

Justification

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The architecture of knowledge

Huemer sees four principal possibilities for structure of knowledge and its justification:

- 1 finite, linear structure: foundationalism
- 2 infinite, linear structure: infinite regress
- 3 circular structure: e.g. coherentism
- 4 no structure: skepticism

Question: could there be more complex topologies?

Sextus Empiricus, “The five modes”

The five modes of suspension according to Sextus Empiricus: (what does he mean?)

- **disagreement**
- **extension to infinity**: infinite regress
- **relativity**: object appears in relation to other objects, but cannot perceive it “directly” (and see its true nature)
- **assumption**: foundationalism
- **argument in a circle**

Important: these five modes exhaust every possibility for grounding our judgment.

Coherentism

Characterization (Coherentism)

A *coherence theory of justification* or *coherentism* “holds that [empirical] beliefs are justified by virtue of their coherence with each other.” (Huemer, 370)

- Major argument for coherentism: if our experience didn't generally connect our beliefs to reality, then it would be highly improbable that our empirical beliefs would constitute a coherent picture of the world.
- holistic view of justification, closest to structure (3)
- coherence: logical consistency, degree of integration of various components of system, explanatory power

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Chancellor Fox Fights Back

"Shut it down!" she responds to the Black Student Union. "And by 'it' I mean your fuckin' mouth. Yeah, you. Bitch."

By Stander
FOXY LAAADY

In response to weeks of harsh criticism from members of the Black Student Union — who claim Chancellor Marye Anne Fox has long neglected her duty to recruit and retain more black students on campus — Fox finally emerged from her office last Monday to take a stand against her critics.

"I will not live in this state of marginalization any longer," she said. "I shouldn't be scared to leave the safety of my office every time I want to walk to the faculty club for some soups."

Miraculously, Fox then ceased her trembling, and looked her adversaries straight in the eye.

"So bring it on, motherfuckers," she said, shedding her characteristic warble for a deep, sure baritone.

Vice Chancellor of Student Life Penny Rue — wearing a pantsuit that read "Solidarity" across the breast —



lingered back near the entrance to the Chancellor's Complex throughout the one-woman protest.

"I, too, know what it's like to be an anal-retentive anglo-saxon administrator, loathed and misunderstood by 24,000 rambunctious youth," Rue said, empathizing with her boss. "It's rough out here on Library Walk. I am truly heartsick for the chancellor."

Fox said her feelings were deeply hurt last month when a member of the BSU told her not to "just stand there and look like [she was] dumb."

"Doesn't she know that's just how I look?" Fox asked.

The chancellor then attempted to pass around a petition to shut down the BSU, but it appeared no one would accept the clipboard.

"You need to check your privilege at the door, Chancellor," shouted one student from within the small crowd that had gathered.

"You will definitely be seeing a zinger of a campuswide e-mail within the next few days containing my retort," Fox said. "And when you read it, I can assure you, you'll wish you had bought some calemine for that burn."

Basic problem for foundationalism

Laurence Bonjour: *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* (1985)

- Challenge: where does justification for foundation of foundationalism (“epistemological unmoved mover”) come from?
- Laurence Bonjour: justification as means to truth
- ⇒ The feature by virtue of which particular belief is basic must also constitute good reason for thinking that belief is true.
- Question that then arises: how can empirical belief be justified *a priori*?
- Hit foundationalist with dilemma: either basic belief is unjustified or “its justification depends on that of at least one other empirical belief.” (in Huemer, 388)

Basic antifoundationalist argument

- 1 Suppose \exists basic empirical beliefs which are themselves justified.
 - 2 Justification requires that there be a reason why belief is likely to be true.
 - 3 For a belief to be justified for a particular person, this person must be in cognitive possession of such a reason.
 - 4 The only way for this is to justifiedly believe the premises from which it follows that the belief is likely to be true.
 - 5 These premises cannot be entirely *a priori*, at least one of them must be empirical.
 - 6 Justification of candidate basic empirical belief must depend on justification of at least one other empirical belief, in contradiction with (1).
- \therefore There are no basic empirical beliefs.

