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INFINITISM

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Introduction

Infinitism, along with coherentism and foundationalism, is a view about the structure of reasons and reasoning that is designed to provide a solution to the epistemic regress problem. The regress problem can be put this way: Suppose we give a reason, r_1, for holding one of our beliefs, b. Then, we are asked for our reason for holding r_1, and we provide the reason, r_2. Then, we are asked for our reason for r_2, and we give r_3. Now, either this process could go on indefinitely, which seems to suggest that nothing has been gained by providing a reason because there is always another one needed; or, if some reason repeats, it seems that we have argued in a circle and that no such argument could provide a good basis for accepting b; or, if at some point there is no further reason, it seems that the stopping point is arbitrarily held because there is no reasonable basis for holding it. The problem is that, contrary to strong pre-theoretical intuitions, there seems to be no point in giving reasons for our beliefs.

Infinitism holds that there is no reason that can be given for any belief which is so privileged that it is immune to further interrogation. There are circumstances in which even the most commonplace reasons require further reasons. Even so, knowledge based upon such reasoning is possible, and giving reasons does increase the warrant for our beliefs.

The primary purpose of this chapter is to sketch the case for infinitism. It has three main steps.

First, I will discuss the way in which the regress problem was originally conceived by the Pyrrhonians and Aristotelians. The upshot will be that given two presuppositions that underlie the regress problem as originally conceived, the Pyrrhonian response, namely that reasoning is unable to resolve disputes, is highly plausible.

Second, I will discuss three challenges to the Pyrrhonian response. The first challenge arises from various forms of foundationalism including what I call 'austere reliabilism' and 'embellished reliabilism.' I will argue that these forms of foundationalism fail to adequately address the normative basis motivating the regress argument. The second challenge originates with contemporary coherentism. I will argue that contemporary coherentism is not a viable response because it is subject to the same objections that apply to foundationalism. That leaves infinitism, the third challenge, as the only viable, non-skeptical response.

Third, I will sketch infinitism, point to some of its advantages, and try to show that the primary objections to it miss the mark.

1. The Traditional Problem

The traditional regress problem was known to Aristotle, who wrote this in the *Metaphysics*:

> There are . . . some who raise a difficulty by asking, who is to be the judge of the healthy man, and in general who is likely to judge rightly on each class of questions. But such inquiries are like puzzling over the question whether we are now asleep or awake. And all such questions have the same meaning. These people demand that a reason shall be given for everything; for they seek a starting point, and they seek to get this by demonstration, while it is obvious from their actions that they have no such conviction. But their mistake is what we have stated it to be; they seek a reason for things for which no reason can be given; for the starting point of demonstration is not demonstration.
>
> (Aristotle 1941b: 1011a2–14)

Even though Aristotle is speaking about "demonstration," and there is a special meaning that he would sometimes attach to that concept involving syllogistic reasoning from intuited first principles, his point here is that reasoning, in general, reaches an end because there are some privileged starting points "for which no reason can be given" because "the starting point of demonstration is not demonstration." No reason *can* be given because reasoning presupposes something not inferred—namely the premisses that provide the basis for the reasoning.

This argument still motivates foundationalism. Here is a redacted paragraph from William Alston's *Epistemic Justification* that faithfully renders his general point:

> The argument [for foundationalism] is that the original belief [the one that requires justification] will be mediately justified only if every branch [of the justificatory tree] . . . terminates in an immediately justified belief. Positively, it is argued that on this condition the necessary conditions for the original belief's being mediately justified are satisfied, and negatively it is argued that if any branch assumes any other form, they are not.
>
> (Alston 1989: 54)

Alston goes on to say that this argument "gives stronger support to foundationalism than any other regress argument" (Alston 1989: 55).

