

## 1. Background

*Reminders:*

- $S$  knows that  $p$  if and only if: (1)  $S$  believes that  $p$ ; (2)  $p$  is true; (3)  $S$  is justified in believing that  $p$ ; and (4)  $S$ 's belief that  $p$  isn't Gettiered. We'll be focusing on different theories of justification, i.e., on (3).
- Justification = your reasons or evidence for believing something. It's your answer to the question, "How do you know that  $p$ ?"

*Foundationalism* is a theory of justification, which holds that  $S$ 's belief that  $p$  is justified if and only if:

- (1)  $S$ 's belief that  $p$  is "basic" or self-justifying, or
- (2)  $S$ 's belief that  $p$  "arises" from  $S$ 's basic beliefs.

*Main questions:*

- *Basic Belief Question:* What makes a belief "basic"? *Leading answer:* if it is produced "immediately" by our senses.
- *Epistemic Ascent Question:* How do "nonbasic" beliefs "arise" from basic beliefs? *Leading answer:* via inference/reasoning.

## 2. What kinds of belief are basic?

### 2.1. Two Candidates

- *Physical-object beliefs:* Beliefs about physical objects based on perception, e.g. my belief that *the table is brown* or perhaps my belief that *I see that the table is brown*.
- *Appearance beliefs:* Beliefs about my sensory experiences, e.g. my belief that *a brown table appears to me* or *it seems to me that a brown table is here*.

### 2.2. Physical-object beliefs are not basic

1. Suppose that I believe that the table is brown, but I also believe that I'm colorblind.
  2. Then I am not justified in believing that the table is brown without further beliefs (e.g. that I've compensated for my colorblindness.)
  3. My belief that the table is brown is representative of all other physical object beliefs.
  4.  $\therefore$  Physical-object beliefs depend on other beliefs for their justification. (1-3)
  5. If a belief depends on other beliefs for its justification, then it is not basic.
  6.  $\therefore$  Physical-object beliefs are not basic. (4,5)
- Traditionally, this is why foundationalists claim that only appearance beliefs are basic.

## 3. What makes a belief basic?

A belief is *basic* for  $S$  iff<sup>1</sup> that belief is either incorrigibly justified or prima facie justified for  $S$ .

### 3.1. Incorrigibility

A belief is *incorrigibly justified* for  $S$  iff it is impossible for  $S$  to hold the belief but be unjustified in doing so.

A proposition  $P$  is *incorrigible* for  $S$  iff (1) it is necessarily true that if  $S$  believes  $P$ , then  $P$  is true, and (2) it is necessarily true that if  $S$  believes  $\sim P$  then  $P$  is false.

#### 3.1.1. Incorrigible Appearance Beliefs?

Appearance beliefs are often thought to be incorrigible, and incorrigible beliefs are thought to be incorrigibly justified.

Most beliefs are corrigible, i.e. just because you believe that  $P$  doesn't make  $P$  true. Why are appearance beliefs special?

If we plug appearance beliefs into our definition of incorrigibility, we get the following:

- (IA1) It is necessarily true that if  $S$  believes that *it appears to me that  $P$* , then it appears to  $S$  that  $P$ .
- (IA2) It is necessarily true that if  $S$  believes that *it does not appear to me that  $P$* , then it does not appear to  $S$  that  $P$ .

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<sup>1</sup> "Iff" is shorthand for "if and only if." I'll use this a lot throughout the term.

*Problems with LA1:* By default, people believe that shadows on snow appear gray. However, they actually appear blue. Consequently, we can be wrong about our appearances. Appearance beliefs aren't corrigible. We can also set up (hypothetical? real neuroscientific?) scenarios where our appearances are disconnected from our beliefs about those appearances.

### 3.2. *Prima facie justification*

Another proposal is that basic beliefs are *prima facie* justified. Colloquially, this is the idea that basic beliefs are "innocent until proven guilty."

A belief is *prima facie justified* for *S* iff it is only possible for *S* to hold the belief unjustifiedly if she has reason for thinking she should not have the belief.

