be appropriate premises; S's foundational belief is simply not based on them (I also question the validity of the inference in the second quotation, but I suspect Aristotle had independent grounds for its conclusion).

10 In "Fallibilist Foundationality and Holistic Coheren-
tism," I set forth such a coherentism. As to circular ver-
sions, for some major difficulties they face see my "Psychological Foundationality," Ms 62 (1978).

11 In Meditation I, e.g., Descartes says that "reason already persuades me that I ought no less carefully to withhold my assent from matters which are not entirely certain and indubitable than from those which appear to me manifestly to be false" (from the Haldane and Kock translation).

12 Clause (a) needs the "other things being equal" clause because removal of justification from one source can affect justification from another even without being a basis of it, and the level of justification in question I take to be as (in the counterpart formulation of coherentism) approximately that appropriate to knowledge. The formulation should hold, however, for any given level.

13 For a reply to some of them, see my "Fallibilist Foundationality and Holistic Coheren
tism," and for fur-
ther defense of foundationality and a wealth of relevant references, see Chisholm (1989) and Moser (1989).

14 In "Psychological Foundationality," Ms 62 (1978), I argued that circular epistemic chains are at best deeply problematic; and in "Believing and Affirming," cited in note 2, I have explained some difficulties about the view that we have infinite sets of beliefs.


V.3 A Critique of Foundationalism

LAURENCE BONJOUR

Laurence BonJour is professor of philosophy at the University of Washington. After rehearsing the regress argument and foundationalism's claim to meet its challenge, BonJour distinguishes three different versions of foundationalism:

(1) strong or classical foundationalism, which holds that basic beliefs yield knowledge and are infallible;

(2) modest (strong) foundationalism, which holds that basic beliefs yield knowledge but are not infallible;

and (3) weak foundationalism, which holds that the basic beliefs have a relatively low degree of warrant so that they need to be augmented by inferential relationships (coherence) with other minimally warranted beliefs. Weak foundationalism is a hybrid between strong foundationalism and coherence views.

At the core of the essay is BonJour's critique of foundationalism through what is sometimes called the argument from epistemic ascent. The argument says that regarding whatever feature we pick out as being in the kind that yields proper basicality we need to ask for a justification of positing that feature, but if we do that we seem to be calling for additional justification, so that our basic beliefs aren't really foundational after all. Then BonJour takes up the two foundationalist attempts to answer this criticism: the externalist solution and the standard foundational solution, "giveness." He argues that neither is successful in meeting the problem.

The idea that empirical knowledge has, and must have, a foundation has been a common tenet of most major epistemologists, both past and present. There have been, as we shall see further below, many importantly different variants of this idea. But the common denominator among them, the central thesis of epistemological foundationalism, as I shall understand it here, is the claim that certain empirical beliefs possess a degree of epistemic justification or warrant which does not depend, inferentially or otherwise, on the justification of other empirical beliefs, but is instead somehow immediate or intrinsic. It is these non-inferentially justified beliefs, the unmoved or self-moved) movers of the epistemic realm, as Chisholm has called them, that constitute the foundation upon which the rest of empirical knowledge is alleged to rest.

In recent years, the most familiar foundationalist views have been subjected to severe and continuous attack. But this attack has rarely been aimed directly at the central foundationalist thesis itself, and new versions of foundationalism have been quick to emerge, often propounded by the erstwhile critics themselves. Thus foundationalism has become a philosophical hydra, difficult to come to grips with and seemingly impossible to kill. The purposes of this essay are, first, to distinguish and clarify the main dialectical variants of foundationalism, by viewing them as responses to one fundamental problem which is both the main motivation and the primary obstacle for foundationalism; and second, as a result of this discussion to offer schematic reasons for doubting whether any version of foundationalism is finally acceptable.

The main reason for the impressive durability of foundationalism is not an overwhelming plausibility attaching to the main foundationalist thesis in itself, but rather the existence of one apparently decisive argument which seems to rule out all non-skeptical alternatives to foundationalism, thereby showing that some version of foundationalism must be true (on the assumption that skepticism is false). In a recent statement by Quinton, this argument runs as follows:

If any beliefs are to be justified at all, there must be some terminal beliefs that do not owe their credibility to others. For a belief to be justified it is not enough for it to be accepted, let alone merely entertained. It must also be a good reason for accepting it. Furthermore, for an inferences belief to be justified the belief that support it must be justified themselves. There must, therefore, be a kind of belief that does not owe its justification to the support provided by others. Unless this were so no belief would be justified at all, for to justify any belief would require the antecedent justification of an infinite series of beliefs. The terminal . . . beliefs that are needed to bring the regress of justification to a stop need not be strictly self-evident in the sense that they somehow justify themselves. All that is required is that they should not owe their justification to any other beliefs.

