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Traditional Internalism and Foundational Justification

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Abstract: Several arguments attempt to show that if traditional, acquaintance-based epistemic internalism is true, we cannot have foundational justification for believing falsehoods. I examine some of those arguments and find them wanting. Nevertheless, an infallibilist position about foundational justification is highly plausible: *prima facie*, much more plausible than moderate foundationalism. I conclude with some remarks about the dialectical position we infallibilists find ourselves in with respect to arguing for our preferred view and some considerations regarding how infallibilists should develop their account of infallible foundational justification. In particular, I provide an account of how propositions that moderate foundationalists claim are foundationally justified derive their epistemic support from infallibly known propositions. This is possible when a foundational proposition is coarsely-grained enough to correspond to determinable properties exemplified in experience or determinate properties that a subject insufficiently attends to; one may have inferential justification derived from such a basis when a more finely-grained proposition includes in its content one of the ways that the foundational proposition could be true.

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1 Epistemic Internalism and Foundational Justification

An influential version of epistemic internalism holds that factors in experience that one is *aware* of, and only those, contribute to one's epistemic (propositional) justification for believing a proposition.¹ Several influential epistemologists have held such a view. To take just three examples, Roderick Chisholm grounds empirical justification in states that are "self-presenting", meaning states the occurrence of which is 'evident' to the subject to whom it occurs (1977, p. 20-23). Richard Feldman argues (2004, p. 219) that justification depends upon evidence and that

¹ Epistemologists overwhelmingly accept additional requirements on having a justified belief, so-called doxastic justification. For instance, if in addition to having adequate propositional justification for p and believing p one's belief that p must be based on one's justification, and if basing is a causal relation, then it is implausible that all factors that constitute one's *doxastic* justification are factors with which one can be acquainted. Perhaps the best solution is simply to abandon a basing condition the satisfaction of which could not be an object of one's acquaintance.

one's evidence is what one is "thinking of or aware of" at a time. And Laurence Bonjour (2003) argues that our empirical beliefs about the mind-independent world are based on mental states that subjects are necessarily aware of and which contain descriptive content about sensory experience (p. 62).² These philosophers all maintain that only features within a subject's awareness that contribute to what is justified for a subject.

Let us call *traditional internalist* any view that holds that awareness or direct acquaintance is the only source of *foundational* justification.³ The label thus combines the version of internalism just described with foundationalism about the structure of justification. According to one exemplar of a traditional internalist theory, that defended by Richard Fumerton (1995 and elsewhere), one has paradigmatic foundational justification when one is acquainted with the thought that p, the fact that makes p true, and the truth-making relation holding between p and the fact that makes p true.⁴ Now for the main issue of the paper: it seems that when a subject is related by direct acquaintance to the factors that constitute foundational justification, the subject thereby has an infallible guarantee that p is true. By hypothesis, when one has foundational justification for believing that p one is acquainted with both the thought that p and the fact p, so there seems to be no room for error about the truth of p. Traditional internalists disagree about whether or not a proposition must be infallibly justified in order for it to be foundational. Perhaps surprisingly, the majority view among traditional foundationalists is the 'moderate' foundationalist view that foundational justification is often *fallible* (Audi 1993, Chisholm 1977, Fales 1996, Fumerton 1995, 2006b, 2010, Moser 1991).⁵ It is mostly *critics* of traditional foundationalism who insist that traditional foundationalism implies infallible

² So, one can be an internalist in the awareness sense and an evidentialist if one identifies a subject's evidence with what a subject is (or has been, or could become) aware of, as Feldman seems to do in places. And one could hold the view that seemings that a subject is aware of are the only things that contribute to a subject's justification, and one would then have a critical role for seemings in one's epistemology while making the epistemic relevance of seemings a result of subjects' acquaintance with them. To my knowledge, no one holds the latter view.

³ "Traditional" internalists locate the inspiration for their view in early modern figures, including Descartes. Cf. Coppenger (2016).

⁴ This is the way Fumerton puts it in his works cited in this paper, but the same basic view appears in the work of other traditional internalists discussed throughout.

⁵ It is important to distinguish two different ways that foundational justification could be fallible. It could be that one only has foundational justification for true thoughts, but that one's justification does not need to entail that the thought is true. Or, it could be that one may have foundational justification for false thoughts. Cf. Tucker (2016).

foundations, which they may go on to claim are too sparse to support the many justified beliefs that we allegedly have.⁶

An example of a belief that satisfies the demanding standards of traditional foundationalism is the belief that one is in pain. When I am in obvious pain and I am directly acquainted with my pain, with my thought that I am in pain, and the correspondence⁷ between that fact and that thought, I am in an ideal position to believe that I am in pain. My belief that I am in pain is clearly not based on some further belief about the relationship between *this* type of sensory experience and being in pain. Once I am directly acquainted with these factors, there are no further conditions that must be satisfied for me to be in the best possible epistemic position for believing that I am in pain. That I am in pain is *guaranteed* to be true for me.