- *Problem:* When is a belief *prima facie* justified vs. just arbitrary?
- 1. Suppose that you have no reason to believe *P* and you *also* have no reason *not* to believe *P*.
- 2. Either you are justified in believing *P* or you are not.
- 3. If you are justified in believing *P*, then *P* is *prima facie* justified. (Definition of *prima facie*)
- 4. If you are not justified in believing *P*, then you need further reasons to believe *P*.
- 5. But if you need further reasons to believe *P*, then you are not *prima facie* justified in believing *P*.
- 6. ∴ Either all beliefs lacking reasons are *prima facie* justified or no beliefs are *prima facie* justified. (From 1-5)
- 7. If *prima facie* justified beliefs are basic beliefs, then only some beliefs lacking reasons are *prima facie* justified.
- 8. *Prima facie* justified beliefs are not basic beliefs. (From 6,7)

### 3.3. *General problem with basic beliefs*

1. If (traditional) foundationalism is true, then: (a) all justified belief ultimately derives from the evidence of our senses, and (b) all evidence from our senses comes in the form of appearance beliefs.
2. Many justified believers have evidence from their senses, but lack appearance beliefs.
3. ∴ Traditional foundationalism is false. (From 1, 2; ditto for apparent memory beliefs)

## 4. Epistemic Ascent

Recall that chains of reasoning that "bottom out" in basic beliefs justify nonbasic beliefs. What is a 'reason'?

A belief *P* is a *reason* for *S* to believe *Q* iff it is logically possible for *S* to become justified in believing *Q* by believing it on the basis of *P*.

- Here, *logical possibility* just means "the absence of contradiction." It is a broader notion of possibility than *physical* or *practical* possibility.
- There is also a distinction between *having* a reason to believe *Q* and *basing* one's belief that *Q* on a reason. Having a reason merely means that it is readily available; basing a belief on a reason means that the reason plays the right causal role in your thinking.

### 4.1. *Defeasible Reasons*

*Conclusive reasons* are reasons that *logically entail* their conclusion. (Deductively valid arguments provide conclusive reasons.)

*Nonconclusive reasons defeasibly justify* their conclusion: in the absence of 'defeaters,' nonconclusive reasons justify their conclusion.

If *P* is a reason for *S* to believe *Q*, then *R* is a *defeater* for this reason iff (*P*&*R*) is not a reason for *S* to believe *Q*.

- In this case, *P* is a defeasible or nonconclusive reason to believe *Q*.

4.2. *Justified Belief & Undefeated Arguments*

An *argument* is a finite sequence of statements such that for each member  $P$  of the sequence:

- (1)  $P$  is basic, or
- (2) There is a set of propositions earlier in the sequence that is a (conclusive or defeasible) reason for  $P$ .

$S$  *instantiates* an argument iff:

- (1)  $S$  believes all of the propositions comprising the argument;
- (2) For any nonbasic proposition  $P$  in the argument,  $S$  bases her belief that  $P$  on the earlier members of the argument that are  $S$ 's reasons for  $P$ .

An argument *supports*  $P$  iff  $P$  is the last element in the argument.

$S$ 's belief that  $P$  is justified if and only if  $S$  instantiates an undefeated argument supporting  $P$ .

*More precisely:* Either:

- (A) None of the arguments that  $S$  instantiates provide a defeater for  $S$ 's belief that  $P$ , or
- (B) If one such argument provides a defeater  $D$  of  $P$ , then (i)  $S$  instantiates another argument that provides a defeater  $E$  of  $D$ , and (ii)  $S$  instantiates no arguments that defeat  $E$ .

4.3. *Problem of perception*

How do we get from appearance beliefs to perceptual beliefs? Ex. How do we get from statements such as *there seems to be a brown table in front of me* to *there is a brown table in front of me*?

4.3.1. *Deductive Phenomenalism*

*Core doctrine:* There are only conclusive reasons, and our basic beliefs are appearance beliefs.

*Argument schema:*

1.  $x$  looks red to  $S$  under circumstances  $C$ .
2. If  $x$  looks red to  $S$  under circumstances  $C$ , then  $x$  is red.
3.  $\therefore x$  is red.

Constraints on  $C$ :

- $C$  cannot refer to anything beyond appearances: otherwise, it presupposes precisely the kind of perceptual knowledge that we're trying to justify. No solution to the problem of perception.

4.3.2. *Inductive Phenomenalism*

*Core doctrine:* There are conclusive *and inductive* reasons, and our basic beliefs are appearance beliefs.