I shall call this argument the epistemic regress argument, and the problem which generates it, the epistemic regress problem. Since it is this argument which provides the primary rationale and argumentative support for foundationalism, a careful examination of it will also constitute an exploration of the foundationalist position itself. The main dialectical variants of foundationalism can best be understood as differing attempts to solve the regress problem, and the most basic objection to the foundationalist approach is that it is doubtful that any of these attempts can succeed. (In this essay, I shall be concerned with the epistemic regress argument and the epistemic regress problem only as they apply to empirical knowledge. It is obvious that an analogous problem arises also for a priori knowledge, but there it seems likely that the argument would take a different course. In particular, a foundationalist approach might be inescapable in an account of a priori knowledge.)

I

This epistemic regress problem arises directly out of the traditional conception of knowledge as adequately justified true belief—which this be taken as a fully adequate definition of knowledge or, in light of the apparent counterexamples discovered by Gettier, as merely a necessary but not sufficient condition. (I shall assume throughout that the elements of the traditional conception are at least necessary for knowledge.) Now the most natural way to justify a belief is by producing a justificatory argument: belief A is justified by citing some other (perhaps conjunctive) belief B,
from which A is inferable in some acceptable way and which is thus offered as a reason for accepting A. Call this *inferential justification*. It is clear, as Quinton points out in the passage quoted above, that for A to be genuinely justified by virtue of such a justificatory argument, B must itself be justified in some fashion; merely being inferable from an unsupported guess or hunch, e.g., would confer no genuine justification upon A.

Two further points about inferential justification, as understood here, must be briefly noted. First, the belief in question need not have been *arrived at* as the result of an inference in order to be inferentially justified. This is obvious, since a belief arrived at in some other way (e.g., as a result of wishful thinking) may later come to be maintained solely because it is now seen to be inferentially justifiable. Second, less obviously, a person for whom a belief is inferentially justified need not have explicitly rehearsed the justificatory argument in question to others or even to himself. It is enough that the inference be available to him if the belief is called into question by others or by himself (where such availability may itself be less than fully explicit) and that the availability of the inference be, in the final analysis, his reason for holding the belief. It seems clear that many beliefs which are quite sufficiently justified to satisfy the justificatory criterion for knowledge depend for their justification on inferences which have not been explicitly formulated and indeed which could not be explicitly formulated without considerable reflective effort (e.g., my current belief that this is the same piece of paper upon which I was typing yesterday).

Suppose then that belief A is (putatively) justified via inference, thus raising the question of how the justifying premise-belief B is justified. Here again the answer may be in inferential terms: B may be (putatively) justified in virtue of being inferable from some further belief C. But then the same question arises about the justification of C, and so on, threatening an infinite and apparently vicious regress of epistemic justification. Each belief is justified only if an epistemically prior belief is justified, and that epistemically prior belief is justified only if a still prior belief is justified, etc., with the apparent result that justification can never get started—and hence that there is no justification and no knowledge. The foundationist claim is that only through the adoption of some version of foundationism can this skeptical consequence be avoided.

*Prima facie*, there seem to be only four basic possibilities with regard to the eventual outcome of this potential regress of epistemic justification: (i) the regress might terminate with beliefs for which no justification of any kind is available, even though they were earlier offered as justifying premises; (ii) the regress might proceed infinitely backwards with ever more new premise-beliefs being introduced and then themselves requiring justification; (iii) the regress might circle back upon itself, so that at some point beliefs which appeared earlier in the sequence of justifying arguments are appealed to again as premises; (iv) the regress might terminate because beliefs are reached which are justified—unlike those in alternative (i)—but whose justification does not depend inferentially on other empirical beliefs and thus does not raise any further issue of justification with respect to such beliefs. The foundationist opts for the last alternative. His argument is that the other three lead inexorably to the skeptical result, and that the second and third have additional fatal defects as well, so that some version of the fourth, foundationist alternative must be correct (assuming that skepticism is false).

With respect to alternative (i), it seems apparent that the foundationist is correct. If this alternative were correct, empirical knowledge would rest ultimately on beliefs which were, from an epistemic standpoint at least, entirely arbitrary and hence incapable of conferring any genuine justification. What about the other two alternatives?

The argument that alternative (ii) leads to a skeptical outcome has in effect already been sketched in the original formulation of the problem. One who opted for this alternative could hope to avoid skepticism only by claiming that the regress, though infinite, is not vicious; but there seems to be no plausible way to defend such a claim. Moreover, a defense of an infinite regress view as an account of how empirical knowledge is actually justified—as opposed to how it might in principle be justified—would have to involve the seemingly dubious thesis that an ordinary knower holds a literally infinite number of distinct beliefs. Thus it is not surprising that no important philosopher, with the rather uncertain exception of Peirce, advocated such a position.

