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AN ANTI-FOUNDATIONALIST CRITIQUE OF RENE DESCARTE

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Abstract

The problem of true knowledge which began in the Ionian era has remained till this our present time in history of philosophy. This challenge emerged due to the inability of the ancient philosophical epoch to reconcile the position or the foundation of true knowledge in the human intellect. This irreconcilable theories gave rise to what we currently have as skepticism. However, in the formation of philosophy today, there are several skeptics who tries at every point in time to debunk every philosophical theory. This philosophic incongruence has lead philosophers like Descartes to write his meditation with the aim of finding out what he knew for sure; this certain truth would be the foundation of knowledge. Descartes believes that the senses are deceptive and therefore accept reason as the very source of certainty. Through this means Descartes fields a rationalist foundation for truth which builds on the cogito ergo sum. Nevertheless, as a rationalist philosopher, Descartes sought clarity and certainty in knowledge. He saw that there is no clarity and certainty in philosophy. For that reason he was worried about certainty in philosophy. He then declared that nothing exist including himself; but due to his thinking nature, he actually exists.

Introduction

The problem of true knowledge is a major concern in the philosophical enquiry. The very act of wonder, which is believed, stimulated the Ionian philosophers, led philosophy through many ages to its present position. However, as a result of the fact that many philosophers in the ancient times found it hard to reconcile this major problem of knowledge between the knowing subject (man) and the objects, they turned skeptics. Skepticism, which questioned the very possibility of true knowledge, no doubt agitated many philosophers. This agitation pushed philosophers into the desire to acquire certain knowledge. This search led to the development of some traditional theories of knowledge, which equally aimed at resolving the problem of certainty and thus give the knowing subject a place in the universe. These theories of knowledge from the ancient times delved into a critical search for the certainty of knowledge as to avoid error. No wonder Plato in the ancient period explained that people are often deceived because they lack knowledge. He made this clearer in his 'allegory of the cave' where he dismisses erroneous knowledge as shadows and upholds the need for more certain concrete knowledge¹. Further in the ancient epoch. Aristotle exposes the dangers of assumption. He lays emphasis on the fact that certainty is very necessary for any

claims to knowledge. Sequel to this he made, through his laws of thought, some self-evident truths, which would serve as guidelines to the certainty of knowledge direly needed.

Rene Descartes, a renowned epistemologist wrote his meditation with the aim of finding out what he knew for sure; this certain truth would be the foundation of knowledge. Descartes believes that the senses are deceptive and therefore accept reason as the very source of certainty. Descartes fields a rationalist foundation for truth which builds on the cogito ergo sum and being faced with the same problem of certain only of that, which can never be false or doubtful, he set out to achieve this certainty by postulating his famous method and guidelines, the methodic doubt and the clear and distinct perception of ideas in the light of reason. These helped him attain his foundation, the cogito ergo sum (I think therefore I am). It is also on this frame work that Descartes was later to build and put forward his arguments for the existence of God.

Thus, this paper seek to criticize Descartes foundational philosophy. Hence, in what follows, the concepts of epistemology and foundationalism will be briefly clarified, Descarte Methodic doubt will be cleared with the innate ideas and then criticism against foundationalist philosophy will be established.

¹William Lawhead. *The Voyage of Discovery: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy*. USA, 2002.

Review of Related Literature

The central claims of foundationalism are (1) that there are beliefs / propositions that can be justified without appeal to further beliefs / propositions, these are the foundational or basic beliefs / propositions, and (2) that there are beliefs / propositions whose justification is by reference to the basic beliefs / propositions. The foundationalist structure was first identified by Aristotle in the *Posterior Analytics* when he examined scientific knowledge and stated that: 'A principle of a demonstration is an immediate proposition, and an immediate proposition is one to which there is no other prior'².

An example of a contemporary formulation can be found with Alston:

'Our justified beliefs form a structure, in that some beliefs (the foundations) are justified by something other than their relation to other justified beliefs; beliefs that are justified by their relation to other beliefs all depend for their justification on the foundations'³

An important element in Alston's definition is that the foundations are justified by 'something other' than their relation to other justified beliefs. This leaves the way clear for further philosophical investigation into what that 'something other' could be. Bonjour provides a similar account of foundationalism:

'Some empirical beliefs possess immediate, intrinsic justification, not dependent upon other beliefs. These basic beliefs are the ultimate source of justification for all empirical knowledge'⁴.

