AN UNDERSTANDING OF EPISTEMIC JUSTIFICATION THROUGH FOUNDATIONALISM AND COHERENTISM

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The justification of beliefs about epistemic principle is the pivotal problem in epistemology. That is, principles stating which kinds of beliefs are justified and which are not. It is in general regarded as circular to justify such beliefs empirically. However, there are two reasons for considering about epistemic justification. First, even if a satisfactory and widely accepted solution to the E. Gettier's problem remain elusive[1], many philosophers hold that there is some important connection between knowledge and justification. Hence many hold that knowledge requires justification. It can be said that **S** knows that **P** ***iff*** **P** is epistemically justified for **S**. Similarly, many holds that if **S** is epistemically justified in believing **not-P**, then **S** does not know that **P**. Since it is reasonable to think that there is some connection between knowledge and justification, a better understanding of knowledge and justification will help us to understand better the nature of knowledge. Second, what makes a belief justified or reasonable? Some beliefs are justified or reasonable and others are not, but what makes them so. Now we shall focus on foundationalism. Where we shall lay out some of the main claims of foundationalism and examine the concept of justified basic beliefs by considering the regress argument. And we shall critically discuss some answers to the question of what we ask 'What makes justified basic belief justified? Similarly, coherentism suggests that empirical beliefs are rationally constrained only by other, further empirical beliefs. And beliefs are caused by sensations and worldly events. The debated over the structure of knowledge and justification is fundamental among those who hold that knowledge requires justification. Hence the structure of knowledge is solely derives from the structure of justification.

Foundationalist Epistemology:

As we know that rationalists believe that reasoning is the best source of knowledge. And in the most rigorous sort of something namely, mathematical proof- we start with axioms, as our foundation and proceed by logical steps to our

[1] Edmund Gettier, 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?' *Analysis*, 23 (1963), pp.121-23

conclusions. The axioms are certain: they are the foundations. And they support the consequences we draw in the strongest possible, i.e., indefeasibly. However, Descartes is rationalist in this sense. For him, the foundational class was just the class of thoughts that could not be doubted. Because, you have indefeasible evidence for them. So to know something, for Descartes,

I. You must believe it,

II. It must be true, and

III. You must have indefeasible evidence for the belief.

The famous slogan 'I think therefore I am' is one thing he thoughts that you could not doubt. You could not doubt it because you could not be fooled about it. There are arguments of the form of the 'Cogito' that are equally valid[2]. For example, 'I laugh therefore I am'. It is true that you cannot laugh unless you exist either. What is special about the 'cogito' is that the premise- 'I think'- is something that it is not true whenever I think it but also indubitable or certain. According to Descartes, whenever I think it. The reason Descartes wanted a premise that was indubitable which was used the foundational strategy. He wanted a premise that was certain 'I think' from which to deduce his conclusion 'I exist' because he thought that a valid argument that has premises that are certain can transmit the certainty to the conclusion. Therefore, rationalists contend that all true and certain knowledge comes from our reason. Rationalists take mathematics as the model of knowledge and hold that certain knowledge is apriori[3]. Apriori means knowledge which is justified or known to be true independent of experience.

Some of our beliefs are justified on the basis of other beliefs. In such cases, our belief is justified in virtue of certain other things. For example, a detective is justified in believing that Smith is thief. His belief is justified on the basis of certain other things. Detective believes that Smith's fingerprints were found at the crime scene, that witness saw Smith in the area at the time of crime, that stolen objects was found in Smith's room. Hence by taking all these evidences which we can say chain

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[2]*Meditations on First Philosophy* (Rene Descartes), 1641.Copyright: 1996, *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. This is of the 1911 edition of *The Philosophical Works of Descartes* (Cambridge University Press), translated by Elizabeth S. Haldane.1

[3]A. C. Ewing, *The Fundamental Questions of Philosophy*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London and New York, 1989,p. 65.

of evidences we might say that detective is justified in believing that Smith is a thief. Oversimplifying that, we might say that our detective is justified in one belief, $\mathbf{B_1}$ on the basis of other beliefs, $\mathbf{B_2}$ and $\mathbf{B_3}$ and $\mathbf{B_2}$ and $\mathbf{B_3}$ are in turn justified on the basis of yet further beliefs and so on[4].