Alternative (iii), the view that ultimately moves in a closed curve, seems more promising, albeit dialectically more prominent, albeit dialectically more prominent, albeit dialectically more prominent, albeit dialectically more prominent, albeit dialectically more prominent, albeit dialectically more prominent, albeit dialectically more prominent, albeit dialectically more prominent, albeit dialectically more prominent, albeit dialectically more prominent, albeit dialectically more prominent, albeit dialectically more prominent, albeit dialectically more prominent, albeit dialectically more prominent, albeit dialectically more prominent, albeit dialectically more prominent, albeit dialectically more prominent, albeit dialectically more prominent, albeit dialectically more prominent, albeit dialectically more prominent, albeit dialectically more prominent, albeit dialectically more prominent, albeit dialectically more prominent, albeit dialectically more prominent, albeit dialectically 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Alternative (iii), the view that justification 
ultimately moves in a closed curve, has been 
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this alternative might seem even less attractive 
than the second. Although the problem of the 
knower having to have an infinite number of 
beliefs is no longer present, the regress itself, still 
infinite, now seems undeniably vicious. For the 
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(iii) have generally tended to respond to this sort 
of objection by adopting a holistic conception of 
justification in which the justification of individ 
ual beliefs is subordinated to that of the closed 
system of beliefs in which such a view implies; the 
property of such systems usually appealed to as a 
basis for justification is internal coherence. Such 
coherence theories attempt to evade the regress 
problem by abandoning the view of justification 
as essentially involving a linear order of 
cpendence (though a nonlinear view of justification 
has never been worked out in detail). Moreover, such a coherence theory of empirical 
knowledge is subject to a number of other famil 
ar and seemingly decisive objections. Thus alter 
native (iii) seems unacceptable, leaving only 
alternative (iv), the foundationalist alternative, as 
apparently viable.

As thus formulated, the epistemic regress 
argument makes an undeniably persuasive case for 
foundationalism. Like any argument by elimina 
tion, however, it cannot be conclusive until the 
 surviving alternative has itself been carefully 
examined. The foundationalist position may turn 
out to be subject to equally serious objections, 
thus forcing a reexamination of the other alter 
atives, a search for a further non-skeptical 
alternative, or conceivably the reluctant acceptance of 
the skeptical conclusion. In particular, it is not 
clear on the basis of the argument thus far 
whether and how foundationalism can itself solve 
the regress problem; and thus the possibility exists 
that the epistemic regress argument will prove to 
be a two-edged sword, as lethal to the founda 
tonist as it is to his opponents.
that certain empirical beliefs possess a degree of independent epistemic justification or warrant which does not derive from inference or coherence relations. But the weak foundationist holds that these foundational beliefs have only a quite low degree of warrant, much lower than that attributed to them by even modest strong foundationism and insufficient by itself to satisfy the justification condition for knowledge or to qualify them as acceptable justifying premises for other beliefs. Thus this independent warrant must somehow be augmented if knowledge is to be achieved, and the usual appeal here is to coherence with other such minimally warranted beliefs. By combining such beliefs into larger and larger coherent systems, it is held, their initial, minimal degree of warrant can gradually be enhanced until knowledge is finally achieved. Thus weak foundationism, like the pure coherence theories mentioned above, abandons the linear conception of justification.7

Weak foundationism thus represents a kind of hybrid between strong foundationism and the coherence views discussed earlier, and it is often thought to embody the virtues of both and the vices of neither. Whether or not this is so in other respects, however, relative to the regress problem weak foundationism is finally open to the very same basic objection as strong foundationism, with essentially the same options available for meeting it. As we shall see, the key problem for any version of foundationism is whether it can itself solve the regress problem which motivates its very existence, without resorting to essentially ad hoc stipulation. The distinction between the two main ways of meeting this challenge both cuts across and is more basic than that between strong and weak foundationism. This being so, it will suffice to concentrate here on strong foundationism, leaving the application of the discussion to weak foundationism largely implicit.

The fundamental concept of strong foundationism is obviously the concept of a basic belief. It is by appeal to this concept that the threat of an infinite regress is to be avoided and empirical knowledge given a secure foundation. But how can there be any empirical beliefs which are thus basic? In fact, though this has not always been noticed, the very idea of an epistemically basic empirical belief is extremely paradoxical. For on what basis is such a belief to be justified, once appeal to further empirical beliefs is ruled out? Chisholm's theological analogy, cited earlier, is most appropriate: a basic belief is in effect an epistemological unmoved (or self-moved) mover. It is able to confer justification on other beliefs, but apparently has no need to have justification conferred on it. But is such a status any easier to understand in epistemology than it is in theology? How can a belief impart epistemic "motion" to other beliefs unless it is itself in "motion"? And, even more paradoxically, how can a belief epistemically "move" itself?