Linear vs. nonlinear justification

- BonJour: tacit assumption responsible for regress problem: linear conception of justification
- ⇒ Coherentism must reject this assumption
- Alternative: systematic/holistic justification via inferential relations among beliefs in coherent system, i.e. mutual or reciprocal support.
- **local** (= justification of small set of beliefs on backdrop of largely uncontested system) vs. **global** (= overall justification of system) level of justification
- often overlooked: global level is decisive
- at local level that justification appears linear (**contextually basic beliefs** ≠ basic beliefs simpliciter), and thus gives rise to linear conception of justification
- apparent justificatory circle is not circle after all: dependence is on overall system and its coherence

The four steps of justification of an empirical belief

- 1 study relationship of this particular belief with other particular beliefs, embedding in system
- 2 check coherence of overall system of empirical beliefs
- 3 thus ascertain justification of overall system
- 4 particular belief inherits justification by virtue of its membership in system of beliefs

The foundationalist defense

William Alston, "Has foundationalism been refuted?", in Huemer (ed.)

- William Alston: a version of foundationalism can still be retained, even in light of criticism (by Frederick Will and Keith Lehrer)
- Frederick Will characterizes foundationalism in the following way:

"There is a class of claims, cognitions, that are known in a special direct, certain, incorrigible way; and all epistemic authority resides in these [...] A claim can be established to be a genuine example of knowledge [...] only if it can be disclosed to be, if not a first cognition itself, in some degree authenticated by one or more such cognitions. It must be possible somehow, beginning with such cognitions, by a finite set of steps in an acceptable procedure to arrive at the claim as a conclusion and, by virtue of this, as a justified result." (cited by Alston, p. 402)

- foundationalist basis acc to Will: “first cognitions” which are “infallible”, “indubitable”, “self-justifying”
- Will’s attack against foundationalism is against the basis’s **independence** and **incorrigibility**, i.e. the impossibility of justified rejection or revision
- **against independence**: sensory discriminations (and cognition in general) depends on social practices bc concepts emerge from these practices
- **against incorrigibility**: inherent possibility that any conceptual scheme is scrapped for a better one
- Alston: but foundationalism needn’t presuppose independence or incorrigibility

Terminology

- **mediately/indirectly justified belief**: what justifies belief includes evidence or reasons, i.e. other beliefs
- **immediately/directly justified belief**: what justifies belief does not include any other justified belief
- **Multiple branching**: typically, mediately justified belief rests on several beliefs; but each of these branches must end with an immediately justified belief

Alston's Minimal Foundationalism

Characterization (Minimal Foundationalism (MF))

"Every mediately justified belief stands at the base of a (more or less) multiply branching tree structure at the tip of each branch of which is an immediately justified belief." (405)

- ⇒ targets of Will's criticism not in definition of MF
- MF: basic beliefs must be justified by something other than other justified beliefs
 - MF: belief is immediately justified \nrightarrow belief is incorrigible
 - MF: belief is immediately justified \nrightarrow belief is absolutely independent except in its justification, i.e. can occur in context of social practices/conceptual schemes etc

Main argument for MF: regress argument

*“All that it takes to avoid the three alternatives deemed unacceptable by this argument [termination of regress by unjustified belief, circular justification, regress continues ad infinitum] is a belief at the tip of each branch that is in fact immediately justified. These beliefs do not have to be incorrigible, infallible, or indubitable to perform this function. Their justification does not have to ‘guarantee’ their truth in any sense in which that goes beyond just being justified. [...] All that is needed to satisfy the demands of the argument is that a belief that **is** immediately justified in some way or other terminate each chain of mediate justification.” (413)*

Keith Lehrer's criticism of foundationalism

Lehrer's characterization of foundationalism:

- 1 basic statements are self-justified
- 2 basic statements either irrefutable or only refutable by other basic beliefs
- 3 all non-basic beliefs justified or refuted on basis of basic beliefs

Using this characterization, Lehrer attacks foundationalism both at the basic as well as the non-basic level.

