

## CHAPTER V

### TOWARDS RECONCILIATION

In the foregoing discussions, particularly from Chapter II through Chapter V, we have been concentrating on the two theories of justification, their substantive theses as well as the arguments they deploy against each other, thus, bringing to the fore their contrast. It is now time to pause and see whether the two theories are really so opposed that in no way they can be brought closer and make it possible to forge a reconciliation and rapprochement between them. What must be acknowledged is that there are hidden currents of thinking for reducing the conflict between them. There are hints and suggestions dropped by philosophers and also their explicit statements are there to that effect. This may not be surprising because we are, after all, dealing with human knowledge, more precisely, justification of belief and both the theories we are considering have important things to say about it. The subject, of which foundationalism and coherentism are accounts, although different, is about the structure of empirical knowledge. We may here listen to what Laurence Bonjour has to say.

...the subject of which foundationalism and coherentism are offering competing accounts is the fundamental structure of the epistemic justification of contingent or empirical beliefs, where what is distinctive about epistemic justification is that it involves an acceptably strong reason for thinking that the belief in question is true or likely to be true. This is not the only possible

account of the subject matter of the dispute, but it is by far the most standard and straightforward.<sup>1</sup>

Ernest Sosa has clarified the alternatives of foundationalism and coherentism through the metaphors of the pyramid and the raft<sup>2</sup> (the latter idea being borrowed from Otto Neurath), respectively. According to foundationalism, each piece of knowledge lies on a pyramid such that the base supports the superstructure. The coherentist rejects the metaphor of the pyramid in favor of one according to which knowledge is a raft that floats free of any anchor or tie. Repairs must be made afloat, so that we must stand on some in order to replace or repair others. Not every part can go at once.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, Sosa finds a “surprising kinship” between coherentism and foundationalism, both of which turn out to be varieties of a deeper foundationalism, which he calls “formal foundationalism”. Formal foundationalism is the view that epistemic conditions supervene on non-epistemic conditions in a way that can be specified in general, perhaps recursively. Sosa says that substantive foundationalism is only a particular way of doing so, and coherentism is another. This means that the alternatives of foundationalism and coherentism, of the pyramid and the raft alike are committed to a kind of “formal foundationalism”. This view derives its plausibility from the claim that justification conditions are normative and that all normative claims are supervening. However, Sosa did not develop, what we consider to be a promising line of thought. He argues that substantive foundationalism is superior, since coherentism is unable to account adequately for the epistemic status of beliefs at the ‘periphery’ of the body of knowledge.

## Section I: Chisholm and Coherence

That the idea of coherence is not something untouchable to the foundationalists can be shown with reference to Chisholm's foundationalist position. Chisholm, who many think, offers the best example of a foundationalist theory of justification, has claimed that a principle of coherence is needed to give a complete account of justification.<sup>5</sup> [Chisholm, of course, has used the word "congruence" and not the word "coherence". We shall use the word "coherence" without affecting Chisholm's position]. According to him, a set of propositions *A* is coherent if "*A* is a set of two or more propositions each of which is such that the conjunction of all the others tends to confirm it and is logically independent of it".<sup>6</sup> According to Chisholm some claim *e* tends to confirm some other claim just if *e* would give a person some reason for accepting *h* even if *e* were the only relevant evidence available to the person. What this amounts to in precise language, Chisholm says, is that "*e* tends to confirm *h*" means that "necessarily, for every *S*, if *e* is evident for *S* and if everything that is evident for *S* is entailed by *e*, then *h* has some presumption in its favour."<sup>7</sup> Thus, what Chisholm intends to indicate by his definition of coherence is that each proposition in a coherent set is given some epistemic support by the conjunction of the remaining propositions. Given that definition of coherence, Chisholm argues for two principles of coherence, principles *H* and *I*. The principles are as follows:

(*H*) Any set of [coherent] propositions, each of which has some presumption in its favour for *S*, is such that each of its members is beyond reasonable doubt for *S*.

(J) If *S* believes, without ground for doubt, that he perceives something to be *F*, and if the proposition that there is something that is *F* which is a member of a [coherent] set of propositions, each of which is beyond reasonable doubt for *S*, then it is evident for *S* that he perceives something to be *F*.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the technicalities, the above principles and definitions, the terms such as “some presumption in its favour”, “beyond reasonable doubt”, and “evident” are used by Chisholm to pick out increasing degrees of epistemic warrant. Even when a proposition *p* has some degree of warrant deriving from foundational claims, one may not be sure whether to believe it or not for evidence which is not strong enough, or even when the proposition has some epistemic merit, *S* ought neither to believe nor to disbelieve, i.e., withhold judgement. What Chisholm is claiming here is that a proposition, even a proposition with relatively little to recommend it epistemically, can gain in epistemic stature by belonging to a set of propositions which is such that the remaining members of the set if assumed support its truth.

Chisholm’s example of a coherent set is as follows:

There is a cat on the roof today; there was one yesterday; and there was one there the day before yesterday and there was one there the day before that, and there is a cat on the roof almost everyday... Each of the five propositions thus formulated may be said to be confirmed by the set of all others.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, we assume on the basis of present perception and certain memories that each of these five propositions has at least some presumption in its favour for *S*. We can conclude by using *H* that each of these claims is beyond reasonable doubt for *S*. And thus, if we further assume that *S* believes without ground for doubt that he perceives there to be a cat on the roof, we can conclude using *I* that it is evident for *S* that there is a cat on the roof and that thus, *S* knows this. Chisholm says:

Each of the five propositions thus formulated may be said to be confirmed by the set of all the others. They are mutually consistent; hence, they are concurrent; and therefore, they are all reasonable by principle *H*.<sup>10</sup>

It is true that Chisholm allows the role of coherence to be important epistemically in these cases where the propositions comprising the coherent set have some warrant independent of coherence. However, the warrant may be only so-called, “only feint epistemic praise” and may never be elevated to the position of being supported by evidence strong enough for knowledge. Essentially, what Chisholm claims is that without some principle of coherence extensive empirical knowledge would be impossible. And this sounds very much like what C.I.Lewis has said before him.<sup>11</sup> Chisholm admits that the two principles, *H* and *I* are “somewhat bold epistemically” but goes on to say “boldness is in order if we are to continue to hold that skepticism is false.”<sup>12</sup> Chisholm’s reason is not pragmatic but epistemic because his principles allow a claim with a certain degree of warrant to gain additional warrant by being supported by other claims which also have a certain degree of warrant. And it stops skepticism.