This intuitive difficulty with the concept of a basic empirical belief may be eliminated and clarified by reflecting a bit on the concept of epistemic justification. The idea of justification is a generic one, admitting in principle of many specific varieties. Thus the acceptance of an empirical belief might be morally justified, i.e., justified as morally obligatory by reference to moral principles and standards; or pragmatically justified, i.e., justified by reference to the desirable practical consequences which will result from such acceptance; or religiously justified, i.e., justified by reference to specified religious texts or theological dogmas; etc. But none of these other varieties of justification can satisfy the justification condition for knowledge. Knowledge requires epistemic justification, and the distinguishing characteristic of this particular species of justification is, I submit, its essential or internal relationship to the cognitive goal of truth. Cognitive doings are epistemically justified, on this conception, only if and to the extent that they are aimed at this goal—which means roughly that one accepts all and only beliefs which one has good reason to think are true. To accept a belief in the absence of such a reason, however appealing or even mandatory such acceptance might be from other standpoints, is to neglect the pursuit of truth; such acceptance is, one might say, epistemically irresponsible. My contention is that the idea of being epistemically responsible is the core of the concept of epistemic justification.

A corollary of this conception of epistemic justification is that a satisfactory defense of a particular standard of epistemic justification must consist in showing it to be truth-conducive, i.e., in showing that accepting beliefs in accordance with its dictates is likely to lead to truth (and more likely than any proposed alternative). Without such a meta-justification, a proposed standard of epistemic justification lacks any underlying ratio-
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ones, if not that the former are more likely to be
true? To insist that a certain belief is epistemically
justified, while confessing in the same breath that
this fact about it provides no good reason to think
that it is true, would be to render nugatory the
whole concept of epistemic justification.

These general remarks about epistemic justifi-
cation apply in full measure to any strong founda-
tionist position and to its constituent account of
basic beliefs. If basic beliefs are to provide a secure
foundation for empirical knowledge, if inference
from them is to be the sole basis for the justifica-
tion of other epistemic beliefs, then that feature,
whatever it may be, in virtue of which a belief
qualifies as basic must also constitute a good rea-
son for thinking that the belief is true. If we let
“F” represent this feature, then for a belief B to
qualify as basic in an acceptable foundationist
account, the premises of the following justificatory
argument must themselves at least justified:

(i) Belief B has feature φ.
(ii) Beliefs having feature φ are highly
likely to be true.

Therefore, B is highly likely to be true.

Notice further that while either premise taken sepa-
ratel e might turn out to be justifiable on an a pri-
or basis (depending on the particular choice of F),
it seems clear that they could not both be thus justi-
tifiable. For B is an hypothesis an empirical belief,
and it is hard to see how a particular empirical
belief could be justified on a purely a priori basis.

And if we now assume, reasonably enough, that
for B to be justified for a particular person (at a
particular time) it is necessary, not merely that
a justification for B exist in the abstract, but that
the person in question be in cognitive possession of
that justification, we get the result that B is not
basic after all since its justification depends on
that of at least one other empirical belief. If this is cor-
rect, strong foundationism is untenable as a solu-
tion to the regress problem (and an analogous
argument will show weak foundationism to be
similarly untenable).

The foregoing argument is, no doubt, exceed-
ingly obvious. But how is the strong foundationist
to answer it? Prima facie, there seem to be only
two general sorts of answer which are even
remotely plausible, so long as the strong founda-
tionist remains within the confines of the tradi-
tional conception of knowledge, avoids tactily
embracing skepticism, and does not attempt the
herculean task of arguing that an empirical belief
could be justified on a purely a priori basis. First,
he might argue that although it is indeed necessary
for a belief to be justified and a fortiori for it to be
basic that a justifying argument of the sort
schematized above be in principle available in the
situation, it is not always necessary that the person
for whom the belief is basic (or anyone else)
know or even justifiably believe that it is available;
instead, in the case of basic beliefs at least, it is suf-
cient that the premises for an argument of that
general sort (or for some favored particular variety
of such argument) merely be true, whether or not
that person (or anyone else) justifiably believes
that they are true. Second, he might grant that it
is necessary both that such justification exist and
that the person for whom the belief is basic be in
cognitive possession of it, but insist that his cogni-
tive grasp of the premises required for that
justification does not involve further empirical beliefs
which would then require justification, but instead
involves cognitive states of a more rudimentary
sort which do not themselves require justification:
intuitions or immediate apprehensions. I will con-
sider each of these alternatives in turn.

III

The philosopher who has come the closest to an
explicit advocacy of the view that basic beliefs may
be justified even though the person for whom they
are basic is not in any way in cognitive possession
of the appropriate justifying argument is D. M.
Armstrong. In his recent book, Belief, Truth and
Knowledge, Armstrong presents a version of the
epistemic regress problem (though one couched in
terms of knowledge rather than justification) and
defends what he calls an “Externalist” solution.