Now the question may arise that, Does every justified belief derive its justification from some other beliefs? Some philosopher would say 'no'. They hold that some beliefs are justified basic beliefs.

> **B** is justified basic belief = Df. **B** has some degree of justification that is independent of the justification, if any, it gets from other beliefs[5].

So, justified basic beliefs we sometimes referred to as 'immediately justified beliefs' or 'non-inferentially justified beliefs'. However, justified non-basic beliefs do depend entirely for their justification on other beliefs. Justified non-basic beliefs are sometimes referred to as 'mediately justified beliefs' or 'inferentially justified beliefs'. Justified basic beliefs include beliefs about simple logical or mathematical truths and about our own mental states. Consider the proposition that 'all tables are tables'. So the proposition for believing it does not need some other proposition or on inferring it from some other proposition. Such proposition is immediately justified. Similarly some beliefs about our own mental states would seem to be immediately justified or justified basic beliefs. Our beliefs that we doubt or believe some propositions are often immediately justified for us. For example, I believe that 'Delhi is the capital of India'. If I consider whether I have this belief, I need not refer that I do from my other beliefs. I simply consider whether I believe that 'Delhi is the capital of India' and I find that I do. I am immediately justified in believing that I have this belief. Similarly, suppose that I doubt that it will rain today. If I consider whether I do doubt this, I need not infer from some other propositions that I do. I simply consider whether I doubt it and find that I do. My belief that I doubt that it will rain today is immediately justified for me. Again some beliefs about other mental attitudes would seem to be

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[4] Noah Lemos, *An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p.46-47.

[5] Noah Lemos, *An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p.45.

immediately justified. My beliefs about whether I am happy, sad, hopeful or fearful are often immediately justified for me.

There are two main theses of foundationalism. First, foundationalism holds that there are some justified basic beliefs which are immediately justified and second, foundationalism holds that all justified non-basic beliefs depend ultimately for their justification on justified basic beliefs. According to foundationalism, our justified basic beliefs are kind of 'foundation' upon which the superstructure of non-basic beliefs rests.

The Regress Argument:

An important argument for the existence of justified basic belief is 'the regress argument'[6]. The regress argument is an argument by elimination. It holds that there are only four conceivable ways in which evidential chains must either:

I. Terminate in a belief that is not justified.
II. Be infinitely long
III. Be circular or
IV. Terminate in a justified basic belief.

If we analyze these options very closely we will find first three options are impossible and the fourth option which implies that there are justified basic beliefs, must be correct.

Option one, tells us that the evidential chain can terminate in a belief that is not justified. For example, it allows that $\mathbf{B_1}$may be supported by an evidential chain of the following sort:

$$\mathbf{B_1} \leftarrow \mathbf{B_2} \leftarrow \mathbf{B_3} \leftarrow \mathbf{B_4},$$

where $\mathbf{B_4}$ is itself an unjustified belief. Now the questions are, how can a belief which is not itself justified confer justification on other beliefs? And how can an unjustified belief be a source of justification for other beliefs?

Option two tells us that evidential chains can be infinitely long so they need not terminate. This option is with the difficulty that it seems psychologically impossible

[6] Noah Lemos, *An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p.48-49.

for us to have an infinite number of beliefs. If it is psychologically impossible for us to have an infinite number of beliefs then none of our beliefs can be supported by an infinite evidential chain. It allows that $\mathbf{B_1}$ can be supported by an evidential chain that has an infinite number of supporting links such as $\mathbf{B_1} \leftarrow \mathbf{B_2} \leftarrow \mathbf{B_3} \leftarrow \ldots$ and so on. Such infinite chain has no final or terminating link.

Option three tells us that an evidential or justificational chain can be circular. It would permit justification chains such as $\mathbf{B_1} \leftarrow \mathbf{B_2} \leftarrow \mathbf{B_3} \leftarrow \mathbf{B_1}$. However it would be impossible for a belief to confer justification on itself, if only through the other links of the chain which is impossible.

Proponents of the regress argument claim that option four, that is, terminate in a justified basic belief is the only acceptable and therefore, they are justified basic beliefs.