It may be pointed out that Chisholm was not speaking of a coherence theory but of coherence principles. That is a matter of terminology. A theory is a body of statements which also incorporate principles. He may be accused of defending principles which are at odds with the foundationalist view of justification. This objection is pointless because Chisholm's leaning towards coherence principles simply shows that he believes in a joining of hands with the coherentists so far as epistemic justification of empirical beliefs is concerned. Elsewhere, Chisholm observes: "There are two moments of epistemic justification, one of them foundational and the other

That is not to say that there are no foundational statements, nor that some of our beliefs are not justified on their bases, but that not all our beliefs are so justified. Basic warrant-conferring statements are limited to what a man believes at a particular time. And their warrant-increasing property will be determined by their inferential relationship. Coherence among statements help increase whatever epistemic warrant a proposition has initially. But this is only for enhancement or augmentation. The primary warrant must be derived from the foundational beliefs. A compromise between foundationalism and coherentism can be effected. Such a theory of mitigated foundationalism or sublimated coherentism, Bonjour calls "weak foundationalism". We already had an occasion to mention that. Certain beliefs have a modicum of epistemic warrant which is non-inferential in character. This is to be augmented by a further appeal to coherence. Here seems to be a point where the contending theories meet.

## **Section II: Earl Conee and “Foundational Coherentism”**

More recently, Earl Conee, in his paper, “The Basic Nature of Epistemic Justification”<sup>14</sup>, has confronted the problem of reconciliation more directly. He argues that the controversy between the opposed theses of foundationalism and coherentism has satisfactory solution. He first begins with the question: What makes each theory right? The basic coherentist view that coherence among beliefs contributes to justification, and no autonomously justified beliefs are required for this to occur, remains, according to him quite plausible. The best grounds for foundationalism derive from the considerations that our cognitive access to the world is initiated by sensory experience. The two theses are opposed to one another and their opposition put a constraint on any attempt at resolution. Each party to the controversy has highlighted the difficulties in the other. Conee offers, what he calls a prolegomena of clearing away, “apparent obstacles to reconciliation among approaches and outline the resulting inclusive view.”<sup>15</sup>

About a cohering system Conee raises the question as to how it is possible that there are sufficient observational beliefs to constitute a convincing system while experience does not at least largely fit with the system. The “observational beliefs”, according to him, can be counted as another means of smuggling in appropriate experience into the system. When appropriate experiences are absent there is little credibility to the claim that the cohering beliefs are justified. Any such system fails to make sense of a person’s own sensory states. There is plausibility about the coherentist denial of a need for foundational “beliefs”. The plausible basis for this denial is that there can be cohering systems of justified beliefs

without any external support consisting of beliefs of *ordinary* sort. A person need not reflect on his or her experiences, or formulate judgments about them in order to have a system of justified beliefs. But there is no plausibility to the claim that a cohering system of beliefs would be justified, even if one's atypical, *experiential* beliefs fail to lend credence to the system.<sup>16</sup> Conee gives an example. Suppose a man has a system of cohering beliefs including that he sees just black and white objects illuminated by a white light, and that he is not hallucinating or otherwise deceived. Suppose too that that person has a visual experience of seeing blue. Under the circumstances, the perceptual beliefs in his system are not justified. The experience of blue render unjustified his belief that all that he sees is black or white. Coherence among beliefs is insufficient to justify those beliefs in the face of recalcitrant experience.

With regard to foundationalism, the epistemic role of sheer sensory experience has been questioned. In Chapter III of this work, we have discussed the objections against the "sensuous given" as being non-propositional and unconceptualized sort of awareness. There is C.I. Lewis' claim that the given element in experience and conceptual thought are such that "neither limits the other". Now, it may be that experience places no insuperable causal limit on what can be believed. But this is not a problem for the core foundationalist thesis that experience sets a rational limit. That means the character of experience limits which beliefs can be justified. Our experiences, even though non-propositional, somehow constrain our beliefs about the external world. We can use the word 'substantiate' too, in order to convey the sort of support that a sensory foundation can provide to perceptual beliefs. By 'substantiation', Conee does not mean the strong

claim that that non-proposition, sensory experiences can be premises in a deductive or inductive logical relations in the demonstration of any external world belief. He means that “experience can substantiate external world beliefs by an epistemic support relation other than deductive and inductive validity.”<sup>17</sup> The nature of the justificatory constraint provided by experience does call for explanation. But the existence of the relation is not rendered dubious, thereby. However, if experiential support of beliefs is present, but coherence is absent, it is difficult to say the belief is justified. Let us explain this with Conee’s example. Suppose, Jones is in his room with all the windows closed to shut out light from outside. He believes that the lights in his room are on. He has the ordinary visual experiences of an illuminated room. But suppose also that Jones believes that there is no electric supply and the lights are electrical. His visual experiences do not suffice to substantiate his beliefs because the three beliefs do not form a coherent system. So when the foundationalists talk of crucial experiences foundations in justification, the justified beliefs do not occur in incoherent combinations. Even first person phenomenal beliefs are not plausibly held to be justified in the absence of all coherence. Such beliefs are justified only when they cohere as experience of phenomenal quality, thus requiring at least minimal coherent system.<sup>18</sup>