So the foundationalist picture can be presented as follows:

S's belief in P is justified if and only if, either

(a) S's belief in P is foundational or

(b) S's belief in P rests on foundational beliefs.

The two central questions that foundationalism must answer as an epistemic justificatory theory are: firstly, what is the nature of foundational beliefs? In other words, what does it mean to say that some of our beliefs are 'basic' in the sense that their justification is without appeal to other beliefs that we hold? The second question is: even if we manage to establish that we can and do have some foundational beliefs, how do the other beliefs that we have, the non-basic or non-foundational beliefs 'rest' on the foundations? In order to illuminate the issues concerning foundationalism, at this stage I will refer to the foundations as beliefs, but it should be noted that whether the foundations of our empirical knowledge are beliefs, is itself a debated issue within epistemology. An

example of the controversy of the nature of the foundations can be seen in this statement by Michael Huemer:

'For some persons S and some propositions P, S is justified in believing P, and some of S's justification for believing P does not depend upon S's having a reason or reasons for believing P.'⁵

Huemer's suggestion seems to be that part of the justification for a belief may be simply the act of having an experience or sensation rather than articulating reasons. Huemer then gives an example: when someone is in pain they do not require any reasons for believing they are in pain to be justified in believing that they are. The sensation itself is the justification. This issue of the nature of the foundations of empirical knowledge shall be made clear as we progress. The debate concerning the nature of epistemological foundations has resulted in the emergence of different strands within foundationalism. I will now examine the distinctive features that define the main types of foundationalist theories.

There are two types of foundationalism, viz; Classical and moderate foundationalism.

Classical foundationalism is a theory that involves advocating the following:

1. S has some basic (i.e. non-inferentially) justified empirical beliefs.
2. S has some justified non-basic empirical beliefs.
3. Every branch of an evidence tree supporting any of S's non-basic empirical beliefs ends in a basic empirical belief.
4. The basic beliefs are certain.

The questions that naturally arise from this are: is it necessary to have certain foundations? Is it possible to have such strong foundations? Even if such strong foundations are necessary and possible, are they enough to form a structure that we can build our empirical knowledge upon? It would seem that to answer the skeptic we need strong foundations that do not require justification from other propositions. The skeptic can continually press the question how do you know? If we appeal to other propositions, the skeptic will ask: how do you know those propositions are true? One possible solution is to suggest that there could be some sort of epistemic principle that connects the premises to what I infer from those premises. The problem is that for basic beliefs, the principle will have to somehow be part of the way in which the belief is formed. If any epistemic principle is external to how an allegedly basic belief is formed, then justification is needed for the epistemic principle. The skeptic can then continue the line of questioning demanding to know what justifies the epistemic principle.

The epistemic principle could be something like: whenever a belief is formed in manner X, it is a justified belief. The individual does not have to know what the principle is, but the principle has to be true. The other factor is that the epistemic

²Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, 72a 7-9, trans. by Jonathan Barnes, Oxford University Press, 1975, p.3

³William P. Alston, 'Two Types of Foundationalism', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 73 (1976), p. 165-84.

⁴Bonjour, Laurence, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*, Harvard University Press, 1985, p. 17.

⁵Michael Huemer, 'Arbitrary Foundations?' *The Philosophical Forum*, 34 (2003), p. 141.

principle must not be arbitrary and it must show why the basic belief is justified without any inferential support.

Moderate foundationalism in the other hand holds that the basic beliefs do not need to be certain, only that they must have some level of initial plausibility. The moderate foundationalist position involves the following:

1. S has some basic (non-inferentially justified) empirical beliefs.
2. S has some justified non-basic empirical beliefs.
3. Every branch of an evidence tree supporting any of S's non-basic empirical beliefs terminates in a basic empirical belief.
4. Some of S's basic empirical beliefs are less than certain for S.

The difficulty that a moderate foundationalist theory faces is that if the basic beliefs are less than certain, what else props them up for justification? It seems hard to avoid admitting that there are supporting beliefs involved, but then the beliefs are not truly basic and we are back at square one trying to identify what justifies the supporting beliefs. The skeptic would see moderate foundationalism as unlikely to meet the strong skeptical challenge because of the lack of certainty of the foundations.

The distinctions between classic and moderate foundationalism are not confined to differences over the nature of the foundations of knowledge. The issue of transmission i.e. how to get from the foundations to the other beliefs or propositions that we hold, is also a debated topic. For the classical foundationalist, the transmission is by deduction only, for the moderate foundationalist, non-deductive inference mechanisms can be used. Both the classical and moderate camps within foundationalism attempt to provide a solution to a difficult problem: the problem of epistemic regress.

