THE ARCHITECTURE OF KNOWLEDGE

I. T. OAKLEY'S "AN ARGUMENT FOR SCEPTICISM CONCERNING JUSTIFIED BELIEF"

If a person, A, is justified in believing that P, then A's belief that P is either
(1) a basic belief, i.e., it does not depend for its justification on the justification of any other belief(s);
(2) a member of an infinite series of justified beliefs, each of which depends for its justification on some other belief; or
(3) a member of a finite series of justified beliefs, at least one of which depends for its justification on itself.

Oakley argues that there are no basic beliefs and that neither (2) nor (3) paints an accurate portrait of epistemic justification. He concludes that no beliefs are to the slightest degree justified.

I. There are no basic beliefs

A. Beliefs based on perception

1. Each and every one of these beliefs – for example, the belief that there is a table here – requires for its justification that we be justified in believing

(a) that we have the capacity to discriminate one item in our environment (e.g. a table) from another,

and that

(b) no factors are present in my environment that would cause me to make mistakes about the presence or absence of certain items (e.g. tables).

2. But we are never justified in believing that (b).

3. Thus, we are never justified in holding any belief that is based on perception.

B. Beliefs about immediate experiences

1. Each and every one of these beliefs – for example, the belief that it appears to me that something is blue – requires for its justification that we be justified in believing that *there are no factors that would cause me to make mistakes in judgment about my immediate experiences* (i.e. about how things seem immediately to me to be).

2. We are never justified in believing that there are no factors that would cause me to make mistakes in judgment about my immediate experiences.

3. Thus, we are never justified in holding any beliefs about our immediate experiences.

II. The circular picture

- We have the intuition that no belief can be justified if it depends for its justification on itself.
- "…given any set of experiences, plus the [circular] theorist's permission to allow circles of justification dependence, we will always be 'justified' in both *p* and not-*p*" (p. 381).

III. The infinite regress picture

- We cannot reconstruct an infinite regress of justified beliefs. It seems unlikely, then, that any belief could be justified if it required for its justification an infinite series of justified beliefs.
- "…any *p* and its negation are equally justified…" (p. 383) since "[w]e will always be able to construct a series headed by not-*p*, and depending upon all the same experiences as were depended upon by the first series [which was headed by *p*]" (p. 383). [This involves UNHELD BELIEFS.]

LAURENCE BONJOUR'S *THE STRUCTURE OF EMPIRICAL KNOWLEDGE*

I. An argument against the foundational picture

1. Assume for the moment that there are basic beliefs, that is, beliefs that are justified but whose justification does not depend on the justification of any other belief(s).

2. If a belief is justified, then there's a reason why it is likely to be true.

3. If a belief is justified *for some person A*, then A must be in cognitive possession of a reason why her belief is likely to be true.

4. The only way to be in cognitive possession of such a reason is to *believe with justification* the premises of an argument for the conclusion that the belief is likely to be true.

5. Thus, any allegedly basic belief will depend for its justification on the justification of other beliefs. That is, there are no basic beliefs.

II. The other alternatives

1. The infinite regress picture

No plausible way to develop this theory

2. The unjustified foundations view

   Skeptical

III. This leaves us with some form of coherentism

1. Linear coherentism: This is the view that justification proceeds linearly, as if regressing, until some point at which we discover that one of the beliefs ultimately depends for its justification on itself.

   a. My belief that P must *already* be justified if it is to justify my belief that Q.

   b. Given this, then if my belief that P justifies itself, it must *already* be justified if it is to justify itself.

   c. Yet this is absurd, and we must accordingly reject linear coherentism.

2. Nonlinear coherentism: This is the view that a belief is justified by virtue of (a) being a member of a coherent web of beliefs and (b) being appropriately related to other beliefs in that web.

   These conditions involve at least three things:

   i. Whether the belief can be *inferred* from other beliefs in the web.
   ii. Whether the web is a *coherent* one.
   iv. Whether the belief is a *member* of the web.