The relation of epistemic support is the heart of epistemic justification, and it is found to be encouraging by Conee. He finds in it a topic where a combination of coherentism and foundationalism is particularly promising. He writes:

Substantiation of experience calls for an explanation, and so does coherence among beliefs. There is no need to think that these are two problematic relations. It may be that the only basic epistemic support relation is a sort of coherence that can hold both among beliefs in a system and between a system of belief and constraining experiences. If so, then the best theory of justification would combine the core of coherentism with the core of foundationalism and have it that a belief is epistemically justified exactly when it is in a coherent system that coheres with the person's experiences.<sup>19</sup>

According to Conee, what contributes to the dispute between coherentists and foundationalists is the difficulty to fit in experience within doxastic categories. His analysis has shown that there is no insurmountable obstacle in this. The resulting thesis Conee calls "foundational coherentism". It contains the insights of coherentism when it asserts that justified beliefs must be a coherent system of beliefs and goes beyond coherentism towards foundationalism when it says that the system of beliefs coheres with experience.

### **Section III: Susan Haack and Foundherentism**

We shall now give an account of one of the most fascinating claims towards reconstruction in epistemology presented by Susan Haack in her book, *Evidence and Inquiry: Towards Reconstruction in Epistemology*.<sup>20</sup> The

reconstruction consists in transcending the classical dichotomy of foundationalist versus coherentist theories of justification. This is sought to be done by providing a new position which contains what is good in both the standard views, and none of the bad. Haack calls her position foundherentism.

Three main objectives are persuaded in Haack's book. The first and the most important is to set forth a new theory, foundherentism. The second is, by a critical examination of alternative epistemological theories - foundationalism and coherentism - to bring out the merits and superiority of foundherentism. The third is to defend the legitimacy of epistemological inquiry and theory against a number of currently fashionable views to the contrary. We shall follow her first and third objectives.

Haack offers a 'new explication' of epistemic justification, a theory which is neither foundational nor coherentist in structure, but "foundherentist". A mixture of foundationalism and coherentism, it makes room both for pervasive mutual support among beliefs and for the contribution of experience to empirical justification. It, in other words, would be a double-aspect theory "... allowing the contributory relevance both of empirical considerations about human being's cognitive capacities and limitations and of considerations of a logical deductive character."<sup>21</sup> With this aim in view, Haack turns to an examination of the foundationalism-coherentism dialectic to show how they push one toward the middle ground of foundherentism. Haack's examination of the two rival theories treads the familiar ground of highlighting the defects of each, and hence, sometimes repetitive. The difference of her approach consists in a

“rational reconstruction” to get these familiar arguments into their strongest forms. Besides, Haack coins novel and exciting phrases to christen the arguments. All the arguments are not equally important for our purpose. We shall concentrate on the major ones.

Haack begins with registering the shades of foundationalism and coherentism. On the basis of the variants of the forms, a whole range of permutations is made. The pair of distinctions strong/weak, pure/impure gives the four-fold classification: strong, pure, foundationalism; weak, pure, foundationalism; strong, impure, foundationalism; weak, impure foundationalism. Coherentism has the two initial forms, “uncompromising” and “moderated” coherentism. “Moderated coherentism” is distinguished into “moderated, weighted, coherentism”, and “moderated, degree-of-embedding coherentism”.

Haack claims that even at this very initial stage, “With the various refinements, qualifications and modifications ..., the rival theories have come, in a way, closer together.”<sup>22</sup> Let us quote her:

Weighted coherentism [some beliefs in a coherent set of beliefs have a distinguished initial status, justification depending on weighted mutual support] and weak, self-justificatory foundationalism - especially impure, weak, self-justificatory foundationalism - bear more than passing resemblance to each other. Self-justificatory foundationalism makes justification derived from relations among beliefs, as does coherentism in all its

forms; weighted coherentism allows that some beliefs have an epistemic distinction not dependent on their relations to other beliefs, as does foundationalism in all its forms.<sup>23</sup>

Haack claims that from this preliminary stage, it will not take very elaborate argument to establish the main thesis that foundationalism and coherentism do not exhaust the options in the theory of justification. Her argument is simple enough. She concentrates on what each theory requires or allows to be the theory it is, and on that basis, what it does not require or allow. Thus, foundationalism requires one-directionality, coherentism does not; coherentism requires justification to be exclusively a matter of relations among beliefs, foundationalism does not. A theory which allows non-belief input cannot be coherentist; a theory which does not require one-directionality cannot be foundationalist. The theory which Haack intends to work out is one which allows the relevance of experience to justification, but requires no class of privileged beliefs justified exclusively by experience with no support from other beliefs. It is neither foundationalist, nor coherentist, but occupies an intermediate position between the traditional rivals. Haack gives a rough idea, an approximation of the theory she favors, thus:

(FHI) A subject's experience is relevant to the justification of his empirical beliefs, but there need be no privileged class of empirical beliefs justified exclusively by the support of experience, independently of the support of other beliefs; and, (FHII) justification is not exclusively one-directional, but involves pervasive relations of mutual support.<sup>24</sup>

From this *prima facie* case Haack does not immediately proceed to defend her position. Rather, her strategy is to examine the most significant arguments in the debate between foundationalism and coherentism. She has presented several arguments, either damaging or fatal, in different degrees, to the variants in the two warring camps. It is not necessary to state all of these. We shall pick up the two most important ones, one against foundationalism and the other against coherentism.

Haack calls her clinching arguments against the most plausible forms of foundationalism, the “up and back all the way down arguments”. The first argument in it identifies a weakness in even modest forms of foundationalism, a weakness that cannot be repaired except by abandoning, as she puts it, “the one-directional character of [foundational] justification”; the second argument supports the conclusion that if one-directionality is weakened, in a plausible way, the result is a form of foundherentism. She presents these closely related arguments by means of an example. Suppose that a man has the experience of seeing a dog before him. Although this experience undoubtedly gives him some justification for believing that a dog is actually there, his justification for this belief would be greater, she says, if he also justifiably believed that his eyes were working normally, that he was not under the influence of post-hypnotic suggestion, that there is no life-like toy dogs in the vicinity, and so on. It is, she concludes, a defect of weak forms of foundationalism that they cannot allow basic empirical beliefs this “downward” support from beliefs about a higher-order domain – from beliefs about things that the subject is not currently experiencing.