Foundationalist theories, as well as other theories of epistemic justification, are concerned with the problem of epistemic regress. The problem is that we seem to possess epistemic chains of beliefs: beliefs that are based on knowledge of other beliefs.

The possibilities for such an epistemic chain are:

1. The chain might be infinite.
2. The chain might be circular.
3. The chain might terminate with a belief that is not knowledge.
4. The chain terminates with a belief which is direct knowledge.

The foundationalist position is that not only are there non-inferential justified beliefs, but the inferential beliefs that are based on them can be traced back to the non-inferential beliefs. There are alternative theories to foundationalism used to counter the epistemic regress problem, but the advantage of a foundationalist approach, if true, is that there is a definite stopping point to epistemic regress with basic beliefs.

The classical foundationalist response to epistemic regress Traditional classical foundationalism is commonly attributed to Descartes. For the Cartesian style foundationalist the foundations must be indubitable, or self-evident. The implication being that if I can rationally doubt that p, my belief is not strong enough for p to be a strong foundation. This requirement for certainty appears as early as the First Meditation where Descartes states:

'Reason now leads me to think that I should hold back my assent from opinions which are not completely certain and indubitable just as carefully as I do from those which are patently false⁶.'

The classical foundationalist view is that the move from foundational propositions to the non-foundational superstructure of beliefs built upon them is by deduction only. The inferential beliefs have to be validly deduced from the non-inferential beliefs. It is not enough, by the classical account, that the inferential belief is somehow inductively supported by the foundational belief, as this would allow the inferential belief to be false even if foundational belief were true.

Descartes seems to have favoured the deductive, mathematical, approach to building knowledge. In the Fifth Meditation he states:

'For example, when I consider the nature of a triangle, it appears most evident to me, steeped as I am in the principles of geometry, that its three angles are equal to two right angles; and so long as I attend to the proof, I cannot but believe this to be true⁷.'

The key point about mathematical proofs is that the conclusions follow deductively from the premises. In the Discourse on the Method Descartes states:

'Those long chains composed of very simple and easy reasoning's, which geometers customarily use to arrive at their most difficult demonstrations, had given me occasion to suppose that all the things which can fall under human knowledge are interconnected in the same way. And I thought that, provided we refrain from accepting anything as true which is not, and always keep to the order required for deducing one thing from another, then there can be nothing too remote to be reached in the end or too well hidden to be discovered⁸.'

I think it is easy to see the appeal of a geometrical account of the accumulation of knowledge. If the foundations are certain and every move beyond the foundations can be traced deductively, then one can proceed without fear of error. The problem, however, is that the geometrical account seems to make knowledge too difficult to obtain. It is difficult to see how empirical knowledge or indeed anything outside of the

⁶Descartes. *First Meditation*: AT VI 1 18; CSM II 12.

⁷Descartes. *Fifth Meditation*: AT VI 1 69-70; CSM II 48. 8

⁸Descartes. *Discourse on the Method*: AT V 1 19; CSM 1 120.

mathematical or logical arena can satisfy the stringent demand of deduction being the only valid way to build systematic knowledge. So what does the weaker, moderate foundational position have to offer?

Audi presents a version of moderate foundationalism referred to as fallibilist foundationalism. This position can be stated as:

‘For any S and any time, t, the structure of S’s body of justified beliefs is at t, foundational. The justification of S’s foundational beliefs is at least typically defeasible, the inferential transmission of justification need not be deductive, and non-foundationally justified beliefs need not derive all of their justification from foundational beliefs, they only need enough justification that they would remain justified (if other things being equal), if any other justification they have (maybe from coherence) were eliminated⁹.’

Audi’s brand of foundationalism is fallibilist for several reasons: Foundational beliefs could turn out to be unjustified, false, or both. The superstructure beliefs may be only inductively and thereby fallibly justified by the foundational beliefs. A consequence of this could be that the superstructure beliefs could be false, while the foundational beliefs are true. Audi’s moderate foundationalism leaves the possibility of error or lack of justification, even with the foundational beliefs, open. He argues that foundationalism does not entail that a person’s grounds for knowledge must be indefeasible. Perceptual grounds may be changed, and we can cease to know a proposition, not because it is false, but because we cease to be justified in believing it.