According to ‘Externalist’ accounts of non-
inferential knowledge, what makes a true
non-inferential belief a case of knowledge
is some natural relation which holds between
the belief-state . . . and the situation which
makes the belief true. It is a matter of a cer-
tain relation holding between the believer
and the world [187].
Armstrong’s own candidate for this “natural relation” is “that there must be a law-like connection between the state of affairs $Bap$ [i.e. $a$’s believing that $p$] and the state of affairs that makes ‘$p$’ true such that, given $Bap$, it must be the case that $p$.” [166] A similar view seems to be implicit in Dretske’s account of perceptual knowledge in *Seeing and Knowing*, with the variation that Dretske requires for knowledge not only that the relation in question obtain, but also that the putative knower believe that it obtains—though not that this belief be justified. In addition, it seems likely that various views of an ordinary-language stripe which appeal to facts about how language is learned either to justify basic belief or to support the claim that no justification is required would, if pushed, turn out to be positions of this general sort. Here I shall mainly confine myself to Armstrong, who is the only one of these philosophers who is explicitly concerned with the regress problem.

There is, however, some uncertainty as to how views of this sort in general and Armstrong’s view in particular are properly to be interpreted. On the one hand, Armstrong might be taken as offering an account of how basic beliefs (and perhaps others as well) satisfy the adequate-justification condition for knowledge; while on the other hand, he might be taken as simply repudiating the traditional conception of knowledge and the associated concept of epistemic justification, and offering a surrogate conception in its place—one which better accords with the “naturalistic” world-view which Armstrong prefers. But it is only when understood in the former way that externalism (to adopt Armstrong’s useful term) is of any immediate interest here, since it is only on that interpretation that it constitutes a version of foundationalism and offers a direct response to the anti-foundationist argument set out above. Thus I shall mainly focus on this interpretation of externalism, remarking only briefly at the end of the present section on the alternative one.

Understood in this way, the externalist solution to the regress problem is quite simple: the person who has a basic belief need not be in possession of any justified reason for his belief and indeed, except in Dretske’s version, need not even think that there is such a reason; the status of his belief as constituting knowledge (if true) depends solely on the external relation and not at all on his subjective view of the situation. Thus there are no further empirical beliefs in need of justification and no regress.

Now it is clear that such an externalist position succeeds in avoiding the regress problem and the anti-foundationist argument. What may well be doubted, however, is whether this avoidance deserves to be considered a solution, rather than an essentially ad hoc evasion, of the problem. Plainly the sort of “external” relation which Armstrong has in mind would, if known, provide a basis for a justifying argument along the lines sketched earlier, roughly as follows:

(i) Belief $B$ is an instance of kind $K$.
(ii) Beliefs of kind $K$ are connected in a law-like way with the sorts of states of affairs which would make them true, and therefore are highly likely to be true.

Therefore, $B$ is highly likely to be true.

But precisely what generates the regress problem in the first place is the requirement that for a belief $B$ to be epistemically justified for a given person $P$, it is necessary, not just that there be justifiable or even true premises available in the situation which could in principle provide a basis for a justification of $B$, but that $P$ himself know or at least justifiably believe some such set of premises and thus be in a position to employ the corresponding argument. The externalist position seems to amount merely to waiving this general requirement in cases where the justification takes a certain form, and the question is why this should be acceptable in these cases when it is not acceptable generally. (If it were acceptable generally, then it would seem that any true belief would be justified for any person, and the distinction between knowledge and true belief would collapse.) Such a move seems rather analogous to solving a regress of causes by simply stipulating that although most events must have a cause, events of a certain kind need not.

Whatever plausibility attaches to externalism seems to derive from the fact that if the external relation in question genuinely obtains, then $P$ will not go wrong in accepting the belief, and it is, in a sense, not an accident that this is so. But it remains unclear how these facts are supposed to justify $P$’s acceptance of $B$. It is clear, of course, that an external observer who knew both that $P$ accepted $B$ and that there was a law-like connection between such acceptance and the truth of $B$ would be in a position to construct to justify his own acceptance of $B$ serve as a useful epistemic instrument.

Knowledge of the truth of particular facts is a belief which must be the “must” is a matter of law-like properties.
would be in a position to construct an argument to justify his own acceptance of B. P could thus serve as a useful epistemic instrument, a kind of cognitive thermometer, for such an external observer (and in fact the example of a thermometer is exactly the analogy which Armstrong employs to illustrate the relationship which is supposed to obtain between the person who has the belief and the external state of affairs [166ff.]). But P himself has no reason at all for thinking that B is likely to be true. From his perspective, it is an instance of the belief that is true.8 And thus his acceptance of B is no more rational or responsible from an epistemic standpoint than would be the acceptance of a subjectively similar belief for which the external relation in question failed to obtain.9

Nor does it seem to help matters to move from Armstrong’s version of externalism, which requires only that the requisite relationship between the believer and the world obtain, to the superficially less radical version apparently held by Dretske, which requires that P also believe that the external relation obtains, but does not require that this latter belief be justified. This view may seem slightly less implausible, since it at least requires that the person have some idea, albeit unjustified, of why B is likely to be true. But this change is not enough to save externalism. One way to see this is to suppose that the person believes the requisite relation to obtain on some totally irrational and irrelevant basis, e.g. as a result of reading tea leaves or studying astrological charts. If B were an ordinary, non-basic belief, such a situation would surely preclude its being justified, and it is hard to see why the result should be any different for an allegedly basic belief.