Haack's most important argument against the most plausible forms of coherentism is the drunken sailors argument. The most fundamental problem with coherentism lies in the fact that it tries to make justification depend solely on relations among beliefs. The point is expressed by C.I. Lewis when he protests that this claim of the coherentist's is as absurd as suggesting that two drunken sailors could support each other by leaning back to back – when neither was standing on anything. Only experience, she concludes, can provide the indispensable groundwork, the “ultimate empirical evidence”, on which a system of mutually-supporting empirical beliefs must ultimately rest. So foundationalism won't do; coherentism, too, won't do. So neither foundationalism nor coherentism would do. Haack's own theory assimilates in limited and circumspect ways certain features of both of them but rejects much else. Here is not a synthesis but a novel and impressive “third alternative”.<sup>25</sup>

In a bid to undermine foundationalism and coherentism Haack makes a detailed case-study of C.I. Lewis as a representative of the former and Donald Davidson and Laurence Bonjour as representatives of coherentism.

#### **A. C. I. Lewis and Undermining of Foundationalism:**

Haack summarizes the strong foundationalist position of Lewis in three key theses. In each case Haack's strategy would be to show that it is false or inconclusive or ambiguous and in each, the strong foundationalism of Lewis wears out to accommodate some weaker thesis. Let us now take them up *ad seriatum*.

**Thesis 1.** One's apprehension of what is given to one in immediate experience is certain. This thesis Haack says is full of ambiguities. The question of truth of a belief and the question of its justification are not kept distinct so far as the apprehension of experience is concerned. Lewis is primarily concerned with "immunity to error" which he takes as equivalent to "immunity to unjustifiedness". "Certain" in this context, that is, apprehension of experience, means both "immune from error" and "immune from unjustifiedness". Haack formulates this distinction as T-certain ('T' stands for truth) and J-certain ('J' stands for justifiedness). Another ambiguity detected is, certainty can be substantially T or J-certain, or trivially T or J-certain. An "apprehension of the given" will be substantially T-certain *"if it could not be false, because it is guaranteed to be true; substantially J-certain if it could not be unjustified, because it is guaranteed to be justified; it would be trivially T-certain if it could not be false but also could not be true; trivially J-certain if it could not be unjustified, but also could not be justified"*.<sup>26</sup>

Ambiguity also visits Lewis' examples of the apprehension of the given, "I now see what looks like a sheet of paper", "I now see what looks like a doorknob" as well as his use of phrases like "presentations of sense", "direct findings of sense", "Immediately presented ... contents of experience", "apprehended ... facts of experience" because these may be taken in either way, that is, as beliefs or judgments of what is given in experience and the experience itself. Hence, Lewis' Thesis 1 is not defensible. It is not only inconclusive but false. It can be reconstructed by pointing out that we do have various experiences, sensory, introspective, but what experiences we are going to have is up to us. Haack marks it the thesis

1\* She observes that Lewis acknowledges as much when he contends that '... there is such a thing as experience, the contents of which we do not invent.'<sup>27</sup>

**Thesis 2.** Unless there were such absolutely certain apprehensions of experience, no empirical belief could be justified to any degree. Haack's observation is that this thesis is vulnerable to the confusion the two ways in which empirical beliefs are justified. (1) Beliefs are justified absolutely – they are justified and non-relatively, that is, not relative to any further beliefs; (2) beliefs are justified completely, not just partially justified.

What is being claimed here is that an objective belief, a belief about the external world can be justified to some degree, relatively, with reference to some further beliefs which support it, but it cannot be justified absolutely, non-relatively unless, ultimately, the series of beliefs comes to an end with some belief or beliefs which are fully justified independently of the support of any other beliefs. Haack diagnoses it as a variant of the strong foundationalist regress argument which is "re-phrased" by Haack as the "no tolerable alternative argument", meaning that a coherentist account is ruled out. But there is no guarantee that the ultimate foundation will be fully and completely justified independently of any belief. Haack locates in Lewis' own writing dilution of the requirement, allowing that the grounds of belief don't happen to be certain but only 'credible'.<sup>28</sup> From these observations Haack concludes that Lewis' argument is unsound but it leaves room for a weak thesis 2\*. It is that unless one had such experiences none of one's empirical beliefs would be justified to any degree.

**Thesis 3.** The justification of all one's (justified) empirical beliefs depend ultimately, at least, in part, on the support of these certain apprehensions of experience.

Initially there seems to be no doubt that it is a strong foundationalist theory that is proposed. Only one's present experience is available to one in the peculiar direct way to guarantee the justification of one's empirical beliefs. Haack's contention is that this Lewisian thesis is repudiated in the context of his discussion of memory. Most of one's experiential beliefs could be justified only by reference to past experience – and these are presently available to one only through the fallible medium of memory. Haack observes as follows:

At this point, it seems that Lewis shifts to a weak foundationalism in which in which the basis includes, besides apprehensions of one's present sensory experience ... apprehensions, by means of memory, of past experiences, taken to be no more than initially credible.<sup>29</sup>(sh35)

Haack probes into the question why it is not possible for Lewis to accommodate in his strong foundationalism apprehensions, by means of memory, of past experiences, to include them among his allegedly certain apprehension of experience, which constitutes the basis. The reason is, in order to be a basis what is required is not the present apprehension of past memory experience but judgments of one's past sensory experience along the lines of "It now seems to me that I remember seeing what looked like a doorknob". Lewis acknowledges that since they depend on memory they are

not certain.<sup>30</sup> Lewis is forced to retreat from his strong foundationalism to weak foundationalism. Haack notes:

...apprehensions of one's present experiences are certain; but they are insufficient to form the basis, and while the addition of memory judgments of past experience might provide a sufficient basis, it is at the price of the sacrifice of certainty.<sup>31</sup>

Haack refers to Lewis's own admission in this regard that justification of most empirical beliefs does not ultimately depend, even in part, on the support of supposedly certain apprehensions of what is presently given to one in experience. It depends, most often, on admittedly fallible memories of what was given to one in experience. Lewis says:

In addition to the present data of recollection, a generalization is required to the effect that when such data of memory are given, the seemingly remembered experiences may, with some degree of accuracy, be accepted as actual.<sup>32</sup>

So we see that the goal of the above exposition is not only to show that Lewis' foundational theory fails, but also to show that properly interpreted and cleared of confusion his foundational theses reveal tendencies which point to a foundherentist direction, and can be accommodated by it.

**B. Dismantling Coherentism** Haack's foundherentism is also motivated by her attacks on Donald Davidson and Laurence Bonjour, who are representatives of coherentism. She makes a short work of Bonjour before turning to a detailed exposition and critical notice of Davidson.

### **Laurence Bonjour and Foundherentism**

We know that Bonjour rejects the doctrine of the given and still leaves room for something like an experiential constraint in his coherence account of justification both in his book *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* and his paper "The Externalist Theory of Empirical Knowledge". This he seeks to do by means of the imposition of the "observational requirement" on justification. Observation is Bonjour's way to allow some role of experience. Coherence theory, by definition, holds that all justification is inferential, a matter of relation among beliefs. How can it accommodate the "the observation requirement", something non-inferential? Bonjour overcomes this difficulty by drawing a distinction between the two senses of a belief's being non-inferential: with respect to its origin and with respect to its justification. A belief is non-inferential in the first sense, when a subject may come to have it through observation or introspection and not as an inference from other beliefs. Beliefs, non-inferential in origin are cognitively spontaneous. But justification of the belief is sustained through inferential relation to other beliefs of the subject. Haack interprets Bonjour as saying more; as being interested not only in the coherent justification of beliefs but a meta-justification of this theory of justification. The observation requirement guarantees the steady and on-going observational input which provides the basic reason that a system of beliefs is likely to be true.

Haack's target is the observation requirement. The statement of it, she argues, reveals an ambiguity between what she calls (1) a doxastic and (2) an experientialist interpretation. On the former interpretation, it is required that the subject believes that he has cognitively spontaneous beliefs which he believes to be generally reliable. On the latter interpretation, it is required of this subject to have cognitive spontaneous beliefs and he believes that they are generally reliable. There is an equivocation between the subject's *believing* to have and *having* cognitively spontaneous beliefs; confusion between a systems's attributing reliability to cognitively spontaneous beliefs and the system's actually containing such beliefs. There is further confusions between the weaker claim: the "observation requirement guarantees that a cognitive system which satisfies it will receive *at least apparent* input from the world."<sup>33</sup> and the stronger claim that "the observational requirement guarantees that the system of beliefs will receive on-going observational inputs."<sup>34</sup>

These equivocations and ambiguities aside, Haack concentrates on the most vital part of BonJour's argument, namely, how the observation requirement radically alters the character of his theory. On the doxastic interpretation, the Observation Requirement is couched in terms of relations among the subject's beliefs, and hence, entirely consonant with coherentism. On its experientialist interpretation, Observation Requirement is understood, not purely doxastically, as relations among beliefs; it yields something which does guarantee experiential input. But, then, it radically alters the character of BonJour's coherentism. It will not qualify as coherentist. Does it then qualify as foundationalist? It does not either. For, foundationalism requires that basic beliefs be justified otherwise than by the support of

further beliefs. In the reconstructed version of Bonjour's theory, cognitively spontaneous beliefs would depend for their justification on the support of other beliefs as well as on their observational origin. Haack takes it to be a turn towards foundherentism. It is not exactly like it. However, it, allowing "...*both* a role to experience *and* pervasive mutual support, surely is recognizably foundherentism in tendency."<sup>35</sup>

#### **D. Davidson and Foundherentism**

Haack has many observations on Davidson's version of coherentism set forth in his influential paper "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge".<sup>36</sup> Having shifting through these observations, she states the substance of her critique thus: To save coherentism from the drunken sailors argument Davidson establishes that "beliefs are by nature generally true."<sup>37</sup> But "...it fails because it requires a version of the principle of charity which is too demanding to accept."<sup>38</sup>

Davidson's position is coherentist because it treats justification as a relation exclusively among beliefs. This is the positive thesis. The negative strategy turns on the thesis that the idea that a belief might be justified by something other than other beliefs rests on confusion between justification and causation. In the positive part of his paper, Davidson depends on a theory of interpretation within the philosophy of language. When it comes to his negative strategy, specifically epistemological issues come to the fore and the pulls towards a double-aspect theory becomes apparent. The key to Davidson's positive thesis is to see it as the consequence of correct theory of belief-attribution. An interpreter must so interpret his respondents' discourse as to attribute to them beliefs which are, by and large, true. This argument,