The foundationalists' response is an answer to the skeptics' use of the regress argument whose classical formulation is due to Sextus Empiricus:

> The later Skeptics hand down Five Modes leading to suspension, namely these: the first based on discrepancy, the second on the regress *ad infinitum*, the third on relativity, the fourth on hypothesis, the fifth on circular reasoning. That based on discrepancy leads us to find that with regard to the object presented there has arisen both amongst ordinary people and amongst the philosophers an interminable conflict because of which we are unable either to choose a thing or reject it, and so fall back on suspension. The Mode based upon regress *ad infinitum* is that whereby we assert that the thing adduced as a proof of the matter proposed needs a further proof, and this again another,

and so on *ad infinitum*, so that the consequence is suspension [of assent], as we possess no starting-point for our argument. The Mode based upon relativity . . . is that whereby the object has such or such an appearance in relation to the subject judging and to the concomitant percepts, but as to its real nature we suspend judgment. We have the Mode based upon hypothesis when the Dogmatists, being forced to recede *ad infinitum*, take as their starting-point something which they do not establish but claim to assume as granted simply and without demonstration. The Mode of circular reasoning is the form used when the proof itself which ought to establish the matter of inquiry requires confirmation derived from the matter; in this case, being unable to assume either in order to establish the other, we suspend judgement about both.

(Empiricus 1976: I: 166–69)

There are five modes mentioned in the passage from Sextus Empiricus. The modes of relativity and discrepancy are crucial to understanding the *reductio* put forth by Sextus because those modes are designed to show that neither a judgment based on how things appear nor a judgment based upon what we collectively believe (either qua "philosophers" or qua "ordinary" persons) is so privileged that it does not need to be supported by further reasoning. As we will see, considerations similar to those motivating the modes of relativity and discrepancy form part of the motivation for infinitism.

The foundationalists' answer to the skeptical conclusion is that there must be some beliefs that cannot be justified by further reasoning because, as they see it, reasoning cannot create epistemic warrant, so warrant *must* be present in some basic beliefs. From the foundationalists' perspective, the problem is typically not *whether* there is sufficient warrant for knowledge, it is, rather, *how* sufficient warrant arises and is transferred.

This is clear, for example, from Aristotle's rather dismissive attitude towards skepticism manifested in the citation above, and even in the carefully constructed answer in the *Posterior Analytics* designed to show that *if* some knowledge is the result of demonstration, then some knowledge must not be the result of demonstration. There he argues that either the series of demonstrations is finite or infinite. It must be finite because "one cannot traverse an infinite series" (Aristotle 1941a: 72b10). But if it terminates, it cannot terminate in another belief that requires a demonstration because the conclusion would not be "properly" known and "rests on the mere supposition that the premisses are true" (Aristotle 1941a: 72b14). It cannot be finite and circular because the premisses in a demonstration must be "prior to and better known than the conclusion" and "the same things cannot be simultaneously both prior and posterior to one another" (Aristotle 1941a: 72b25–28). Thus, *if* there is demonstrative knowledge, then there must be non-demonstrative knowledge.

Near the end of the *Posterior Analytics* Aristotle does provide a sketch of how such non-demonstrative knowledge reliably originates with sensation and ends with rational insight. The details of Aristotle's proto-reliabilist sketch are not important at this point, although I will return to it and a general discussion of reliabilism in section 2. What is important here is to understand how the foundationalists use the regress argument.

The Regress Argument as Used by Foundationalism

1.   Reasoning has only three possible structures: it is finite and has a beginning point, it is circular, or it is infinite.

2. Circular reasoning is not acceptable because a belief would have to be epistemically prior to itself.
3. Reasoning infinite in length could not be carried out by humans.
4. Thus, if there is knowledge that results from reasoning, the reasoning must be finite in length.
5. The beginning points of the reasoning must be known (otherwise it would be mere supposition).
6. Thus, if there is reasoning that results in knowledge, there must be some beliefs (the beginning points) that are known by some process other than reasoning.

The conclusion is the basic claim made by the foundationalist, namely, if there is some knowledge that is the result of reasoning, some knowledge is not the result of reasoning. Note the hypothetical nature of the conclusion. As mentioned above, although almost all foundationalists eschew skepticism, a foundationalist need not hold that there is knowledge in any specific area, or even in general. There can be and have been skeptical foundationalists: Hume, for example. There can be non-skeptical foundationalists: Locke, and of course Aristotle, for example.