As Audi sees it, his theory provides a solution to the epistemic regress problem. It does not make knowledge impossible to have as the skeptic would hold, nor too easy to achieve. The theory also seems to support common sense in that the kinds of beliefs that it takes to be non-inferentially justified are those which on reflection, we think people are justified in holding, by the evidence of the senses or intuition. An example is the fact that we do not normally ask people for reasons why they think it is raining when they can see clearly from an unobstructed window and they say they can see the rain.

Audi also argues that moderate foundationalism leads to cognitive pluralism. Different people have different experiences and anyone’s experiences can change over time, so it is not surprising that people differ from one another in their non-inferentially held beliefs. With inductive inference being part of the moderate foundationalist system we may be able to explain strange events with reference to the best explanation.

The difficulty with moderate foundationalism is that it may make knowledge too easy to obtain. If the foundations do not

have to be certain, how else are they justified? Also, if the move from the foundational beliefs to the non-foundational beliefs is through other mechanisms than deduction, then the possibility of error becomes a significant threat.

Alston went further to present what is known and called simple foundationalism. He defines simple foundationalism as, ‘for any epistemic subject, S, there are p’s such that S is immediately justified in believing that p’.¹⁰

Iterative Foundationalism is defined as:

‘For any epistemic subject, S, there are p’s such that S is immediately justified in believing that p and S is immediately justified in believing that he is immediately justified in believing that p’.¹¹

Essentially what Alston is proposing is that simple foundationalism just claims that there are immediately justified foundations, whereas Iterative foundationalism claims not only that there are such foundations, but also that these foundations themselves can be known immediately, without appeal to further propositions.

Simple foundationalism does not set out to prove the higher level claim that foundational beliefs are themselves immediately justified. The simple foundationalist account only goes as far as to say that it may be possible to find adequate reasons for the higher level belief that someone is immediately justified in believing a foundational belief.

Alston leaves open the possibility that a foundational belief may be immediately justified because of some epistemic principle that sets out the conditions for that justification. These conditions do not include the believer having to have other justified beliefs. But for this strategy to work the epistemic principle has to be valid and the foundational belief has to somehow fall under the principle one of the main reasons for adopting foundationalism is the apparent impossibility of a belief being mediately justified without resting ultimately on immediately justified foundations. There is an intuitive appeal in the idea that there can be a definite starting point to knowledge. This is what foundationalism, if true, offers. On the other hand critics of foundationalism may argue that a dogmatism charge can be levelled against foundationalism as it involves a commitment to adopting beliefs without any reasons for regarding them as acceptable. The adoption of foundational beliefs may seem to be arbitrary. To avoid the perceived dogmatism of foundationalism, coherence and contextualist theories have been adopted: theories in which no belief is considered to be acceptable unless it is backed by other, reinforcing reasons. But whatever epistemic theory one subscribes to, it is normally a response to the challenge of skepticism.

⁹Robert Audi, ‘Contemporary Foundationalism’, in *Knowledge: Classical & Contemporary Readings*, 2nd edition, ed. by Louis Pojman, New York: Wadsworth, 1999, p.208.

¹⁰ William P. Alston, ‘Two Types of Foundationalism’, *The Journal of Philosophy*, 73 (1976), p.171.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p.171.

Timothy McGrew neatly summarized the task that epistemology has traditionally set itself to examine: the starting point is to take commonsense beliefs, attempt to answer the skeptic regarding the possibility of knowledge and in answering the skeptic to work with a particular concept of justification.

In relation to justification, whether one subscribes to classic or moderate foundationalism, simple or iterative, an adequate theory of knowledge needs to recognize the following:

1. Justification is internal to do with one's cognition.
2. Justification is truth-directed: If S is justified in believing that p, he has some reason to think that p is true, rather than convenient or useful for example.
3. Justifying reasons are not arbitrary: A justifier cannot simply be inserted.

In order to face up to the skeptical challenge, an epistemic justification theory will need to deal with the issue of certainty.

As we have seen, the main distinction that is drawn between classical and moderate foundationalism centres on whether basic beliefs are certain. But at a more fundamental level, the connection between certainty and knowledge itself is a debated issue.

Wittgenstein held that 'knowledge' and 'certainty' do not belong to the same category because knowing requires justification, but a proposition is certain only if it does not require justification¹². This view does not necessarily preclude strong foundationalism as it claims that basic propositions are certain and not themselves justified in the same manner as non-basic propositions. The crucial detail here of course is the admittedly problematic nature of how justification works. Unger's view is that 'a person knows something to be so only if he is certain of it'¹³. Unger's focus is on the meaning we attach to words like certain. A distinction is drawn between absolute and relative terms. An absolute term would be a word such as "flat".