Thus it finally seems possible to make sense of externalism only by construing the externalist as simply abandoning the traditional notion of epistemic justification and along with it anything resembling the traditional conception of knowledge. (As already remarked, this may be precisely what the proponents of externalism intend to be doing, though most of them are not very clear on this point.) Thus consider Armstrong’s final summation of his conception of knowledge:

Knowledge of the truth of particular matters of fact is a belief which must be true, where the “must” is a matter of law-like necessity.

Such knowledge is a reliable representation or “mapping” of reality [220].

Nothing is said here of reasons or justification or evidence or having the right to be sure. Indeed the whole idea, central to the western epistemological tradition, of knowledge as essentially the product of reflective, critical, and rational inquiry has seemingly vanished without a trace. It is possible of course that such an altered conception of knowledge may be inescapable or even in some way desirable, but it constitutes a solution to the regress problem or any problem arising out of the traditional conception of knowledge only in the radical and relatively uninteresting sense that to reject that conception is also to reject the problems arising out of it. In this essay, I shall confine myself to less radical solutions.

IV

The externalist solution just discussed represents a very recent approach to the justification of basic beliefs. The second view to be considered is, in contrast, so venerable that it deserves to be called the standard foundationalist solution to the problem in question. I refer of course to the traditional doctrine of cognitive givenness, which has played a central role in epistemological discussions at least since Descartes. In recent years, however, the concept of the given, like foundationalism itself, has come under serious attack. One upshot of the resulting discussion has been a realization that there are many different notions of givenness, related to each other in complicated ways, which almost certainly do not stand or fall together. Thus it will be well to begin by formulating the precise notion of givenness which is relevant in the present context and distinguishing it from some related conceptions.

In the context of the epistemic regress problem, givenness amounts to the idea that basic beliefs are justified by reference not to further beliefs, but rather to states of affairs in the world which are “immediately apprehended” or “directly presented” or “intuited.” This justification by reference to non-cognitive states of affairs thus allegedly avoids the need for any further justification and thereby stops the regress. In a way, the basic gambit of givenism (as I shall call posi-
tions of this sort) thus resembles that of the existentialist positions considered above. In both cases the justificatory appeal to further beliefs which generates the regress problem is avoided for basic beliefs by an appeal directly to the non-cognitive world; the crucial difference is that for the givenist, unlike the existentialist, the justifying state of affairs in the world is alleged apprehended in some way by the believer.

The givenist position to be considered here is significantly weaker than more familiar versions of the doctrine of givenness in at least two different respects. In the first place, the present version does not claim that the given (or, better, the apprehension thereof) is certain or even incorrigible. As discussed above, these stronger claims are inessential to the strong foundationist solution to the regress problem. If they have any importance at all in this context it is only because, as we shall see, they might be thought to be entailed by the only very obvious intuitive picture of how the view is supposed to work. In the second place, givenism as understood here does not involve the usual stipulation that only one's private mental and sensory states can be given. There may or may not be other reasons for thinking that this is in fact the case, but such a restriction is not part of the position itself. Thus both positions like that of C. I. Lewis, for whom the given is restricted to private states apprehended with certainty, and positions like that of Quinton, for whom ordinary physical states of affairs are given with no claim of certainty or incorrigibility being involved, will count as versions of givenism.

As already noted, the idea of givenness has been roundly criticized in recent philosophical discussion and widely dismissed as a piece of philosophical mythology. But much at least of this criticism has to do with the claim of certainty on behalf of the given or with the restriction to private, subjective states. And some of it at least has been mainly concerned with issues in the philosophy of mind which are only distantly related to our present epistemological concerns. Thus even if the objections offered are cogent against other and stronger versions of givenness, it remains unclear whether and how they apply to the more modest version at issue here. The possibility suggests itself that modest givenness may not be a myth, even if more ambitious varieties are, a result which would give the epistemological foundationist all he really needs, even though he has usually, in a spirit of philosophical greed, sought considerably more. In what follows, however, I shall sketch a line of argument which, if correct, will show that even modest givenism is an untenable position.

The argument to be developed depends on a problem within the givenist position which is surprisingly easy to overlook. I shall therefore proceed in the following way. I shall first state the problem in an initial way, then illustrate it by showing how it arises in one recent version of givenism, and finally consider whether any plausible solution is possible. (It will be useful for the purposes of this discussion to make two simplifying assumptions, without which the argument would be more complicated, but not essentially altered. First, I shall assume that the basic belief which is to be justified by reference to the given or immediately apprehended state of affairs is just the belief that this same state of affairs obtains. Second, I shall assume that the given or immediately apprehended state of affairs is not itself a belief or other cognitive state.)