as Haack observes, turns on the principle of charity. At the same time it makes the principle too strong.<sup>39</sup> On its modest construal, the principle of charity is a rule to the effect that a translator has no option but to proceed on the presumption of agreement between himself and his respondent. Davidson, however, views it be something stronger to the effect that “an interpreter must so interpret as to make a speaker or agent largely *correct* about the world.”<sup>40</sup> Haack discovers different formulations of what Davidson means, explaining charity in terms of truth and in terms of agreement. Citing Davidson’s way of putting the point from his paper she thinks that Davidson is shifting back and forth between explaining charity in terms of maximizing agreement and explaining it in terms of maximizing truth. However, Davidson’s commitment is to maximizing truth rather than maximizing agreement. What raises questions or rather doubts is how to pass from an interpreter’s having no option but to proceed on the assumption that “respondents’ beliefs are mostly true” to “people’s beliefs must be mostly true”. We cannot rule out the possibility that respondents may systematically lie. Haack opines that “...a modest principle, in the form of a defeasible presumption of agreement between translator and respondent has *some* claim to plausibility as a maxim of translational practice.”<sup>41</sup> This plausibility “... does not extend to the much more ambitious principle that an interpreter must attribute mostly true beliefs to the respondents.”<sup>42</sup> Haack thinks that Davidson’s optimism, even if true, will not show the superiority of coherentism over other theories of justification, but obviates a significant objection to it – the drunken sailor’s argument. To reach coherentist conclusion Davidson’s negative strategy is also necessary. What is that negative strategy? It is an argument to the effect that the idea of justification is exclusively a relation among beliefs. A denial of this rests on confusion,

confusion of justification with causation. Any attempt to relate our beliefs with the world requires a relation between a sensation and a belief. The relation cannot be logical; it is causal. But a causal explanation of a belief does not show how and why the belief is justified. Justification must be purely doxastic. Davidson can say this: if justification is a purely logical affair then in that case only we can regard justification and causation in an either or light. Truly speaking, Haack says, it is possible to hold that the concept of justification is neither purely causal, nor purely logical. Whether someone is justified in some belief depends on *what* he believes and on *why* he believes it.

Haack attracts our notice to a passage in “A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge” in which Davidson gives two quite different accounts of what beliefs are: (1) sentences held true by someone; (2) belief-states which are caused by and cause events outside the bodies of their entertainers.<sup>43</sup> Building on this admission of Davidson, Haack thinks that at some level of awareness, a satisfactory of justification would have to have a causal as well as a logical element. Concluding her assessment of Davidson’s coherentism Haack observes as follows:

That there is an implicit acknowledgement of the double-aspect character of the concept of justification to be found on Davidson’s paper despite his official endorsement of the irrelevance of causation argument indicates something of the strength of the pull towards... foundherentism.<sup>44</sup>

This requires, in her opinion, an additional step – a repudiation of the sharp distinction between purely perceptual beliefs and beliefs supported by other beliefs.<sup>45</sup> In the absence of a sharp distinction of observational versus theoretical beliefs, it would be foundherentist in character.

After the detailed case-studies of specific foundationalist and coherentist programmer, Haack gives an articulation of her own theory of foundherentism.

She says:

My account is neither foundationalist, nor coherentist, but “foundherentist,” Like foundationalism, it allows the relevance of experience to empirical justification; but it does not require that there be any belief exclusively justified by experience. Nor that relation of experiential support be exclusively one-dimensional. Like coherentism, it allows for pervasive mutual support; but it takes empirical justification to require experiential evidence.<sup>46</sup>

Let us return to the basic question: When is a proposition *p* justified in her view? Haack’s positive theory of epistemic justification, which she calls a “double-aspect” theory is partly causal and partly evaluative. She does not accept Davidson’s theory that causation is irrelevant to justification. How do the causal and the evaluative considerations relate? The two aspects are expressed by distinguishing, first, belief-states, S-beliefs, from belief-contents, C-beliefs. The state has causal properties, the content has justificatory properties. She talks about the S-belief, referring to the state of

believing something an entity with causal properties and C-belief, the content believed to refer to an entity with evidential properties. The distinction between S-thing and C-thing is extended to reason and experience. And then the two aspects, causal and evaluative is expressed by distinguishing A's S-evidence with respect to  $p$  (a set of states of A: those other S-beliefs and sensory and introspective states which are part of the causal nexus of his S-belief that  $p$ ), from A's C-evidence with respect to  $p$  (a set of sentences or propositions: the contents of those S-beliefs, and propositions to the effect that he is in those sensory or introspective states). How justified is A at  $t$ , in believing that  $p$  depends on how good his C-evidence, i.e., his C-reasons and his experiential C-evidence, with respect to  $p$  is. But what set of propositions constitutes his C-evidence with respect to  $p$  depends on what states causally sustain/inhibit his S-belief that  $p$  at  $t$ .

The structure of the theory is, as she claims, "Informed by the analogy of a cross-word puzzle".<sup>47</sup> Her account of how good A's C-evidence with respect to  $p$  is relies on the analogy of a cross-word puzzle – where there is, undeniably pervasive mutual support, with, equally undeniably, no vicious circularity. The clues are the analogue of experiential evidence, other already completed intersecting entries of background beliefs. The reasonableness of an entry in a crossword puzzle depends on how well it fits with the clue and any other already-completed intersecting entries; how reasonable these other entries are, independently of the entry in question; and how much of the cross-word has been completed. How justified is A in believing that  $p$ , analogously depends on how favorable his C-evidence with respect to  $p$  is; how justified he is, independently of his belief that  $p$ , in

believing his C-reasons with respect to  $p$ ; and how comprehensive his C-evidence is.<sup>48</sup>

This analogy between a solution to a cross-word puzzle and justified belief is good and fruitful in the sense that it clearly exhibits how two types of fit in different directions are both necessary for a solution: a word which is a solution has to fit the entry-word, and it also has to fit other solutions. These distinct directions are easily recognized and Haack makes quite a lot out of this in a positive theory of when a belief is justified. I believe the theory can be assessed and appreciated independently of the quite general issues we have already covered. Her approach makes room for a gradational theory of justification, a way of ordering beliefs as more or less justified, with beliefs which are conclusively justified at one extreme. The first notion to be spelt out then is being favorable. Some evidence  $e$  is favorable to  $p$  when it supports  $p$ , and supportiveness is explained as explanatory integration. We have support of  $p$  from evidence  $E$  when  $p$  is better than its competitors with respect to explanatory integration of  $E$ . Supportiveness is a matter of degree. The characterization of support then borrows from both inferences to best explanation and explanatory coherence.