To say that something is flat is to say that it is absolutely or perfectly flat. A flat surface is not bumpy or curved. The terms "bumpy" or "curved" are relative terms, there can be grades: a table's surface could be described as "very bumpy" for example. Something is flat only if it is absolutely flat. But as Unger points out, the term 'absolutely' never gives us a standard for any of our relative terms: nothing which is bumpy is absolutely bumpy.

Unger argues that "certain" is an absolute term, while "confident", "doubtful", and "uncertain" are relative terms. Certainty has two important contexts: the 'impersonal' context, as expressed in the sentence: "It is certain that it is

raining", the term "it" here has no apparent reference. The other context for "certain" is the 'personal' context: "he is certain that it is raining".

For Unger, "certain" must mean the same thing in both contexts. This meaning is the complete absence of doubt. "It is certain that P" means "it is not at all doubtful that P". When applied to personal certainty: "he is certain that P", means "in his mind, it is not at all doubtful that P".

Another distinction is drawn between being "confident" and being "certain". If we take the sentence: "He is more certain that p than he is that q", we might take from this that he is either certain that p while not being certain of q, or else he is more nearly certain that p than he is that q. But if we amend the example to be: "He is more confident that p than he is that q", we cannot take from this he is either confident that p while not confident that q, or else he is more nearly confident that p than he is that q. The reason that we cannot take these options is because he may well already be confident of both things. As I mentioned earlier, Unger's goal is merely to show that skepticism is a reasonable position to adopt, not to definitively prove the skeptical thesis. The conclusion drawn is that we should at least suspend judgment, if not accept the skeptical position: 'That in the case of every human being, there is hardly anything, if anything at all, which the person knows to be so'¹⁴

When Unger refers to two contexts of certainty: impersonal and personal, he is identifying two distinct types of certainty: propositional certainty and psychological certainty. I will now focus on these types of certainty.

Rene Descartes Foundationalist Philosophy

René Descartes was born to a farmer in the traditional French province of Touraine on March 31, 1596. Descartes' mother had died when he was only one year old. Soon after, his father Joachim remarried and left Descartes to be raised by his grandmother, and eventually by his great-uncle. Caught in a familial turmoil, Descartes began to undertake formal education at a Jesuit college in La Flèche, France. After spending intermittent periods of time attending various universities and travelling Europe, he eventually found himself in the Netherlands at a college in Franeker (Watson). In 1628 Descartes began his philosophical career, at age 30, while simultaneously delving into research of both mathematics and the natural sciences.

Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*, published in 1641, is made up of six separate Meditations in which Descartes begins by discarding all previously assumed knowledge or certainties. From this point forward, Descartes constructs new standards of fundamental knowledge and applies processes to verify information in an objective sense. In his first Meditation Descartes shares the following with readers of his work:

¹² Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *On Certainty*, Basil Blackwell Oxford, 1969, paragraph 308, p.39e.

¹³ Peter Unger, 'A Defense of Skepticism', in *Essays on Knowledge and Justification*, ed. by George S. Pappas and Marshall Swain, Cornell University Press, 1978, p.318.

¹⁴ Unger, op.cit. p.336.

It is some years now since I realized how many false opinions I had accepted as true from childhood onwards, and that, whatever I had since built on such shaky foundations, could only be highly doubtful. Hence I saw that at some stage in my life the whole structure would have to be utterly demolished, and that I should have to begin again from the bottom up if I wished to construct something lasting and unshakeable in the sciences. But this seemed to be a massive task, and so I postponed it until I had reached the age when one is as fit as one will ever be to master the various disciplines. Hence I have delayed so long that now I should be at fault if I used up in deliberating the time that is left for acting. The moment has come, and so today I have discharged my mind from all its cares, and have carved out a space of untroubled leisure. I have withdrawn into seclusion and shall at last be able to devote myself seriously and without encumbrance to the task of destroying all my former opinions¹⁵. (p. 17)

Descartes had used doubt as a tool, he forced it from his mind whilst deriving incontrovertible knowledge, based upon the Cartesian doubt method of deductive reasoning. This allowed Descartes the ability to begin formulating a basis of which only intrinsic, foundational knowledge would stand.