Classical Foundationalism:

The foundations of knowledge have been seen as infallible (which cannot be wrong), incorrigible (which cannot be refuted), and indubitable (which cannot be doubted). For empiricists these foundations consist in our beliefs about our own experience. Our beliefs are basic and non-basic. Our basic beliefs comprise such belief as that we are now seeing a blue shape in our visual field. In order to justify our non-basic belief we must be able to infer it from other beliefs. The claim of the classical foundationalists is that inferential justifications are not required for our basic beliefs. There may not actually be a blue object in the world because we may be hallucinating, but, on the other hand, we cannot be wrong about the fact that we now believe that we are seeing something blue. Justifications for such beliefs is provided by experiential status that are not themselves beliefs, that is, by our immediate apprehension of the content of our sensory, perceptual experience, or what is sometimes termed 'the Given'. We may call it traditional foundationalism. Classical foundationalism holds that the only way justification can be transmitted from one belief to another is through deduction[7].If **S's** belief that **q** is a nonbasic belief, then the only way for **S** to be justifiedin believing that **q** is by **S's** deducing **q** from some

[7] Laurence BonJour, *Epistemology: Classic Problems and Contemporary Responses* (Second Edition), Rowman and Little Field Publisher, U.K. 2010, p.179.

other proposition that **S** is justified in believing. Ultimately, if **S** is justified in believing that **q**, then **q** must follow from, or be implied by, one or more propositions for which **S** has basic justification. According to classical foundationalism, epistemic justification requires either infallible belief or deduction from what is infallibly believed.

Modest Foundationalism:

Some foundationalists hold that 'the Given' is in some ways problematic. Yet they maintain a 'moderate' foundationalism. Our perceptual beliefs about the world and our experience are not seen as infallible. We can believe that we see blue or we seem to see blue, yet either belief can turn out to be unjustified. Non-conceptual perceptual experience does not play a justificatory role. Perceptual beliefs are simply self-justified. Such a view of perception remains foundationalist in nature because we still have basic beliefs, beliefs that are non-inferentially justified. Modest foundationalism avoids the dilemma that faces traditional foundationalism. It does not have to be infallible for a perceptual belief to be justified. We may call this a modest view of foundationalism or modest foundationalism.

Modest foundationalism[8] accepts the two central claims of foundationalism. First, there are justified basic beliefs and second, that all nonbasic justified beliefs depend ultimately for their justification on justified basic beliefs. In contrast to classical foundationalism, however, modest foundationalism has a more relaxed view about the nature of basic beliefs and about the connections between justified basic beliefs and nonbasic justified beliefs. Modest foundationalism does not insist that justified basic beliefs must be infallible. Moreover, modest foundationalism does not hold that the only way for justification to be transmitted to nonbasic beliefs is through deduction. Modest foundationalism allows that nonbasic beliefs can be justified through various kinds of inductive reasoning, such as enumerative induction and inference to the best explanation.

Justification of Basic Beliefs:

Even if we think that modest foundationalism is more plausible view than classical foundationalism: We may still quest what makes basic beliefs justified?

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[8] Laurence BonJour, *Epistemology: Classic Problems and Contemporary Responses* (Second Edition), Rowman and Little Field Publisher, U.K. 2010, p.181-82.

- First, Epistemic justification either to be evaluative or normative concept or property.[9] When we say a belief is epistemically justified or reasonable, that is, a positive of favourable evaluation of that belief. If not then a negativity of that belief. Similarly, the same might be said of the concept of knowledge. When we say that someone knows something, we are making a positive favourable evaluation of his belief. Along with knowledge and justification, other evaluative or normative concepts include good, bad, right, wrong, beautiful and ugly.
- Second, the evaluative and normative properties supervene or depend on descriptive properties. In other words, a thing has its evaluative or normative properties in virtue of its having certain descriptive properties. Suppose, for example, If **B** is a beautiful painting then it is so in virtue of its having a certain composition and arrangement of colour. If we assume that justification is a normative or evaluative property, then we should assume that if someone's belief is justified, then it is justified in virtue of certain descriptive features or properties of the person or his belief.
- Third, many philosophers endorse the view about supervene and evaluative properties[10]. That means if two things differ in their evaluative properties then these must be some difference in their descriptive properties. Justified basic beliefs have a non-doxastic source of justification. The source of justification is not a belief or set of beliefs. Since justified basic beliefs have some source of justification other than one's beliefs, justified basic beliefs must have a nondoxastic source of justification[11]. A nondoxastic experience is an experience or mental state that is not a belief. Nondoxastic experiences include such things as our sensations and perceptual experiences. Sensations and perceptual experiences differ from beliefs have truth values. Beliefs are true or false. In contrast sensations and perceptual experiences do not have truth values. The belief that I have a sensation of red is either true or false. In contrast, the sensation of red is either true of false. Similarly, the perceptual