The idea of independent security is, Haack claims, easiest to grasp in the context of the cross-word analogy. This is surely true. However, this seems to be the only context Haack draws on to explain what she means by independent security. In real life the notion of explanatory integration readily becomes so holistic that we lose sight of independent security as an independent criterion. We feel that more work is needed here, and it would

be nice if we could furnish some real life examples which exhibited the force of and need for the independent security requirement.

The last requirement is that of comprehensiveness. Here the cross-word analogy does not seem to be of much help. It looks a lot like a total evidence requirement. Perhaps fortunately, Haack says, "The role of the comprehensiveness clause is most apparent negatively, when one judges someone unjustified or little justified in a belief because of their failure to take into account some relevant evidence."<sup>49</sup> What the cross-word analogy does is to suggest three different dimensions along which to compare justifications. To work out these three dimensions in such a way that they can be recognized in normal epistemic situations would be very interesting and worthwhile. We find her explanation of support in terms of explanatory integration is directional and optimizing, and therefore a bit like foundationalism.

We judge *Evidence and Inquiry* a valuable contribution to the issue of epistemic justification in general and to the particular problem of ours, namely, to find out a conflict-resolution mechanism between the two competing theories of justification. Haack's foundherentism seeks to do that by an integration of the causal and evidential considerations in novel ways. She has started by taking a look at good classical and recent representatives of the two rival camps and in this background asks whether there is a possibility of belonging to neither school. As a part of that Haack has identified the positions by certain core characteristics and asks whether there can be a position with neither characteristic. Haack has rightly pointed out that foundationalism think of justifiers as divided into two classes, basic and

non-basic. Many traditional foundationalists have also held that basic justifiers are certain, infallible and incorrigible. But the latter type of characteristics is not essential to foundationalism and nowhere Haack does assume that foundationalists hold that it is impossible to falsely entertain a basic belief.

Coherentists resist the division of justifiers into two classes with different justificatory properties, and thus deny the directionality of justification and settle for a holism of justification. This holism can be one where higher-level justifiers justify lower-level justifiers and vice versa. This holism is also compatible with different weighing of different types of justifiers. It is plain that if the presence or absence of a direction in justification were the only relevant characteristics of the two theories of justification under consideration, then division between foundationalism and coherentism would have been exhaustive. But Haack introduces another defining characteristic – concerning the issue of whether only beliefs can be input to justification, i.e., can be justifiers. What about experiences/ can they also be input to justification? And are they items distinct from beliefs? Haack claims that coherentists must deny that non-belief input, for example, experiences can play a role in justification, while foundationalists are said to allow this. This means that according to Haack, you cannot be a coherentist if you allow non-belief inputs to justification of beliefs. If you also deny the existence of a direction in justification, then you cannot be a foundationalist, but instead, a foundherentist, according to Haack.

It may appear that Haack is making things too easy to arrive at her theory. By hooking on to the defining traits of coherentism or

foundationalism, it has become easy for her to show that the division between the two approaches is exhaustive. One may, however, recall coherentists who have allowed non-belief inputs to justification. Jonathan Dancy is a clear example. Again, there are foundationalist theorists like Mark Pastin who have considerably toned down the tall claims of foundational beliefs being infallible or incorrigible. Alston has defended a tree-like structure of epistemic justification which is not linear. We have already made mention of that. This, however, does not falsify Haack's theory because she is concerned with philosophers who declare themselves to be foundationalists or coherentists. But it weakens her theory to some extent. She is indeed forthright in her criticism of foundationalism in any form. Strong, pure foundationalism is vulnerable to the argument that the beliefs taken as basic will be too substantial in content plausibly to be claimed to be justified by experience alone or else too insubstantial in content plausibly to be claimed to justify the rest of our empirical beliefs. Weak foundationalism is vulnerable to the argument that it cannot allow that beliefs justified in some degree by experience may get more justified by the support of other beliefs; impure foundationalism lacks a cogent rationale, allowing mutual support among derived beliefs, yet insisting that there must be a class of basic beliefs denied the possibility of support from other beliefs. Her detailed critique of C.I. Lewis shows how he shifts from strong to weak foundationalism and, even, briefly into proto-foundationalism under pressure from the arguments of Haack. Hence, it is not fair to say that she has not examined the different types of foundationalism. She has also shown why efforts to accommodate experiences are bound to compromise coherentism, as well as her critique of Bonjour's "observational requirement", showing how he equivocates, between an interpretation which can accommodate experience but is

incompatible with coherentism, and an interpretation which is compatible with coherentism but cannot accommodate experience. Another thing. If there are thinkers in either camp with leanings towards the other, then it will be to the advantage of Haack. It will strengthen her position.

However that may be, the basic argument Haack employs against coherence theories of justification is the classical argument that coherence or consistency is too weak to amount to justification. It could deem as justified a proposition within a consistent fairy-tale. She asks: How could the fact that a set of beliefs is coherent, to whatever degree and in however sophisticated sense of “coherent” be a guarantee, or even an indication, of truth.<sup>50</sup> One may object that it is far from obvious that it is a necessary or legitimate requirement upon justification that it is a guarantee of truth. It may be pointed out that if experiences are fallible and if experiences are where justification comes to an end, it is indeed natural to think that justification comes to an end here, it cannot be a guarantee of truth even though justification points to truth or is an approximation to truth. As for the other point, whether coherence is even an indicator of truth requires a weak probability only and nothing close to certainty. The further substantial issue concerns the strength with which an adequate justification should indicate truth, and whether coherence is a sufficiently strong indicator of truth to justify a belief.