3.3 The Methodic Doubt

Descartes is a rationalist philosopher for him reason is the source of knowledge. As a rationalist philosopher, he sought clarity and certainty in knowledge. He saw that there is no clarity and certainty in philosophy though it has been studied philosophy best of mind for long time. For that reason he was worried about certainty in philosophy. To bring out the certainty in philosophy, he thought I need to start philosophy from beginning. Therefore, he introduces a method that is called 'method of doubt'. The method of doubt is a tool to find out certainty in philosophy. Descartes in his first meditation says, whatever I have been accepting as true from my childhood that can be highly doubtful in nature. Therefore, he pointed out that "from time to time I have found that the senses deceive, it is prudent never to trust completely those who have deceive us even once".

Descartes here found that our day-today experience is not certain about our knowledge. So he doubted our all sense experience, because it is not providing clear picture of knowledge about the world to us. He introduced methodological inquiry to get certainty philosophy in genera and epistemology in particular. His most important arguments are dream argument; evil demon argument and cogito ergo sum argument. These three arguments are the basis for the achieve certainty in philosophy. According to his dream argument he shows that it is very difficult to separate between awaking state and dreaming state. That means he found that if I say I am holding a paper in my hand I cannot mislead it. But at the same time we need to think that we can dream there is a paper in our hand. So our sensation do not give us adequate

knowledge. When he tries to doubt the mathematical propositions like $2+2=4$ he felt that it is very difficult to doubt mathematical propositions. So he fails to doubt mathematical propositions. He thought that God who made me think like that therefore, I am unable to doubt the mathematical propositions. Later he realized that God who is supremely good would not allow me to deceive. Descartes points out that "God would not allow me to be deceived in this way, since he is said to be supremely good."

According to his argument, Descartes realized that it is possible evil demon can deceive me any time. So it is the evil demon that deceived me. He says "that not God, who supremely good and source of truth, but rather some malicious demon of the utmost power and cunning has employed all his energies in order to deceive me." Descartes introduced cogito argument, according to him, 'my thinking' is presupposes everything that is "I think therefore, I exist or I think, therefore, I am." Here Descartes identifies my thinking is a conscious being. I cannot be doubted even if we apply dream argument and evil demon argument. There must be doubter to doubt something. That doubter must exist. That is the foundational philosophy for Descartes, which is indubitable.

The concept of foundationalism in Descartes

Descartes foundationalism theory says that, there are some basic beliefs that beliefs justified the other non-basic beliefs. In other words there are foundational beliefs, which supported to non-foundational beliefs. That non-foundational belief depends on the foundational beliefs and foundational beliefs do not depend on any other any beliefs for their justifications.

The Cartesian foundationalism is a very popular theory of foundationalism. This view holds that there is need for the deconstruction of epistemic superstructures, that is, every epistemic claim should be broken down until one gets to a solid base upon which one can build other forms of epistemic beliefs. What one can call Descartes basic belief is his claim of 'cogito ergo sum', 'I think therefore I am' while other beliefs which are derived inferentially from it are the non-basic beliefs. Descartes conceives beliefs as a superstructure with the basic beliefs serving as the foundation, while non-basic beliefs represent the structure itself. Descartes holds that those propositions which are directly evident for a person S have to do in some was with S's mental states his thoughts, beliefs, feelings, perpetual experiences and others. The Cartesian foundationalists hold that basic propulsions report private psychological state.

Descartes foundational consists of basic beliefs that somehow provide the support to everything else, which we may be claimed to know. Our knowledge is built upon the Descartes foundational theory of knowledge. Descartes foundationalist theory of knowledge especially discussed in his meditation of first philosophy, have been regarded as foundational in nature.

Descartes foundationalism is about foundational knowledge claims. Descartes in his method of doubt discussed that there was no clear and certain foundation of knowledge. Though the

¹⁵ Descartes

best of mind has been studied philosophy for long time. To build an indubitable foundation he searched for the strong method which he build the foundation of knowledge.

Descartes cogito argument, shows that there is a certain and clear foundation in epistemology. That foundation cannot be doubted. His argument is like this to doubt something there must be a doubter, without doubter nothings can be doubted. To think some things there must be a thinker without thinker thinking could not be possible. That thinker must exist. Therefore, he said "I think, therefore I am or I think therefore, I exist". That is the foundational claim in Descartes epistemology. Descartes cogito is something that whose truth is clearly and distinctly perceived.

Once we are clear and certain about our cogito we can have truth about the other proposition clearly and distinctly. From this observation we derive clarity and a distinctness rule that is what is perceived clearly and distinctly must be true.