   Example:

   i. I have a **cognitively spontaneous belief** – that is, a belief that simply occurs to me, in a way that is both involuntary and forceful – of kind K_1 that there is a red book on the desk.
   ii. Conditions C_1 obtain (e.g. good lighting, object is close at hand, eyes functioning normally).
   iii. We take it that cognitively spontaneous beliefs of kind K_1 are likely to be true.
   iv. Thus, my belief that there is a red book on the desk is likely to be true.

   Thus, my cognitively spontaneous belief that there is a red book on the desk "is rather dependent on the background and context provided by my other beliefs" (p. 394).

IV. Objections and replies

1. Since coherence is just a relation among beliefs, it seems that a coherent system of beliefs need not involve any input from the world.

a. But the system includes cognitively spontaneous beliefs. These beliefs (i) are new elements in the system, (ii) they do not derive inferentially from other elements in the system, and (iii) we take them to be caused by the world.

2. But the mere inclusion of these beliefs might not be enough, for maybe we can construct a coherent system without seeing its cognitively spontaneous elements as being reliable enough to constitute input from the world.

   a. Here we need the *Observation Requirement*, namely, the claim that the coherent system of beliefs must contain laws attributing a high degree of reliability to a reasonable variety (but not necessarily to *all*) cognitively spontaneous beliefs. Once this requirement is in place, we are *forced* to take a significant variety of cognitively spontaneous beliefs to be reliable.

3. Even in the long run and with the continued impact of observational beliefs, there will always be multiple, equally coherent systems, and we will be unable to decide between them.

   a. The Observation Requirement rules this out as a possibility.

   b. Even if we could construct (perhaps by employing the evil demon hypothesis) two equally coherent systems, each of which met the Observation Requirement, we could not provide equally plausible explanations of the coherence of the two systems.

WILLIAM ALSTON'S "HAS FOUNDATIONALISM BEEN REFUTED?"

I. Those who argue against foundationalism sometimes call into question whether any beliefs count as basic (or, alternatively, as foundational). To do this, they provide a positive characterization of basic beliefs, and then try to show that there can be nothing that corresponds to that characterization.

   a. Two conceptions of basic beliefs

      i. Will says that basic beliefs are **incorrigible**, that is, that it is impossible either to reject or to revise them. (Oakely can be put into this camp as well.)

      ii. Lehrer says that basic beliefs are **self-justifying**, that is, that they are justified by virtue of being held, or by virtue of being a certain sort of belief.

   b. Alston's conception of basic beliefs

      A belief is basic if it is **immediately justified**, that is, if what justifies that belief does *not* include the believer's possessing other justified beliefs.

A belief is **mediately justified** if what justifies that belief *does* include the believer's possessing other justified beliefs.

MINIMAL FOUNDATIONALISM: 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.

II. Alston's argument

1. Minimal Foundationalism is a plausible and legitimate version of foundationalism.
2. Minimal Foundationalism is spelled out in terms of immediately justified beliefs, but a belief's being immediately justified entails neither that it is incorrigible nor that it is self-justifying.
3. Thus, even if Will's and Lehrer's criticisms are correct, they do not compromise Minimal Foundationalism.
4. Thus, foundationalism, at least in its minimal form, has not been refuted.

III. An immediately justified belief need *not* be

1. incorrigible, that is, impossible either to reject or to revise
2. infallible, that is, necessarily true
3. indubitable, that is, impossible to doubt
4. such that their justification "guarantees" their truth
5. incapable of being mediately justified
6. true
7. self-justified

IV. Alston against BonJour

A. BonJour's argument against foundationalism

1. Assume for the moment that there are basic beliefs, that is, beliefs that are justified but whose justification does not depend on the justification of any other belief(s).

2. If a belief is justified, then there's a reason why it is likely to be true.

3. If a belief is justified *for some person A*, then A must be in cognitive possession of a reason why her belief is likely to be true.

4. The only way to be in cognitive possession of such a reason is to *believe with justification* the premises of an argument for the conclusion that the belief is likely to be true.

5. Thus, any allegedly basic belief will depend for its justification on the justification of other beliefs. That is, there are no basic beliefs.