I think it is fair to say that there are two core presuppositions underlying the regress argument as put forth by foundationalists without which the argument could not succeed:

Non-Originating Principle: Reasoning, alone, cannot produce epistemic warrant.

Inheritance Principle: Reasoning can transmit the requisite epistemic warrant for knowledge from other beliefs.

For the sake of the discussion, the Pyrrhonians can accept the hypothetical in step 6 (above) as well as the two principles, but they would invoke the modes of relativity and discrepancy in order to show that there are no legitimate firm beginning points. Aristotle might be right that in practice we do not push for reasons beyond those that are taken for granted by all of the participants in a discussion, but skeptics would argue that such contextually based agreements do not indicate the presence of a belief that has the requisite epistemic warrant because at other times and in other circumstances, different agreements are, or can be, made. In addition, skeptics would point out that beliefs based upon perception are person and circumstance relative. That's not to say that reasons for holding such beliefs can't be located; rather, it is to say that they are not privileged in the way required by foundationalism.

The skeptics would point out that the inheritance and non-originating principles are telling against infinitism and coherentism because if reasoning cannot originate epistemic warrant, then neither view can explain how warrant arises in the first place. Each belief in the potentially infinite reasoning process is warranted on the condition that the previous belief is warranted, but that previous belief is warranted only if the previous one is, etc. So, how does warrant originate? (see Dancy 1985: 55). Similarly, even if the beliefs in a set of coherent beliefs are mutually warranting—each increasing the warrant of the other—the question of how the beliefs obtain warrant to begin with still remains.

The upshot, from the Pyrrhonian point of view, is withholding beliefs. To them, what initially looked like a good argument for foundationalism, when examined more care-

fully, actually provides a basis for a skeptical attitude towards beliefs because the origin of warrant remains mysterious.

2. Responses to the Skeptics' Use of the Regress Argument

Aristotle was not content with his response to skepticism quoted in the previous section (Aristotle 1941b: 1011a2–14). As mentioned earlier, in the *Posterior Analytics* he provides the sketch of another type of response, namely, one designed to provide a basis for explaining the origin of warrant. Here is a somewhat redacted and interpolated quotation that remains true to the basic Aristotelian view. (I have indicated exact quotes with double quotation marks):

> In order for us to acquire the basic beliefs "we must possess a capacity of some sort" which is "a characteristic of all animals, for they all possess a congenital discriminative capacity which is called sense perception. But though sense perception is innate in all animals, in some the sense-impression comes to persist, in others, it does not." In those animals in which sense perception persists, there "comes to be what we call memory, and out of frequently repeated memories of the same thing develop experience . . . [and] from experience . . . originate the skill of the craftsman and the knowledge of the man of science".
>
> (Aristotle 1941a: 99b33–100a8)

The essence of this form of foundationalism is what I call 'austere reliabilism' with regard to basic beliefs that acquire their warrant simply in virtue of having the right kind of causal history. What makes this form of reliabilism "austere" is that although reasoning can produce new knowledge, reasoning neither creates new types of epistemic warrant nor augments the amount of warrant, it merely transmits the warrant inherent in basic beliefs. (See Goldman 1979 for a contemporary form of austere reliabilism.)

'Embellished reliabilism' does not adhere strictly to the two principles mentioned in the previous section because it allows that reasoning can produce either a new type of epistemic warrant or augment the amount of epistemic warrant inherent in basic beliefs. Nevertheless, embellished reliabilism, like austere reliabilism, holds that some beliefs have a type of epistemic warrant that obtains because of the way in which such "basic" beliefs arise. But once the basic beliefs, or those inferred from them, become members of a set of beliefs that have been subjected to careful self-reflection—including reflection about the reliability of our (or, in a Cartesian mode, my) epistemic capacities—a different type of (or at least more) warrant can arise. Here is a passage from Ernest Sosa that makes that very point:

> Admittedly, there is a sense in which even a supermarket door "knows" when someone approaches, and in which a heating system "knows" when the temperature in a room rises above a certain setting. Such is "servo-mechanic" knowledge. And there is an immense variety of animal knowledge, instinctive or learned, which facilitates survival and flourishing in an astonishingly rich diversity of modes and environments. Human knowledge is on a higher plane of sophistication, however, precisely because of its enhanced coherence and comprehensiveness and its capacity to satisfy self-reflective curiosity. Pure reliabilism is questionable as an adequate epistemology for such knowledge.
>
> (Sosa 1991: 95)

It is not my purpose here to examine either austere ("pure") or embellished reliabilism in detail and I grant that this taxonomy might be difficult to apply in some cases. Nevertheless, it should be clear that although the embellished form of reliabilism does recognize the normative imperative to provide reasons for some of our beliefs, both forms fail to *fully* recognize the fundamental intuition informing the regress—namely, that any belief for which one can produce reasons is better or differently warranted than a belief for which one cannot produce reasons.

If good reasoning cannot be circular, and if being able to provide reasons for our beliefs is importantly epistemically better than not being able to do so, then infinitism is the only solution to the regress argument—other than skepticism. To see that, take any proposed "basic" belief in the regress. Call it "E." One can ask the following question: In virtue of what is E a proper ending point? If no answer is forthcoming, then it clearly appears arbitrary to believe E without a reason because up to that point reasons were needed. Why should the regress end at E rather than at some earlier step or at some possible later step?

Suppose that the answer is that E is the appropriate ending belief in virtue of E's having some foundational property, F. Then, the next question becomes obvious: Does E's possessing F make it more likely that E is true than it would be if E did not possess F?

The imperative to produce an answer strikes me as obvious. Consider what I have called elsewhere a "Wednesday Foundationalist" who holds that a belief formed by any person on Wednesday has the austere form of warrant (Klein 2007a: 15). No one is such a foundationalist because there is absolutely no reason to believe that Wednesday-beliefs are any better than, say, Friday- or Sunday-beliefs. What foundationalists typically put forth as the F-property in virtue of which E beliefs are foundational is such that E's possessing F readily provides a basis for believing that E is likely to be true.

Once the question is asked about whether E's possessing F is truth conducive, there are four possible responses: It can be ignored, or "yes," "no," or "I don't know." I take it that ignoring the question is to fail to grasp the normative imperative underlying the regress argument, and the "no" and the "I don't know" answers place S's acceptance of E in jeopardy. Once the question is asked and understood, the only answer that at least preserves all of E's warrant is "yes." But, then, a reason for believing E has been given and the regress has continued.

Let me note in passing that this argument against foundationalism, if sound, works against the current forms of emergent coherentism as well—and emergent coherentism strikes me as the only plausible form. The other form—what I call transference coherentism—was probably never held since it takes individual beliefs to be the primary bearers of warrant and leads to circular reasoning. That logically possible but completely unsatisfying view was well disposed of by Aristotle and the Pyrrhonians.

Emergent coherentism is best exemplified by BonJour (BonJour 1985: 87–110). In this view, it is *sets* of beliefs that are the primary bearers of warrant. All beliefs in the appropriate type of coherent set are warranted simply in virtue of being members of that set. Thus, warrant is not transferred from one belief to another—rather, warrant emerges as a result of the mutual support provided by the beliefs in the set.

As Ernest Sosa has pointed out, this form of coherentism shares a formal structure with foundationalism (Sosa 1980). Using the terminology I am employing, the emergent coherentist takes the foundational property F to be E's being a member of a set of beliefs that is coherent (and perhaps has other features as well). In other words, emergent coherentism can be seen as one-step foundationalism because all beliefs are

foundational. (Perhaps some are relatively "more foundational" than others because they are more important to the coherence of the set. But they all gain their initial warrant because they are members of the appropriate type of set.) But once the foundational property, F, is identified as "being a member of a set of coherent beliefs," the question arises about whether E's being a member of such a set is truth-conducive. Without a positive answer to that question, acceptance of the coherent set seems arbitrary. The regress has continued.

