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### Conclusion. Bibliography.

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have attempted to show that foundationalism is a defensible theory of knowledge. In saying that, I mean to assert that, while foundationalism is not demonstrably correct, it is a plausible theory that can be defended from the best objections which have been raised by the critics of this theory.

It seems to me that, in general, philosophical theories are not the sort of things that can be proven to be correct, but rather, that the plausibility of a theory depends on the degree to which it is in harmony with certain of our intuitions concerning the subject matter of the theory and the degree to which it can be defended from objections. To be somewhat more specific, the plausibility of a theory of knowledge depends on the degree to which it incorporates our preanalytic intuitions concerning knowledge and justification, as well as the degree to which it can meet the objections that are raised against it. In this regard, I am at odds with Lewis and in agreement with Chisholm.

Lewis seemed to be overly concerned with demonstrating the truth of foundationalism. It seems to me that he was willing to go to extremes to demonstrate the truth of

foundationalism. Lewis's demonstration of foundationalism was found to be unacceptable. Ultimately, it depended on the truth of an implausible doctrine, phenomenalism. Chisholm, on the other hand, correctly suggests that foundationalism gains some plausibility from the fact that the account of epistemic justification which it provides accords with certain of our intuitions concerning justification. Chisholm suggests that we may seek our justification for a proposition by a process of Socratic interrogation, i.e., by successively questioning what evidence we do have for believing a proposition, its evidence, etc. According to Chisholm, we find that there is a proper stopping place for the process of questioning; we find that this process of Socratic interrogation ends when a proposition is cited which is claimed to constitute its own evidence. This is not taken to be a demonstration of the truth of foundationalism, however; this does suggest that foundationalism has some intuitive plausibility. Chisholm and I seem to agree that just as the proof of the pudding is in the eating, the proof of foundationalism lies in the spelling out of a detailed version of the theory which is immune to objection.

The first step that must be taken in showing that foundationalism is defensible is the explication and defense of foundationalism's most controversial tenet, the

self-justification thesis. The self-justification thesis asserts that the foundation of empirical knowledge is comprised of propositions which are initially justified independently of the justification that they receive from other propositions. Propositions which describe a person's immediate experiences or phenomenal states are alleged to be paradigm examples of such propositions.

On this issue, Lewis and Chisholm are in substantial agreement, the latter's views being a refinement of the former's. Lewis referred to the foundation of knowledge as the given. The given, according to Lewis, is a set of true propositions which assert of a person that he is having a certain sort of phenomenological experience. These propositions are supposed to be expressed by sentences of the following forms: 'I seem to see..', 'I seem to hear...', etc. Lewis supported his claim that these propositions are self-justifying by alleging that one cannot be mistaken in believing such a proposition. Lewis, however, was not terribly clear about which sentences express the given. At times, he appears to assert that any sentence of the form 'I seem to see...' expresses a given-proposition, while on other occasions, he restricts the predicates that may be used in filling in the blank to perceptual predicates. Lewis's view of the foundation of knowledge was deemed deficient because of this vagueness

in the theory.

Chisholm attempts to be more precise than Lewis in putting forth his views concerning the foundation of knowledge. He proposes that the class of foundational propositions is the class of propositions that are directly evident for a person. For Chisholm, the class of propositions that are directly evident for a person is the class of true propositions whose truth entails that they are evident (the class of self-presenting propositions) and those propositions that are entailed by self-presenting propositions. Chisholm asserts that the propositions that are directly evident for a person include true propositions that ascribe beliefs and thoughts to the person, as well as propositions which describe the ways that things seem to appear to him. The propositions of this latter class are those expressed by noncomparative appear statements, statements of the form: 'I am appeared to  $\Phi$ -ly,' where 'appear' is taken in its noncomparative sense and where  $\Phi$  expresses a property that is either a proper object of the various senses (e.g., red, sweet) or a common sensible (e.g., square, flat). Chisholm further alleges that these propositions are optimally reasonable, and thus provide a firm foundation for empirical knowledge.

I suggested that the problem with Chisholm's embellishment of Lewis's theory was the manner in which he

attempted to specify the class of foundation propositions. It was suggested that his characterization of the directly evident was defective, for it did not take into consideration the fact that a person may believe a proposition which describes the way that he is appeared to for an erroneous reason. It was, thus, suggested that the notion that the person bases his belief on the fact that the proposition is true must be incorporated in the characterization of the directly evident, i.e., that the class of directly evident propositions is the class of true propositions which are necessarily such that when they are true and when the person they describe bases his belief in them on the fact that they are true, they are evident for the person (i.e., self-presenting) or which are entailed by self-presenting propositions. It was then noted that the class of directly evident propositions is larger than the class of foundational propositions. Foundational propositions are directly evident and are believed for the right reasons (on the basis of their truth). When the theory is amended in this way, it overcomes the best objections that can be raised against it (provided that the notion of basing one's belief on something can be explicated in an appropriate manner).

Lewis and Chisholm give divergent accounts of the justification of nonfoundational beliefs by foundational

beliefs. Lewis claims that the justification of non-foundational beliefs is accounted for by scientific rules of inference. A scientific hypothesis is justified when sufficiently many of its test implications are verified (and sufficiently few are falsified). Lewis treated ordinary objective propositions in the way that he believed that scientific hypotheses were justified. He adhered to a form of phenomenalism which asserted that objective statements had certain test implications, terminating judgments, as analytical consequences. These terminating judgments were to the effect that given that the person was appeared to in a certain way, if he were to seem to perform an action of a certain sort, then he would be appeared to in an appropriate way. Lewis thought that when sufficiently many of these terminating judgments were verified, the statement that had these terminating judgments as an analytic consequence was rendered probable. A statement's being probable relative to a person's body of knowledge is sufficient, according to Lewis, to justify the person in believing the proposition.

Chisholm correctly argued that Lewis's phenomenalism was implausible, and, thus, concluded that Lewis's account of the justification of non-foundational beliefs must be abandoned. Chisholm suggested that rules of inductive

logic could not account for the justification of simple perceptual beliefs. He claimed that special epistemic principles were needed to account for the justification of perceptual beliefs. Unfortunately, the epistemic principles which Chisholm presented suffered from a general defect. They assumed that regardless of the way that the world is, beliefs are justified on the basis of perception, i.e., even if certain sorts of perception were not reliable, Chisholm's principles countenance these sorts of perceptions as reliable sources of knowledge or justified belief. It was argued that this is an unacceptable consequence of Chisholm's theory of the indirectly evident.

Chisholm's criticism of Lewis's phenomenalism is telling. However, I argued that Chisholm abandoned Lewis's general approach to the justification of non-foundational beliefs without good reason (and without a more palatable approach to fall back upon). It was suggested that Lewis's theory could be resurrected with slight modification. The modification that was proposed was that the phenomenalism be abandoned and replaced by the weaker claim that the relationship between an objective statement and certain terminating judgments is the same relationship that holds between a scientific hypothesis and its test implications.

From the considerations raised in this dissertation,



it is fair to conclude that foundationalism is a defensible doctrine. The version of the theory that appears to be most plausible is a hybrid of Lewis's and Chisholm's versions of foundationalism. Such a theory would adopt Chisholm's theory of the directly evident, modified as suggested above, as its account of the foundation of knowledge. It would adopt the foregoing modification of Lewis's account of the justification of nonfoundational belief to explain the relationship between the foundation and the higher tiers of knowledge. Finally, it should be noted that such a theory requires a detailed account of scientific inference which is somewhat more plausible than the one that Lewis presents. It seems to me that certain features of Chisholm's logic of epistemic preferability would have to be incorporated in such an account.

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