In relation to inferential knowledge or sensory experience our beliefs justified through foundational elements which is certain and indubitable. By the application of clarity and distinctness epistemic principle we will able to justify basic beliefs and transfer the justification basic to non-basic beliefs. The man concern clarity and distinctness principle is self-evident internal. It is not external which needs further justification. It is due to the basic nature of clarity and distinctness rule and its secure source of Cogito, which provides a doable solution to the infinite regress problem.

Chapter four: Anti-Foundationalist Critique of Rene Descartes

The major problem of foundationalism is the claim that some beliefs are self-evident and infallible. What the foundationalist is trying to say here is that those beliefs that are infallible and self-evident are possible to exist without being justified. One problematic aspect of foundationalism is the failure of foundationalism as a theory of justification to defend some of its basic positions. The issues of self-justification, infallibility and incorrigibility as qualities of basic beliefs cannot be defended. Some critics of foundationalism are of the opinion that basic beliefs cannot attain these superlative qualities because we cannot be talking about infallible, incorrigible and self-evident beliefs with fallible beings in-control of those belief bearing in mind the effects of sense perception, environment, culture and the psychology of individuals at certain times in interpretation and perception of the things that are presented to them. This guides against the objectivity of the theory of knowledge which holds that knowledge is subject to interrogation.

Another problem of foundationalism is the problem of infinite regression. The belief that these set of propositions can only be justified by these basic beliefs is static. The question here therefore is what actually constitutes these basic beliefs? The foundationalist also conceives beliefs as hierarchically arranged. One would then ask, from where did the foundationalism conceive these basic beliefs and the criteria for the assertion? Is the issue of selfjustification, infallibility, and incorrigibility of the beliefs enough criteria for the

justification of truth? It has been proved that these qualities ascribed to the basic belief cannot be defended. How does the foundationalist account for the basic beliefs serving as a justification for our beliefs? There have been numerous arguments about the foundationalism, non-inferential nature of belief. Because if what justifies a belief is non-inferential and as such inaccessible, how can we then justify such non-inferential basic belief, does this mean that every basic belief is true and justified regardless of its source?

Heidegger shows that it is possible to build the philosophical edifice on a foundation other than the Cartesian subject. This is a stronger foundation, for it contains no presuppositions at all about man and reality other than the possibility of ontology itself: the possibility of raising the question of Being. Here 'subject' not only denotes the human being, but is considered in the broad sense of subjectum and hypokeimenon. Thus subjectivism not only leaves the nature of man unquestioned, but blocks all further ontological inquiry and brings philosophy to a dead end. Heidegger's efforts to free philosophy from its subjectivism can be seen by carefully following his phenomenological analysis in Being and Time and the less systematic writings of his later period. This reveals that he avoids positing any being whatsoever as a fixed, Archimedean point for ontology, any point that is both the basis of itself and the basis of everything else. Let us take a brief look at his paradigmatic writings. As is well known, in his seminal Being and Time Heidegger raises the question of the meaning of Being and claims that the possibility of raising this question presupposes the existence of an entity that raises it. Heidegger names that entity "Dasein". The term "Dasein" refers to the human structure to which the inquiry on Being is essential. Dasein is the place of ontological clarification, the place where Being is revealed.

David Hume empiricism challenged the idea of certain foundationalism in Descartes questioning the reliability of both sensory experiences and a priori reasoning. David Hume, a renowned philosopher critiqued foundationalism through his problem of induction. In his work "An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding," he argues that the justification for our beliefs must rely on evidence from past observations. However, inductive reasoning, which forms the basis of foundationalist thinking, cannot provide certainty or guarantee that future observations will continue to. Immanuel Kant, in response to Hume's skepticism, introduced the notion of synthetic a priori knowledge, suggesting that some truths are both necessary and known independently of experience. Kant's transcendental idealism offered a unique perspective on foundationalism, blending elements of empiricism and rationalism, asserting that our knowledge is shaped by both sensory experiences and innate concepts.

Agidigbi asked, can a belief be self-evident, that is indubitable, that is impossible to exist on its own without any form of justification? How can man who is a fallible be able to think about indubitable knowledge?¹⁶

¹⁶ Agidigbi Blessing, *Basic Issues and Problems in Epistemology* (Benin: Lucosem Publishing House, 2002):46

Foundationalism was further criticized using what is called 'infinite regresses. According to this critique, if foundational beliefs are used to justify other beliefs, then those beliefs would require further justification, leading to an infinite chain of justifications. This creates an epistemic problem, as it becomes impossible to establish a secure foundation for knowledge.