Now, it could be objected (1) that this very general argument against foundationalism (and emergent coherentism) conflates an important distinction between a belief itself *being* justified with the meta-belief that the belief is justified and (2) that knowledge only requires that the belief be justified (see Alston 1976).

To assess the force of the objection, it is important to distinguish two senses of belief and the concomitant two senses in which a belief is justified. In one sense, "belief" refers to the propositional content of a belief as in "that belief is true" or "her belief was implied by what she said earlier." In the other sense, "belief" can refer to the belief-state as in "she had that belief for many years" or "her belief was caused by a reliable process." The concomitant distinction regarding "justified belief" is between the proposition being justified for someone, that is, propositional justification, and the believing (i.e., the state of believing) being justified, that is, doxastic justification (see Firth 1978).

The objection mentioned above would be valid only with regard to propositional justification. There is a clear distinction between a proposition, say p, being justified and the meta-proposition 'p is justified' being justified. Any argument that conflated the distinction is built upon a pun. I grant that in order for p to be justified for a person, it is not required that 'p is justified' is justified for that person.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that what is required for knowledge is that S's believing that p be justified (even if the believing is only a dispositional state). For even if p is true, believed, and propositionally justified for S, S could fail to know that p because either S believed p for the wrong reasons or no reasons whatsoever (as in a guess). The regress argument and any possible responses are concerned with whether the belief that p is doxastically justified sufficiently for the belief to rise to the level of knowledge.

Once the question is raised concerning whether E's possessing F makes it more likely that E is true than it would be if E did not possess F, it is S's entitlement to continue to believe that p that is being questioned. If S is not able to defend the "yes" answer to the question, some adjustment of S's entitlement to believe E and every belief that depends upon E is called for. It might not be required that S give up E because E (as opposed to any of the contraries of E) might possess the kind or amount of epistemic warrant that austere reliabilism would attribute to it, but those views that recognize the importance of having reasons for our beliefs when their epistemic credentials are challenged (i.e., embellished reliabilism, coherentism, and infinitism) would require some recalibration of S's entitlement to believe that p.

In other words, the "meta-question" concerning whether E's possessing F makes it more likely that E is true is directly relevant to determining whether S's believing that E is warranted. It is only austere reliabilists who will not grant this point. For them, the belief that E is fully epistemically warranted just in case it is produced by an appropriate process. As mentioned above, the normative force behind the regress argument is simply that having reasons for believing a proposition adds a type of epistemic warrant. Lacking a reason is problematic only when seen from the standpoint of normative

epistemology in which knowledge is taken to be the most highly prized form of true belief—where, of course, it is the believing that is prized, not the propositional content (see Plato 1980: 97a–98b).

3. Infinitism

Brief sketch

The upshot of the argument up to this point is that either we have to reduce what it takes to be the most highly prized form of true belief to something akin to austere reliabilism or it appears that there is no privileged belief which is immune to interrogation. The first alternative simply ignores the normative intuition underlying the regress. But a major obstacle to accepting infinitism remains. Recall the two principles that motivated foundationalism: the Inheritance Principle and the Non-Originating Principle.

Together they rule out infinitism. For even if we had infinite time to produce reasons, it still seems mysterious, if not downright impossible, that some belief could ever be warranted because reasoning alone cannot warrant a belief. Coupled with the fact that compared to an infinitely enduring being, we live but a nanosecond, the upshot seems to be that the Pyrrhonians were right after all. Suspension of belief is the only apt attitude.

The answer to these worries and the key to understanding infinitism is that neither of the principles, though they motivate and imply foundationalism, is required by all accounts of epistemic warrant. Having reasons for a belief does add a type of warrant for holding it. Indeed, having reasons for a belief is required for it to be the most highly prized form of true belief. In other words, although there is some type of epistemic warrant that a belief acquires in virtue of its etiology, having a reason for the belief provides a different type of warrant for believing it. I say "different type" of warrant rather than just "more warrant" because no matter how reliable the process is that produced the belief, the belief does not rise to the status of the most highly prized form of true belief unless there are good reasons for holding it. So, although there is one form of warrant that does not originate with reasoning, another form of warrant does. Thus, the Non-Originating Principle is false. Having reasons for a belief provides it with a new type of warrant. In addition, the inheritance principle is, at best, misleading since it seems to imply that the warrant required for knowledge is transmitted by reasoning. But the reason, r, for a belief, b, can provide b with a type of warrant that r, as yet, does not possess because no reason for r has yet been given or located. So b could be known without r being known.