Let's only look at basic level: Lehrer challenges that beliefs can really be "self-justified"

Alston: self-justification only one mode of immediate justification, but there are others, such as the believer's awareness, or by special circumstances such as being wide awake, alert, etc.

But there are other problems:

- Question: how can “foundationalist countenance the deployment of empirical evidence to validate the foundations”? (409f)
- difference bw *knowing that p* and *knowing that I immediately know that p* for a basic belief *p*
- foundationalism: justification in first case doesn't depend on any other justified beliefs, but in second case it may very well!

Internalism about justification

Thesis (Internalism about justification)

Everything that is necessary to provide a justification for a belief is available in the consciousness. Typically, that means that when someone has a justified belief, then she “knows that it is justified and knows what the justification is. It is further assumed that the person can state or explain what [her] justification is.” (Goldman, p 2)

Externalism about justification

Thesis (Externalism about justification)

Whether someone knows p doesn't depend on whether she is aware of her grounds for believing p and whether she can articulate them, but only on the relation that obtains between the fact that she believes p and the fact that p is true.

Examples:

- causal theory of knowledge (Goldman (1967))
- (process) reliabilism (Goldman)
- tracking the truth (Nozick, Roush), although this view replaces justification entirely by tracking conditions

Argument for internalism: new evil demon

Cohen, Stewart (1984) "Justification and Truth", *Philosophical Studies* 46, pp. 279-296.

- demon isolates group of people completely from their normal environment, while of course feeding them with sensory perception as if nothing happened
- intuitively, it seems as if these people are no less rational in the beliefs they form than they were before the demon so maliciously abducted them
- so it seems as if what's relevant in justification is fully available to abducted people and thus must be internal to their minds
- challenge to externalism, particularly reliabilism: in order for a belief to qualify as knowledge, it must have been formed by reliable mechanism or veridical sense perceptions, but these conditions not satisfied here
- possible externalist reactions: bite the bullet or modify own position

Alvin Ira Goldman (*1938): process reliabilism



- “What is justified belief?” (1979)
- Two constraints on account of justification:
 - ① **no epistemic terms** in thy (such as “justified”, “knows that”, “ascertains that”), **only non-epistemic terms** (e.g. “believes that”, “is true”, “implies”)
 - ② assume externalism about justification
- **(process) reliabilism**: an epistemic agent has a justified belief that p at time t only if the belief is the result of a reliable cognitive belief-forming process(es)
- should be understood as **development of his earlier causal thy**; causality only contributing factor to reliability of process of forming beliefs

- What's wrong with most alternative accounts of justification: they place no restriction on what **causally initiates** or **sustains** belief, i.e. disregard process of acquiring or maintaining belief.
- causal process must not only be considered for base-clause principles, but also for principles of entailment (“**recursive principles**”)
- **process must be reliable** \Rightarrow no confused reasoning, no wishful thinking, no hasty generalization, no reliance on emotional attachment, no guesswork
- rather: standard perceptual processes, remembering, good reasoning, introspection

“The justificational status of a belief is a function of the reliability of the process or processes that cause it, where (as a first approximation) reliability consists in the tendency of a process to produce beliefs that are true rather than false.” (p. 10)

- gradual justification: depending e.g. on circumstances of perceptual act, the process of perceiving is **more or less** reliable and the resulting belief therefore **more or less** justified
- ⇒ comparative justification
- ⇒ comparative, gradual knowledge
- justification is **vague**, without threshold value
- process: functional operation, mapping from input (such as antecedent beliefs, emotional states, receptor stimulations; general: events within agent's nervous system) to output (consequent beliefs at given time)
- processes are cognitive operations, i.e. operations of the “ ‘information-processing’ equipment **internal** to the organism” (p. 13)