B. Alston will reject *both* premise 3 *and* premise 4 of BonJour's argument

a. It seems that in order to be in cognitive possession of a reason, one must be in a position to *call it forth in showing* that the belief for which it's a reason is justified. If this is the case, then Alston will deny BonJour's 3rd premise. For Alston claims that we need only *be* justified in holding a certain belief, and not that we need to be in position to *show* that we are justified (see p. 405).

b. Alston will also deny BonJour's 4th premise. He (Alston) suggests that we can be in cognitive possession of a reason (for example, I am presumably in cognitive possession of my own awareness of a feeling of depression) without believing at all in any clear sense that I am aware that I am feeling depressed (see p. 409).

SUSAN HAACK'S "A FOUNDHERENTIST THEORY OF EMPIRICAL JUSTIFICATION"

I. FOUNDHERENTISM, which is something like a mixture of foundationalism and coherentism (think of Huemer's dualistic theory of memory), is supposed to

(a) give us all of the good things about foundationalism while avoiding the bad things about coherentism

- it lets experience be relevant to empirical justification
- it lets us to avoid vicious circularity in our picture of justification

(b) give us all the good things about coherentism while avoiding the bad things about foundationalism

- it postulates no privileged class of beliefs
- it doesn't require only one-directional relations of support

II. FOUNDHERENTISM

A. A is more or less justified, at time *t*, in believing that *p*, depending on how good his evidence is.

B. The concept of justification is both *causal* and *logical*

1. CAUSAL: Degree of justification depends on the quality of the evidence that *actually causes* your beliefs. (Beliefs here are what Haack calls S-beliefs, where A's S-belief that P is whatever mental state A is in when she has the belief that P.)

Example: If A's belief is caused by wishful thinking or by clairvoyance, the quality of A's evidence is worse than it would be if her belief had been caused by legitimate scientific experiments.

2. LOGICAL: Degree of justification depends on the quality of the logical relations between your evidence and the contents of your beliefs. (The contents of your beliefs are what Haack calls C-beliefs, where A's C-belief that P is the propositional content of her belief that P.) In particular, degree of justification depends on whether we can *infer* the content of A's belief from her evidence.

    i. NON-EXPERIENTIAL BELIEF CONTENTS: When A believes that there is a red cardinal on the fence, for example, the content of A's belief is the following proposition: *there is a red cardinal on the fence*.

    ii. EXPERIENTIAL CONTENTS: When A sees a red cardinal on the fence, for example, the content of A's experience is the following proposition: A is in the visual perceptual state that constitutes seeing a red cardinal on the fence.

    This sort of evidence – the evidence provided by EXPERIENTIAL CONTENTS – has a distinctive status in Haack's theory. Such evidence consists of (a) propositions that are all true, and (b) propositions about which questions of justification don't arise. This is the FOUNDATIONALIST element in Haack's theory. (Notice that experiential contents do *not* constitute a privileged class of *beliefs*.)

C. THE COHERENTIST ELEMENT

But this isn't the end of Haack's story. There's more to the justification of a belief than how it is logically and causally related to its evidence. In addition to these things, the belief has to fit well with other of A's beliefs (or at least its doing so will increase the degree to which the belief is justified.) The addition of this element helps us (a) to avoid foundationalism's requirement that *the relation of support move in only one direction*, while (b) avoiding *vicious circularity* like that found in the circular picture of justification.

Haack here uses the idea of a crossword puzzle as an analogy. In trying to complete a crossword puzzle, we look *both* at clues *and* at words we've already filled in. So, in trying to determine what word goes in for 3-down, for example, we look both at the clue for 3-down and at words that we have already filled in that intersect 3-down. The clue is analogous to experiential evidence, while the intersecting words are analogous to the coherentist element in justification (since we use those words in determining how well our choice fits with other choices).

- Clues are like experiential evidence, and they represent the FOUNDATIONALIST element of justification.
- How well our choice fits with other choices is supposed to represent the COHERENTIST element of justification.

Note two other things as well:

- Our word choices are not only *supported by* other word choices and by clues, but they can also themselves *support* other word choices. Thus, we get *multi-directional relations of support*.
- Also, it is not necessary that our justification for a certain word choice ends up depending on itself. For our choice in one section, *p*, may depend on our choice in another section, *q*, but this does not suggest that my choice in *q* will in any way go on to depend on my choice in *p*.