[9] Noah Lemos, *An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p.57.
[10] Noah Lemos, *An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p.58.
[11] *Ibid*., p.59

experience of seeming to hear a bell is neither true nor false. In contrast, the belief that I hear a bell have and the belief that I seem to hear a bell have truth values. According to many classical and modest foundationalists, our nondoxastic experiences are source of justification for our introspective beliefs. That means our introspective beliefs about our own sensations. Suppose I have the introspective belief that I am in pain. What justifies such belief? According to this view, it would be the fact that I am in pain. My introspective belief that I am in pain is justified in virtue of my having the sensation of pain.

Coherentism:

The coherence theory of justification is also known as coherentism. This theory of justification is an alternative to foundationalism. Proponents of the coherence theory hold that a belief is justified in virtue of belonging to a sufficiently comprehensive coherent body of beliefs. The coherence theory of justification should be distinguished from the coherence theory of truth. The former is a theory of what it means for a belief or set of beliefs to be justified, or for a subject to be justified in holding the belief or set of beliefs. The latter is a theory of what it means for a belief or proposition to be true. Hence the sole basis for epistemic justification is relations among beliefs rather than propositions. Coherentism denies the linear conception of justification which the regress argument presupposes[12]. A linear conception of justification assumes that justified nonbasic beliefs owe their justification to other beliefs and these beliefs owe their justification to still others and so on. A linear conception of justification assumes that justification is transmitted to nonbasic beliefs through the links of an evidential chain. In contrast, a proponent of the coherence theory might hold a holistic conception of justification. A holistic conception of justification sees the justification of a belief as a matter of its relation to one's whole body of belief. On this view, if one's beliefs, $\mathbf{B_1}$, $\mathbf{B_2}$, $\mathbf{B_3}$, . . .$\mathbf{B_n}$, from a (sufficiently comprehensive) coherent body of beliefs, then $\mathbf{B_1}$is justified. Coherentists might reject the view of nonbasic justification where that justification must be transmitted to nonbasic beliefs through an evidential chain.

[12] Donald Davidson, 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge', in *Kant order Hegel*, ed. Dieter Henrich (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1983), p.423–38.

The issue we are concerned here is whether sensory experience can justify *beliefs*. But if sensory experience is in this way nonconceptual, and given that beliefs are formulated in propositional and conceptual terms, it becomes hard to see how there can be an intelligible justificatory relation between the two. How can something that is not even formulated in conceptual terms be a reason for thinking that something that is thus formulated is true? The present line of argument concludes that there can be no such justificatory relation - and hence, as the only apparent alternative, that the relation between sensory experience and beliefs must be merely *causal*. D. Davidson puts it:

> The relation between a sensation and a belief cannot be logical, since sensations are not beliefs or other propositional attitudes [that is, are not formulated in conceptual terms]. What then is the relation? The answer is, I think, obvious: the relation is causal. Sensations cause some beliefs and in *this* sense are the basis or ground of those beliefs. But a causal explanation of a belief does not show how or why the belief is justified[13].

Coherence theories of justification differ from foundationalist theories insofar as they place a much greater emphasis on the role of coherence. Coherentists hold that whether a belief is justified depend entirely on how well it fits or coheres with one's other beliefs[14]. Coherentists hold that the justification of belief is entirely a matter of its relations to one's other beliefs. That is of its belonging to coherent web of mutually supporting beliefs. For this reason, the coherence theory of justification is sometimes called a 'doxastic' theory of justification. Such a theory holds that the only things that can serve as reasons or grounds for a belief are other beliefs. The strongest form of coherentism says that belonging to a coherent system of beliefs is:

I. necessary for a belief to be justified and

II. *by itself* sufficient for a belief to be justified

This view is called *Strong Coherentism*. This view can be differentiated with two weaker varieties of coherentism. *Necessity Coherentism* just makes the necessity claim at (I). It imposes coherence as what is often called "a structural condition" on justification. Structural conditions tell us how beliefs must be related to one another if they are to be justified. However, since there might be additional non-structural

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[13] D. Davidson, *A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge*, p.428.
[14] Laurence BonJour, *Epistemology: Classic Problems and Contemporary Responses* (Second Edition), Rowman and Little Field Publisher, U.K. 2010, p.189-90.

conditions on justified belief, being related to one another in the required way may not be sufficient for justification. The other view is called non-coherentist view which holds that coherence can boost the justification of a belief as long as that belief is already independently justified in some way that is not due to coherence. According to this view coherence is sufficient to boost beliefs that are independently justified. This, however, is not thought to be strong enough to be called a coherentist view. To make coherence sufficient for justification we must claim that coherence is sufficient, by itself, to generate justification. In other words, coherence must generate justification *from scratch.* This view is called *Sufficiency Coherentism*.

The significant idea is to notice that the distinction between subjective and objective approaches. The most popular objective approach is explanatory coherentism, which defines coherence in terms of that which makes for a good explanation. On such a view, hypotheses are justified by explaining the data, and the data are justified by being explained by our hypotheses. The central task for such a theory is to state conditions under which such explanation occurs. A different objective account of the coherence relation has been presented by L. BonJour. He has mentioned the following five features in his account. 1) logical consistency, 2) the extent to which the system in question is probabilistically consistent, 3) the extent to which inferential connections exist between beliefs, both in terms of the number of such connections and their strength, 4) the inverse of the degree to which the system is divided into unrelated, unconnected subsystems of belief, and 5) the inverse of the degree to which the system of belief contains unexplained anomalies. These factors are a good beginning towards an account of objective coherence, but by themselves they are not enough[15]. We need to be informed what function on these five factors is the correct one by which to define coherence. That is, we need to know how to weigh each of these factors to provide an assessment of the overall coherence of the system. Coherentism insists that it is always reasonable to ask for a justification for any statement. Coherentism challenges that foundationalism provides an arbitrary spot to stop asking for justification so that it does not provide reasons to think that certain beliefs do not need justification. Coherentism typically holds that justification is

[15] Robert Ammerman and Marcus G. Singer, *Belief, Knowledge and Truth: Reading in the Theory of Knowledge*, Charles Scribner's Sons, USA, 1970, p. 423-24.

solely a function of some relationship between beliefs. They attack foundationalism by arguing that no plausible version of the view will be able to supply enough in the way of foundational beliefs to support the entire structure of belief.[16] Coherentists have gone beyond negative philosophy to provide a positive characterization of their view. Moreover, coherentists typically adopt a subjective viewpoint regarding the items that need to cohere. And it helps maintaining that the system on which coherence is defined is the person's system of beliefs.

The argument of foundationalism is very simple. If knowledge is to be reasonable and our beliefs are justified, then those justified beliefs must be based on some other beliefs which are reasonable and they on further beliefs and so on. But ultimately this process of justification must end up in some beliefs that require no justification or are self-justified or self-evident. Foundationalists insist that there must be some beliefs that are directly or immediately justified, as opposed to being justified by inferences from other beliefs.[17] They maintain that these special non-inferentially justified beliefs form the foundation of all knowledge and that all the rest of our beliefs are ultimately justified in relation to the foundational beliefs. To establish this understanding we have analyzed various kinds of foundationalism. Then we moved on to explore coherentism, the rival of foundationalism.[18] It is obvious that logical coherence is important in any system of beliefs if it is to be accepted as true; otherwise we would lapse into meaninglessness. Coherentism clearly showed us that the better a belief system hanging together the more coherent it is. Here it stressed the importance of logical consistency in the justification of knowledge.

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[16] Robert Ammerman and Marcus G. Singer, *Belief, Knowledge and Truth: Reading in the Theory of Knowledge*, Charles Scribner's Sons, USA, 1970, p. 430.
[17] Robert Audi, 'Belief, Justification and Knowledge': *An Introduction to Epistemology*, Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1988, p.86-88.
[18] *Ibid*. p. 89.