Departures from the canon

- **current time-slice** thys of justified belief: justificational status of belief entirely function of what is true of agent at the time of belief (foundationalism, coherentism)
- **genetic** or **historical** thy of justified belief: a belief is justified iff “it is ‘**well-formed**’, i.e., it has an ancestry of reliable and/or conditionally reliable cognitive operations.” (p. 14) ⇒ “historical reliabilism”
- recursive structure ⇒ foundationalism of sorts
- but **diachronic** rather than **synchronic** foundationalism
- externalism: denies necessity that knower must be conscious of justification; cf. case of forgotten original, compelling evidence

Objections to process reliabilism

- 1 **New evil demon** thought experiment
- 2 **Problem of reflective knowledge**: externalism doesn't distinguish bw cases where we don't need reflection and those where we do, such as in beliefs about logical and conceptual relationships
- 3 **Generality problem**: "problem of fixing the level of generality of the description of the facts that are going to determine whether a given case is one of knowledge" (Roush, Sherrilyn (2005), *Tracking Truth*, Oxford University Press, p. 29); different descriptions do in general not have same implications

The generality problem of externalism

(Roush, p. 29; cf. also Goldman, p. 12)

- Example: visual perception of maple tree—visual perception of object when there's a solid body between us—visual perception of object through glass window (non-opaque surfaces)—visual perception through non-opaque surface at night...
- facts about world can be described at different levels of generality
- descriptions do not in general have same implications
- in particular, don't have same implications about whether true belief by reliable process
- ⇒ process may come out as reliable or unreliable depending on level of generality at which process is described
- related problem: if description uniquely picks process, how can it be assigned a measure of reliability (which is tendency, or probability over many runs)
- Goldman's reply: relevant processes must be "content-neutral"

Robert C Stalnaker



- PhD Princeton 1965
 - taught at Yale, U Illinois, Cornell, MIT
 - explored philosophical aspects of possible world semantics
 - focus of work: “problem of saying what it is to represent the world in both speech and thought” (Steve Pyke’s website)
 - Credo: “We can describe and think about the world only with the materials we find in it.” (ibid.)
 - 2007 Locke Lectures at Oxford U
- ⇒ *Our Knowledge of the Internal World*, Oxford UP 2008

“Starting in the middle”

Link to audio file for 2007 Locke Lecture 1: “Starting in the middle”

Thesis

“Analyze theory-building how we will, we all must start in the middle.”
(W.V. Quine (1960), *Word and Object*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 4)

Internalist Cartesian view:

- knowledge of one's own internal world (= one's current thoughts and feelings) is the **unproblematic foundation for all knowledge**
- philosophical problem: how can we move from private mental states to a conception of an objective world; and how can we know that this external world answers to our conception of it?

Externalist seeks to reverse this order:

- begin with the world we find ourselves in (and either common sense or our best scientific theory about it), attempt to understand our inner lives as features of the world as it is in itself
- philosophical problem: “explain how our objective conception of the world can be a conception of a world that contains things like us who are able to think about and experience it in the way that we do” (3)

*“Internalists and externalists will each complain that the other is taking for granted what needs to be explained. The internalists see the externalist project as a project motivated by pessimism. Their complaint is this: ‘Because you see no hope of reasoning your way out of your internal world, you give up and simply **assume** that there is a world that answers to your inner conception. You just help yourself to some additional material, taking it for granted because you see no other way to make progress. You decide that honest toil is so ill paid that theft is the only option.’ But the externalists reject this way of understanding their project.*

“ ‘It is not,’ they insist, ‘that we are taking for granted what you take as given, and more besides. It is you, we think, who are taking for granted phenomena that are in need of explanation. In our view, we can make sense of your starting point—the internal world—only by locating it in a wider world. The problem, we think, is not that skepticism is unanswerable, from a purely internal point of view, even though it may be true that it is. (In fact, we argue that the problem of skepticism, seen this way, is worse than you think.) The problem is rather that skepticism about the external world has one of its sources an uncritical acceptance, and a false conception, of our knowledge of the internal world.’ ” (4)