The infinitist will take the belief that p to be doxastically justified for S only if S has engaged in providing "enough" reasons along the path of reasons. S would be completely doxastically justified if every reason in the path were provided. But since it takes some time to discover and offer reasons, even though a *proposition* might be completely justified (if there is a suitable endless path of reasons), no *belief* could ever be completely doxastically justified. Nothing is ever completely settled in the sense that it is beyond interrogation, but as S engages in the process of providing more reasons for her beliefs they become better justified—not because S is getting closer to completing the task but, rather, because S has added some warrant for her belief. How far forward in providing reasons S needs to go in order to acquire knowledge seems to me to be a matter of the pragmatic features of the epistemic context—just as which beliefs are being questioned

and which can be taken as reasons is at least partially contextually determined (see Fantl 2003; Klein 2005a, 2005b, 2007a, 2007b).

Responses to Some Objections to Infinitism

Infinitism has not been taken as a serious contender among the answers to the regress problem because there seem to be obvious, clear objections. But I think these objections to infinitism miss the mark. Let us consider five of them:

1. The Finite Mind Objection

Aristotle correctly observed that beings with a finite mind cannot traverse an infinitely long inference path because each inference takes some time. But infinitism—or at least the kind that makes proper use of the distinction between propositional and doxastic justification—does not require that an infinite set of reasons be produced or located in order for a belief to rise to the level of the most highly prized form of true belief. Knowledge requires being able to provide enough reasons for our believing. It does not require completing a task with an infinite number of steps.

What constitutes "enough" reasons requires careful elaboration and I have not done that here. Such an elaboration would include a discussion of the role of the contextual considerations that make further questioning either necessary because a legitimate question has been raised and understood or frivolous because the amount of added warrant that further investigation would produce is minuscule. Those issues are beyond the scope of this essay.

2. The No-Starting Point Objection

The Pyrrhonians said that the process of reasoning endorsed by infinitism could not succeed in justifying a belief sufficiently for us to adopt it because "we possess no starting-point for our argument." That objection has an intuitive tug only if we thought that knowledge could be produced by reasoning only if all of the positive epistemic properties required for belief rising to the level of knowledge had to be present in the reasons for the belief. But I hope I have dispelled their intuitive appeal by showing how reasoning can produce a new type of warrant that is not inherited from the offered reason.

3. Skepticism

Some philosophers have argued that knowledge entails certainty, where certainty includes at least having finally settled the matter. And they would point out that infinitism makes that kind of certainty impossible and, thus, infinitism leads to skepticism. There are two replies to this objection.

First, as I mentioned earlier, there are both skeptical and non-skeptical forms of foundationalism. There would be skeptical forms of coherentism if no belief set held by creatures like us could be sufficiently coherent to satisfy the requirements of knowledge. In a similar vein, there certainly could be skeptical forms of infinitism that held that the normative requirements of justification simply cannot be fulfilled. The fact that a theory of justification leads to skepticism might provide a basis for looking more carefully at whether the theory is correct, but that, alone, does not strike me as a sufficient reason for rejecting the theory.

Second, the form of infinitism that I am defending does not lead to skepticism. It is a form of fallibilism that eschews certainty as a requirement for knowledge, where certainty is construed as requiring that the degree of epistemic warrant necessary for knowledge makes the belief immune to further interrogation. Indeed, I think this form of infinitism can explain why certainty is taken to be both a relative notion as when we say that one belief is more certain than another, and an absolute notion as when we say that a belief is certain only if there is no belief that is more certain. It can also explain why absolute certainty cannot be obtained because any belief can always be made a little more certain by producing more reasons along the path of reasons while at the same time it can explain how a belief can be certain enough to rise to the level required by knowledge (see Klein 2005c).