Consider then an allegedly basic belief that-\( p \) which is supposed to be justified by reference to a given or immediately apprehended state of affairs that-\( p \). Clearly what justifies the belief is not the state of affairs simpliciter, for to say that would be to return to a form of externalism. For the givenist, what justifies the belief is the immediate apprehension or awareness of the state of affairs. Thus we seem to have three items present in the situation: the belief, the state of affairs which is the object of the belief, and the intuition or immediate apprehension of that state of affairs. The problem to be raised revolves around the nature of the last of these items, the intuition or immediate apprehension (hereafter I will use mainly the former term). It seems to be a cognitive state, perhaps somehow of a more rudimentary sort than a belief, which involves the thesis or assertion that-\( p \). Now if this is correct, it is easy enough to understand in a rough sort of way how an intuition can serve to justify a belief with this same assertive content. The problem is to understand why the intuition, involving as it does the cognitive thesis that-\( p \), does not itself require justification. And if the answer is offered that the intuition is justified by reference to the state of affairs that-\( p \), then the question will be why this would not require a second intuition or other apprehension of the state of affairs to justify the original one. For other one and the same cognitive state must some constitute both an apprehension of the state of affairs and a justification of that very apprehen- sion thus pulling itself up by its own cognitive bootstraps. One is reminded here of Chisholm's case that certain cognitive states justify themselves that extremely paradoxical remark hardly contributes an explanation of how this is possible.

If, on the other hand, an intuition is a cognitive state and thus involves no cognate grasp of the state of affairs in question, then need for a justification for the intuition is obvious but at the serious cost of making it difficult to how the intuition is supposed to justify the belief. If the person in question has no cognitive grasp that state of affairs (or of any other) by virtue of having such an intuition, then how does the intuition give him a reason for thinking that his belief is true or likely to be true? We seem again to be back to an externalist position, which it was whole point of the category of intuition or givenness to avoid.

As an illustration of this problem, consider Quinton's version of givenism, as outlined in book The Nature of Things. As noted above, I beliefs may, according to Quinton, concern certain perceptible states of affairs and need not be tain or incorrigible. (Quinton uses the phrase "intuitive belief" as I have been using "basic belief" and calls the linguistic expression of an intuitive belief a "basic statement"; he also seems to pay little attention to the difference between beliefs statements, shifting freely back and forth between them, and I will generally follow him in this.) I "this book is red" might, in an appropriate context be a basic statement expressing a basic or intuitive belief. But how are such basic statements (or correlative beliefs) supposed to be justified? For Quinton's account, beyond the insistence that they are not justified by reference to further belief, seriously unclear. He says rather vaguely that person is "aware" [129] or "directly aware" [1 of the appropriate state of affairs, or that he "direct knowledge" [126] of it, but he gives no account of the nature or epistemological status of this state of "direct awareness" or "direct knoledge," though it seems clear that it is supposed to be a cognitive state of some kind. (In particular, not clear what "direct" means, over and ab "non-inferential.")
thus baldly, this “solution” to the problem seems hopelessly contrived and ad hoc. If such a move is acceptable, one is inclined to expostulate, then once again any sort of regress could be solved in similar fashion. Simply postulate a final term in the regress which is sufficiently similar to the previous terms to satisfy, with respect to the penultimate term, the sort of need or impetus which originally generated the regress; but which is different enough from previous terms so as not itself to require satisfaction by a further term. Thus we would have semi-events, which could cause but need not be caused; semi-explanations, which could explain but need not be explained; and semi-beliefs, which could justify but need not be justified. The point is not that such a move is always incorrect (though I suspect that it is), but simply that the nature and possibility of such a convenient regress stopper needs at the very least to be clearly and convincingly established and explained before it can constitute a satisfactory solution to any regress problem.

The main account which has usually been offered by givenists of such semi-cognitive states is well suggested by the terms in which immediate or intuitive apprehensions are described: “immediate,” “direct,” “presentation,” etc. The underlying idea here is that of confrontation: in intuition, mind or consciousness is directly confronted with its object, without the intervention of any sort of intermediary. It is in this sense that the object is given to the mind. The root metaphor underlying this whole picture is vision: mind or consciousness is likened to an immaterial eye, and the object of intuitive awareness is that which is directly before the mental eye and open to its gaze. If this metaphor were to be taken seriously, it would become relatively simple to explain how there can be a cognitive state which can justify but does not require justification. (If the metaphor is to be taken seriously enough to do the foundationalist any real good, it becomes plausible to hold that the intuitive cognitive states which result would after all have to be infallible. For if all need for justification is to be precluded, the envisaged relation of confrontation seeming must be conceived as too intimate to allow any possibility of error. To the extent that this is so, the various arguments which have been offered against the notion of infallible cognitive states count also against this version of givenism.)