Her argument against foundationalism is of a different nature. She evaluates the negative argument in support of foundationalism, the regress/circularity argument, and claims that even if this argument is quite successful against coherentism, it is not decisive in favour of

foundationalism, since it can be taken to favour foundherentism as well. The point she seems to have in mind is that even if there is a clear direction in the justificatory relation between some justifiers (experiences) and a class of beliefs still the beliefs in that class might be further justified by other and more general beliefs. This makes it possible to avoid all circulatory charges, since many beliefs do get justificatory support from outside the circle. Her definition of foundationalism, also in its weakest version, makes it mandatory that the justification of a perceptual belief by experiences is all the justification a perceptual belief can get on any foundational view, since there is only one direction in justification in the case of perceptual beliefs. In her framework, only the foundherentism can allow that the justification of a perceptual belief be improved upon and made more complete and less prima-facie by support from justified general beliefs about one's sense organs working properly, etc. She grants foundationalists the right to seeing coherence as contributing towards justification in the case of general beliefs only, not in the case of perceptual beliefs. And she is right in this that perceptual beliefs can be made more complete by support from justified general beliefs. But many foundationalists themselves have pointed it out. And by their standard Haack will be a foundationalist. However, there is no denying that Haack has taken a bold step in trying to forge a compromise between foundationalism and coherentism. Whether her position looks like foundationalism or coherentism is beside the point. Since she is trying to bring the core issues of the two, closer, it will be obvious that her final position will betray the characteristics of each in some manner. That is why she says that hers is a compromise formula. In criticizing her we should not lose sight of this basic point.

A few words for the cross-word puzzle. Even in the case of the cross-word puzzle itself, there might be several right solutions, which fit the clues and intersecting entries just as well. In this case they would be equally correct. In real life, at most one of them is true. This difference between cross-word puzzles and systems of belief should be philosophically accounted for. Perhaps Haack's position stands in the need of further articulation and elucidation. As always, there will be questions about how well these two sides of the controversy are integrated to her new position, and jointly serve the purpose of her main aim. What she says in theory of knowledge is new and suggestive. If we want to reconstruct epistemology, however, we have to do it head-on.

**CHAPTER V**  
**NOTES AND REFERENCES**

1. Laurence Bonjour, "Foundationalism and Coherentism", in *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*, Greco, J. and Sosa, E.(eds.), Oxford: Blackwell (1999), pp.117-18.
2. E. Sosa, "The Raft and the Pyramid", in *Epistemology: An Anthology*, Sosa, E. and Kim, J.(eds.), Oxford: Blackwell (2000), pp134-153.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 136
4. *Ibid.* 142.
5. Chisholm, of course has used the word "concurrence" and not the word "coherence". But we shall use the word "coherence" without any in any way affecting Chisholm's position.
6. R. Chisholm, *Theory of Knowledge*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., New Delhi, Prentice-hall of India Pvt. Ltd.(1977), pp. 82-83.
7. *Ibid.*, p.72.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 83-84.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 83.
- 10.*Ibid.*, p. 85.
- 11.C.I.Lewis, *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation*, LaSalle: Open Cort (1946), pp332-368. Lewis allows that mutual support among derived beliefs is legitimate, and can raise the degree of justification they acquire from basic beliefs. Lewis' preferred term for these relations is "congruence", which can raise the credibility of belief, although it cannot confer credibility on them in the first instance.
- 12.R. Chisholm, *Theory of Knowledge*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. , *op cit*, p. 76.

- 13.R. Chisholm, *The Foundations of Knowing*, Minneapolis: University Minnesota Press (1982),p. 13.
- 14.Earl Conee, ‘The Basic Nature of Epistemic Justification’, *The Monist*, Vol.71 (1988).
- 15.*Ibid.*, p. 392.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 394.
- 17.*Ibid.*, p. 392.
18. Robert Audi who develops a version of epistemic justification grants that coherence plays some role in justification. Whereas coherent theorists have argued that coherence is sufficient for justification, Audi argues that justification is only negatively dependent on coherence. As he explains the point, incoherence undermines justification, but coherence does not constitute justification. So he goes the half-way and does not propose any compromise between the two theories of justification.
19. Earl Conee, “The Basic Nature of Epistemic Justification”, *The Monist*, op. cit., p. 393.
20. Susan Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry: Towards Reconstruction in Epistemology*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers (1993).
21. *Ibid.* pp.1-2.
22. *Ibid.* p. 18.
23. *Ibid.* p. 19.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.* p. 93.
26. *Ibid.* p. 37.
- 27.C. I. Lewis, *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation*, LaSalle: Open Court (1946), p.182. Quoted in Haack, p. 42.

28. C. I. Lewis, *Ibid.* p.328. Quoted in Haack, p. 44.
29. Susan Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry*, p. 35
30. C. I. Lewis, *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation*, *op. cit.*, p. 334.
31. Susan Haack, *Ibid.* p. 49.
32. C. I. Lewis, *An analysis of Knowledge and Valuation*, *op.cit.*, p. 336.
33. Laurence Bonjour, *The Structure of Empirical knowledge*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge (1985), p.142. "Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge", *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. 5(1980), pp. 53-73.
34. *Ibid.*, 170.
35. Susan Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry*, *op. cit.* p. 60.
36. Donald Davidson, "The Coherence Theory Truth and Knowledge", in *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, Lepore, E. (ed.), Oxford: Basil Blackwell (1986).
37. *Ibid.*, p. 133.
38. Susan Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry*, *op. cit.*, p. 68.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
40. Davodson, "The Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", *op. cit.*, p. 133.
41. Susan Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry*, p. 67.
42. *Ibid.* p. 68.
43. Davidson, "The Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", *op. cit.*, p. 121.
44. Susan Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry*, *op.cit.*, p. 71.
45. *Ibid.*

46. Susan Haack, "Precis on *Evidence and Inquiry, Reconstruction in Epistemology*", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 56 (1996), pp. 611-12.
47. Susan Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry*. 73 off.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
49. *Ibid.*
- 50.. *Ibid.* p. 27.