4. Infinitism Really Endorses a Form of Arbitrary Foundationalism

It has been claimed that (1) infinitism is really a form of an unjustified (arbitrary) foundationalist view, and (2) that a "bad" reason, r, could justify a belief, b. (See Bergmann 2007 for the objection and Klein 2007b for a full response.) That infinitism is not a form of foundationalism should be clear because it eschews the fundamental claim endorsed by foundationalists, namely, that there are some beliefs immune to further interrogation.

The answer to (2) is more complex. There are several distinct factors that could make a reason, r, "bad" for believing b:

(i)   A reason, r, could be "bad" because it was not formed in a reliable manner. Such a bad reason could not transfer the kind of warrant required by the austere reliabilist to b by reasoning, and consequently, neither b nor r would be knowledge—even according to the infinitist. In other words, the infinitist can embrace the reliabilists' basic insight that a belief must be properly caused in order to be knowledge. So, in this sense r could not be "bad" and lead to knowledge.

(ii) A reason, r, could be "bad" because there is *no* further reason for it. But note that in such a case, r couldn't have been formed reliably because the belief that b was reliably formed is a good reason for thinking b is true. Hence, what was said with regard to (i) applies here as well.

(iii) A reason, r, could be "bad" because S does not have available an answer to the question as to why she believes that r is likely to be true. In such a case, although b has gained some warrant because r was produced as a reason for believing b, b's degree of warrant would diminish. That strikes me as just what a theory of justification should dictate. We are a bit better off by possessing r as a reason for b than we would be if we had no reason for believing b, but we are not completely in the epistemic clear.

(iv) A reason, r, could be "bad" because it is false or there is a defeater of the reason for r. If it is false, there is a defeater of the inference from the "bad" reason (namely, ~r). Infinitism, per se, is an account of only the justification condition in knowledge; an infinitist can include a no-defeater condition in the necessary conditions for knowledge. So, such a "bad" reason could not lead to knowledge.

(I should add parenthetically that I think on some occasions a false belief can lead to knowledge and, hence, such useful falsehoods are not "bad" reasons, but those

considerations are irrelevant here because those false beliefs could appear in chains of reasons endorsed by foundationalists (see Klein 2008).)

5. *The Something from Nothing Objection*

An anonymous reviewer of this chapter poses this question:

> **Q**: Can a belief B be warranted (to at least some degree) by being based on a belief in reason R1 if both of the following are true: (i) the belief in reason R1 is not reliably formed and (ii) the believer has no reason for thinking the belief in reason R1 is likely to be true?

The reviewer writes that a 'yes' answer "seems completely implausible" and that I seem committed to a "no" answer. I suppose that a 'yes' answer seems so implausible because if B can be warranted (at least partially) on the basis of R1, when R1 isn't warranted at all, it seems that some warrant is originating from nothing. The reviewer's point is that if the correct answer to Q is 'no,' then the Non-Originating Principle is true.

He/she writes:

> Klein doesn't directly answer Q in the paper, though he says that under these circumstances, a belief in R1 couldn't transfer the kind of warrant required by the austere reliabilist and so B couldn't amount to knowledge. So I think we should assume that Klein thinks that B couldn't be warranted to any degree at all by being so based and that R1 couldn't transfer any degree of warrant at all under conditions (i) and (ii).

I agree that R1 couldn't *transfer* any degree of warrant under conditions (i) and (ii) because R1 has no warrant to transfer. But the reviewer is wrong in thinking that "B isn't warranted at all by being so based." To repeat, a basic claim of infinitism is that reasoning can originate warrant. When we locate a reason for a belief, we have provided that belief with some warrant which the reason might not (yet) possess. Warrant hasn't originated from nothing. It has originated through the process of locating and citing the reason. Of course, B falls short of being knowledge because "R1 was not reliably formed" is a defeater of R1's justification for B, and, as mentioned above, B lacks the kind of warrant that the reliabilists require of a belief.

Conclusion

I conclude that neither foundationalism nor coherentism provides an adequate non-skeptical response to the epistemic regress problem. Only infinitism does.

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