Unfortunately, however, it seems clear that the mental eye metaphor will not stand serious scrutiny. The mind, whatever else it may be, is not an eye or, so far as we know, anything like an eye. Ultimately the metaphor is just far too simple to be even minimally adequate to the complexity of mental phenomena and to the variety of conditions upon which such phenomena depend. This is not to deny that there is considerable intuitive appeal to the confrontational model, especially as applied to perceptual consciousness, but only to insist that this appeal is far too vague in its import to adequately support the very specific sorts of epistemological results which the strong foundationalist needs. In particular, even if empirical knowledge at some point involves some sort of confrontation or seeming confrontation, this by itself provides no clear reason for attributing epistemic justification or reliability, let alone certainty, to the cognitive states, whatever they may be called, which result.

Moreover, quite apart from the vicissitudes of the mental eye metaphor, there are powerful independent reasons for thinking that the attempt to defend givenism by appeal to the idea of a semi-cognitive or quasi-cognitive state is fundamentally misguided. The basic idea, after all, is to distinguish two sorts of a cognitive state, its capacity to justify other states and its own need for justification, and then to try to find a state which possesses only the former aspect and not the latter. But it seems clear on reflection that these two aspects cannot be separated, that it is one and the same feature of a cognitive state, viz., its assertive content, which both enables it to confer justification on other states and also requires that it be justified itself. If this is right, then it does no good to introduce semi-cognitive states in an attempt to justify basic beliefs, since to whatever extent such a state is capable of conferring justification, it will to that very same extent require justification. Thus even if such states do exist, they are of no help to the givenist in attempting to answer the objection at issue here.

Hence the givenist response to the anti-foundationist argument seems to fail. There seems to be no way to explain how a basic cognitive state, whether called a belief or an intuition, can be directly justified by the world without lapsing back into externalism—and from there into skepticism. I shall conclude with three further comments aimed at warding off certain criticisms. First, it is natural to attempt to justify basic beliefs by appeal to experience. But there is a familiar term “experience,” which in an important distinction upon which the argument rests. Thus “experience” is not the same as “experienced” (i.e., a cognitive state). This ambiguity is resolved, the ence seems to be of no particular givenist. Second, I have concern of simplicity, on Quinton’s view of which ordinary physical states of the things which are given. An argument would be essentially applied to a more traditional version of the epistemological story which it is private experiences which I cannot see that the end result—though it might be haphazardly in cases where the allegations about another cognitive state are carefully that the problem raised to givenism is a logical problem of “logical”). Thus it would be that it can be solved simply by in some state which seems intuitively priate sorts of characteristics; I understand how it is possible for those characteristics. (The mistake which one occasionally makes with the free will problem: the theory of givenism is not the only program to solve the logical problem can be not determined by analogy, indicating a subjective character state, which seems intuitive description.)

Thus foundationalism appears its own internal momentum. No be available of how an empirical givenism is not the same feature an epistemological story all reference to further descriptions of thoughts which themselves were caused. How then is the epistemology of to be solved? The natural argument is to the coherence theory and the associated problem of justification which was above. But arguments by eliminism and at best: there may be further have not yet been formulated,
V.4 A Defense of Classical Foundationalism

TIMOTHY MCGREW

Tim McGrew is professor of philosophy at Western Michigan University. In this essay, he argues that moderate foundationalism faces a devastating criticism, and in consequence our best theory of knowledge is a version of strong foundationalism that requires certainty at the base of one’s evidence tree but does not require certainty for knowledge at the higher levels. McGrew argues that such strong foundations are necessary, available, and sufficiently rich in content to overcome the skeptic’s challenge.

Simple questions often have the most awkward consequences. One of the simplest questions that may be legitimately asked of our everyday judgments can be put in four short words: How do you know? And the remarkable thing about this question is that it can be iterated: In any normal situation, an answer to the question will be some claim or set of claims that can reasonably be subjected to the same question all over again.

Any conversation in which one side sincerely asks this question and the other sincerely attempts to answer it is going to take one of a very limited number of forms. Either the conversation will go on forever, or it will stop. If it goes on forever, either the answerer eventually repeating so initially called into question giving endless new reasons put forward earlier. I either the answerer has standable reaction in reached some claim so said to be justified in reasoned his way to it. Foundationalism is a reigning empirical beliefs are like the final sense given. A belief for reasons or another back to the matter that no two same version like this. The foundationalists is that for just simply reasons are there and ideal conditions, if element of such a counter form of an upside-down two or more reasons at point. But ultimately evokes down to a belief that is branch of the evidence to itself.

Foundationalists defend these things about just with basic beliefs to poss for justifying relations in all from the foundations beliefs. Descartes’s Meditations or First Ph. foundationalist thought on both points: The basi ties, and the inference relations are things to hide deductively valid, allow error at any step along the recent decades has been many, demanding only assess some degree of int than absolute certainty various inference relations instead of insisting on de step. Robert Audi, a notion, adopts this de reaction to the rather of Cartesian position. Unlike make room for justified which we are not abso