident? We might say that they are justified in three different ways. (1) They may be justified by certain relations they bear to what is *directly* evident. (2) They may be justified by certain relations they bear to *each other*. And (3) they may

be justified by their own nature, so to speak, and quite independently of the relation they bear to anything else.⁵⁰

However, it has been amply shown that none of Chisholm's principles provides for the first kind of justification.⁵¹ In any case, however, three postulates quoted above do not match with the early suggestion that all non-directly evident propositions derive their justification from propositions that are directly evident. Another difficulty with Chisholm is his "directly evident-indirectly evident" distinction. He equates "directly evident" with what is called in the foundational parlance as 'immediate justification'. But Chisholm classifies many perceptual and memory experiences, which count as directly evident, as 'indirectly evident'. This saddles Chisholm with incompatible criteria for the application of directly evident.⁵²

At crucial point in his epistemology, Chisholm relies on the view that all other evident propositions derive their evidence from directly evident propositions. But his system does not guarantee this. Chisholm's notion of a self-presenting proposition is not at all clear. From the way Chisholm defines it, it is clear that they are "given to" or "presented" to consciousness. There is scope of confusion, nevertheless. In the first edition of the *Theory of Knowledge*, 'directly evident' plays the role officially assigned to "self-presenting" in the second edition. In the definition of self-evident, what the truth of p does is to render evident the truth of p . But Chisholm also says that what the truth of p does is to justify the higher level epistemic proposition that it is evident to S that p . If we call "self-presenting" the lower level and explanation of "directly evident" higher level accounts, we find that the higher level is mixed up with the lower level in Chisholm's discussion. We

may, to explicate our observation consider Chisholm's example of the man who is thinking that Albuquerque is in New Mexico. Chisholm presents it as a case of reiteration, which it is not. For what was said to be justified was the higher level epistemic proposition "I know that I believe that Albuquerque is in New Mexico." While what was said to 'state' the justification was rather "I do believe that it is in New Mexico". Here Chisholm is obviously switching to the lower-level construal. Alston points out that Chisholm is not clearly distinguishing the levels-distinct propositions p and it is evident to S that p . This is an example of level-crossing in epistemology. The question now is what justifies one in believing the higher level proposition that it is evident to me that p ? Putting together different formulations to say that p is evident is to say that (1) it is more reasonable for me to accept p than not, and (2) the only proposition that could be more reasonable for me to accept than p would be one which has the maximum degree of reasonableness.⁵³

It would seem that propositions of neither form (1) nor (2) could be justified by the mere fact that I am thinking about Albuquerque being "appeared to redly" or feeling embarrassed.

When I am considering something as mere reasonable to accept or having maximum degree of reasonableness, I am invoking valid standards of evaluation. The reason for accepting certain epistemic standards and applying them in a way may not be clear and overboard. They may be possessed implicitly, one may say. "Nevertheless, I would still maintain that at however 'implicit level'" one must "have" reasons of the sort mentioned if one is to be justified in any kind of evaluation. And the self-presenting states of just being appeared to redly or counting a glass of water, is not

sufficient to put one in possession of however implicit a sort, of such reasons.”⁵⁴

Another obvious question for us to ask is: What justifies or render acceptable Chisholm’s rules or principles for transfer of evidence? Although one might expect a foundationalism to answer that such rules are self-evidently acceptable, this is not Chisholm’s answer. His answer rather is that these rules are acceptable because they accommodate our basic common-sense beliefs. By saying that Chisholm means (a) they permit us to derive these beliefs from our foundational belief and (b) that they are resistant to counter examples, that is, they do not permit us to derive intuitively false beliefs from intuitively true one.

Even if Chisholm’s special rules have these properties (a) and (b), his use of his rules puts his foundationalism in an odd position. And this has been brought out neatly by Bruce Aune.⁵⁵

He contends that a rationally acceptable justification requires that its premises are rationally acceptable and so are the rules of inference. We may allow (for the sake of argument) that foundational belief, as Chisholm characterizes them, are fully justifiable, but what about his rules of evidence? If these rules are rationally acceptable for the *reasons* he gives – namely, they permit us to basic, commonsensical beliefs from the foundation and are thus resistant to counter examples – then, if theory is not to take us in higher-level circle (justifying commonsense belief by reference to rules that are, in turn, justified by reference to commonsense beliefs), he must allow that commonsense belief have a rational credibility or acceptability that is

not owing to the fact that they are inferable, by acceptable rules, from fundamental beliefs.

Aune contends that in either case Chisholm's foundationalism is in serious trouble: either it takes us in a higher level circle or it tacitly denies the foundationalist contention that, an empirical belief, if it is not self-justifying, is rationally justifiable, because and only because it is inferable from foundational beliefs.

The difficulty Aune is pointing vitiates most foundationalist theories. Typically, defenders of such theories argue that certain beliefs have this self-justifying character. But they do not insist that forms of inference are equally self-justifying. The reason that they do not so insist is no form of non-demonstrative inference seems self-justifying. If they are not, then, their use for inferring ordinary empirical beliefs from allegedly self-justifying ones are not more secure or more rationally indubitable than those ordinary, empirical, commonsense beliefs. So if the standard philosophical questions of epistemic justification of ordinary, empirical, commonsense beliefs is to be satisfactorily resolved by a foundational approach, self-justifying forms of inference will have to be found besides self-justifying beliefs. Aune observes that they are not forthcoming from Chisholm who relies so much on rules of inference.

An over-all change in his radical foundational position is discernible in Chisholm's later works. We may even say that he advocates a form of modest foundationalism. In a note in Chapter 9 of his book, (3rd edn.), he says: "I believe that the view I have defended here in the present book is

what Audi would call ‘Modest Epistemic Psychological Foundationalism’”⁵⁶ In “A Version of Foundationalism”, Chisholm says that our knowledge is not a function merely of what is self-presenting. There is a non-foundational moment of justification also which is provided by the concepts of absence of contradiction, disconfirmation, etc.⁵⁷ The same argument seems to be repeated in *Theory of Knowledge* even more explicitly and that seems to be his reason for labeling his view as “modest Foundationalism”. He says there that the epistemic status of an empirical belief is a function of three different things.

(1) The object of a belief is self-presenting. In such a case, the belief may be called a basic apprehension.

(2) Some beliefs may have prima-facie probability. If I accept a proposition, and if that proposition is not disconfirmed by my total evidence, then that proposition is probable for me.

And, finally,

(3) a belief may derive its epistemic status from the way it logically concurs with the other things one believes. As we have seen these relations may raise the raise the proposition believed from that of being merely probable to that of being evident.⁵⁸

Chisholm is here clearly defending principles for the sake of enhancing the initial degree of justification by placing such beliefs within a more and more inclusive coherent set of beliefs. He has modified his position of a strong foundationalist.

CHAPTER III
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