*Argument schema:*

1.  $x$  looks red to  $S$  under circumstances  $C$ .
2. Usually, if  $x$  looks red to  $S$  under circumstances  $C$ , then  $x$  is red.
3.  $\therefore x$  is (*probably*) red.

Same constraints on  $C$  as before. This means that we have no way of justifying Premise 2. So no solution to the problem of perception.

4.3.3. *Explanatory Phenomenalism*

*Core doctrine:* There are conclusive, inductive, and *explanatory* reasons, and our basic beliefs are appearance beliefs.

*Argument schema:*

1.  $x$  looks red to  $S$  under circumstances  $C$ .
2. That  $x$  (actually) is red *best explains* why  $x$  looks red to  $S$  under circumstances  $C$ .
3.  $\therefore x$  is (*probably*) red.

Same constraints on  $C$  as before. This works if we are making *comparative appearance statements*: given that I am in normal perceptual conditions,  $x$ 's being red explains its seeming red. However, phenomenalsists can only avail themselves to *non-comparative appearance statements*, in which we cannot assume we are in normal perceptual conditions.

#### 4.3.4. *Scientific Realism*

*Argument schema:*

1. The totality of my appearances is orderly and systematic.
2. Our best theories explain why the totality of my appearances is orderly and systematic.
3.  $\therefore$  Our best theories are (*probably*) true. (from 1-2)
4. According to our best theories, if  $x$  appears red to  $S$  under  $C$ , then  $x$  is red.
5.  $x$  appears red to  $S$  under  $C$ .
6.  $\therefore x$  is (*probably*) red (from 3-5)

*Problem:* Requires too much psychologically, especially the amount of evidence required to justify perceptual beliefs.

#### 4.3.5. *Defeasible Reasons*

P&C embrace this idea: that appearance beliefs provide defeasible reasons for perceptual beliefs. In other words, if it seems to me that  $x$  is red, I am justified in believing  $x$  is red unless I encounter evidence to the contrary.

### 5. Reasoning & Memory

#### 5.1. *Occurrent thoughts*

Many epistemologists adopt the “mental blackboard” picture of reasoning:

- We have an array of interconnected beliefs all available for simultaneous inspection.
- Arguments are built out of these beliefs and are evaluated by such inspection.
- This assumes that all beliefs that figure in justification are *occurrent beliefs*, i.e. conscious, explicit.

The mental blackboard picture is psychologically implausible:

- We only hold a few occurrent beliefs at any given time, even though arguments involve several other “thoughts,” i.e. beliefs that are implicit, unconscious.
- These thoughts are frequently the product of memory.

#### 5.2. *Memory as a source of knowledge*

*Premise memory:* We occurrently believe the premises used in an (occurrent) argument.

*But what justifies those premises?*

*First option:* We merely have thoughts about the earlier arguments that justified these premises.

*Second option:* The very act of remembering produces basic beliefs, i.e. “ $S$  seems to remember  $P$ ” is a defeasible reason for  $S$  to believe  $P$ , where “seeming to remember” is basic. (P&C favor this view.)

#### 5.3. *Genetic and dynamic arguments*

*Genetic arguments* are of the form  $P_1 \rightarrow \dots \rightarrow P_n$

*Dynamic arguments* are of the form (I seem to remember  $P_{i-1} \rightarrow P_{i-1} \rightarrow P_i$ , where  $1 \leq i-1 < i \leq n$ .)

*Puzzle:* dynamic arguments are more psychologically plausible, but they seem to render genetic arguments irrelevant to justification. But genetic arguments seem relevant to justification!

*Solution:*

- Dynamic arguments are *positively* relevant: they tell us what makes us currently justified in believing  $P_i$ .
- Genetic arguments are *negatively* relevant: (a) we know that the genetic argument underlies our having come to believe  $P_i$ , and (b) if we acquire some defeater for the genetic argument, it is also a defeater for the dynamic argument (*genetic defeater*).
- However, genetic defeaters must be in working/occurrent memory.
  - This squares nicely with the idea that memory retrieval is often a kind of “primed search,” an unconscious procedure in which memories are recalled when they satisfy criteria on a non-occurrent memory of a “list”.