Another critique of foundationalism is the problem of coherentism. Coherentism argues that knowledge is not based on foundational beliefs, but rather on the coherence and consistency of a set of beliefs. According to this view, knowledge is a network of interconnected beliefs, and justification is achieved through the mutual support and coherence of these beliefs. Coherentism challenges the idea that foundational beliefs are necessary for knowledge, as it suggests that justification can be achieved without relying on a foundational starting point.

Furthermore, critics argue that foundational beliefs themselves are not immune to doubt or skepticism. Foundationalists often claim that certain beliefs, such as self-evident truths or basic perceptual beliefs are indubitable and serve as the foundation of all knowledge. However, skeptics argue that these beliefs can still be subject to doubt and questioning, undermining their status as secure foundations.

Lawrence Bonjour raised an objection to the claims of the foundationalist that our beliefs are non-inferential. He objects that, a feature of a belief or epistemic situation that makes a belief non-inferentially justified must be a feature to which we have actual or potential access. What this implies is that non-inferential beliefs are not accessible; therefore how can they be the foundations of our basic beliefs? Another problem of foundationalism is the problem of our minds. The knowledge we have of ourselves are secured while those held by others outside of ourselves we cannot really account for, how then do we lay claims on such knowledge as being justified when they are not accessible by others?

The argument from error can be used to show that we know of cases where others have successfully concealed their state of mind or pretend to be in a state of mind other than their own¹⁷. How is one's empirical beliefs justified? Reflection on these questions has led some theorist to what has come to be called the 'Regress Problem'. Thus it has been held that because the justification of any belief requires appeal to additional beliefs and the justification of these beliefs appeal to still to further beliefs and so on.

According to Lawrence Bonjour in Jonathan Dancy's Problems of Epistemic Justification, he holds that attempts at justification can never be carried through others, less pessimistic; have pictured justificatory claims as looping back on themselves. Here belief is thought to be justified not by being fastened to some secured mooring, but by its contribution to a self-contained edifice comprised of other related beliefs. What is less obvious, however, it is the extent

to which they provide a satisfactory portrayal of the structure of epistemic justification. One is sometimes encouraged to accept the picture on the grounds that it is the only one seriously in the running. An endless chain of justification seems both unworkable and unhelpful: a belief moored on an infinite tether is not moored at all. On the other hand, the prospects of locating foundational beliefs capable of generating warrant without themselves requiring the support of other beliefs seem dim indeed.

Recently, Lawrence Bonjour has argued that these prospects are not simply dim, but that they are altogether unimaginable¹⁸. The possibility of epistemic justification depends on ones capacity to connect beliefs to other justified beliefs. When such linkage is absent, so is justification. The notion that some beliefs might be epistemically basic or foundational is according to Bonjour, 'extremely Paradoxical', according to Bonjour, Foundationalist do not deny that inferential justification occurs, only that all justification is inferential. There are, it is thought, certain basic beliefs which are justified immediately. A belief B may be regarded as a basic just in case it is justified solely in virtue of its possession of a certain property Q, whose property does not include essentially any further justified belief. But now it begins to look extremely doubtful that there could be basic beliefs.

Foundationalism as a theory of knowledge justification is static. The foundationalists believe that what constitutes as a basis of knowledge cannot change. With these one can infer that the theory of foundationalism can run into absolutism. Lehrer attacks the foundationalist's theory both on the basic and non-basic level. As for the former, he considers whether the beliefs we need for our foundations are self-justified after arguing that independent information is required for justification.

The Fallibilistic attack on foundationalism is the denial of the possibility of direct, non-inferential knowledge. Because such knowledge is supposed to be the result of pure observation and observation is pure if it involves no interpretation. This is because in the absence of interpretation the possibility of error is removed. Therefore, if there is a direct knowledge then foundationalism will stand with their incorrigible basic knowledge. But there is no direct knowledge because there is no pure observation. It then means that what fallibilism in foundationalism implies is that basic knowledge is subjective. But we all know that true knowledge according to Gettier's Justified True Belief (JTB) in both subjective and objective and that JTB is objective. Subjective Knowledge is the psychological state of a person and it is fallible. Objective knowledge is the benefit gained from human inquires. And it would exist even if all people died because it is independent of man.

¹⁷ Jonathan D. *An Introduction to Cotemporary Epistemology*. Oxford, Basic Blackwell, Inc. 1985, p 55-61

¹⁸ Lawrence B. *opcit*

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