Given the paradigm, it is unclear how a foundational belief could be justified but not guaranteed to be true for the subject. When the subject is directly acquainted with the pain, the thought, and the correspondence between them, there is no possibility that the thought is false, and the subject can see this by appreciating the correspondence between the pain and the thought. There is no obvious place for uncertainty to creep in. Yet, many traditional internalists insist that foundational justification can be fallible, even while accepting the view as presented here. In this paper, I examine the controversy over how strong foundational justification must be and criticize arguments against fallible foundations from C.I. Lewis, Timothy McGrew, Nathan Ballantyne, Ted Poston, and Chris Tucker. In attempting to *refute* the possibility of fallible foundations within a traditional internalist theory of justification, these arguments hinge on implausible, unsupported, or question-begging assumptions. Of particular difficulty for infallibilists arguing against moderate foundationalism is that we hope to convincingly and persuasively *show* that our opponents are wrong, which requires that we not give arguments whose premises presuppose infallibilism. In the end I think that it is not possible to show that moderate foundationalism is defective. Instead, infallibilists should argue for their view by

⁶ For critics who insist on infallible foundations, see the arguments discussed below. For an argument that infallible foundations are too meager to support our many justified beliefs, see Sosa (2003).

⁷ Little hangs on whether correspondence in particular is the truth-making relation the internalist identifies as the relation one must be acquainted with to have foundational justification. Fumerton states in some places that acquaintance with *correspondence* is necessary, and in other places that acquaintance with the *truth-making* relation is necessary (1995 and 2006, respectively). The main point that should be agreeable to all traditional internalists, however, is that foundational justification depends in part on awareness of the fact that a proposition one entertains fits with or matches some further fact with which one is acquainted.

pointing to its intuitive support and showing how an infallibilist view of foundational justification can make sense of examples offered in support of moderate foundationalism. I do both of these things near the end of the paper, where I provide an account of infallible foundational justification that recognizes as foundational propositions that correspond to even indeterminate features of experience, but from which various possible specific properties of experience may be inferred.

2 Infallibilist and Moderate Foundationalism

This paper concerns distinctly traditional internalist versions of what I call infallibilist foundationalism and moderate foundationalism. *Infallibilist foundationalism* is the view that, necessarily, when a subject possesses foundational justification for believing that *p*, the subject's justification is infallible. That does not imply that *p* is a necessary truth nor that the subject cannot doubt whether *p*. It just means that when a subject *has* foundational justification for believing that *p*, the truth of *p* is guaranteed for that subject.

There are two trivial ways that it is 'guaranteed' that I am in pain when I am in the three acquaintance relations that acquaintance theorists claim are necessary and sufficient for foundational justification. First, when I am acquainted with my pain, it is 'guaranteed' that I am in pain. The obtaining of the acquaintance relation requires the existence of its relata, so if I am acquainted with a pain, then I am in pain. Second, when I am acquainted with the correspondence between my pain and my thought that I am in pain, my thought that I am in pain is 'guaranteed' to be true. That is because when I am acquainted with this correspondence, this correspondence obtains, so because my pain corresponds to my thought that I am in pain, my thought is true. Neither of these two trivial senses captures the relevant sense in which bearing the three acquaintance relations gives the subject a 'guarantee' that he or she is in pain. Any time a thought corresponds to a relevant fact in the world, the thought is true—but that clearly does nothing by way of assuring the *subject* who entertains the thought that it is true. So, the relevant sense in which a subject who bears the three acquaintance relations thereby has a guarantee is that the truth of the subject's thought is assured from the subject's perspective because the subject is directly acquainted with everything that constitutes the truth of the thought. That is what it means for the truth of a thought to be guaranteed "for the subject" and (equivalently) for the subject to "have a guarantee" that the thought is true. Infallibilist foundationalism thus says

that when a subject has foundational justification for believing that p, p is guaranteed to be true for the subject.

By contrast, *moderate foundationalism* says a subject can possess foundational justification for believing that p while p is not guaranteed to be true. According to moderate foundationalism, p could be foundationally justified even while p is false. Or, p could be true and p could have some high degree of justification that falls short of infallible knowledge. The moderate foundationalist position is consistent with the further claim that *some* foundationally justified propositions are infallibly justified. The infallibilist, however, denies that foundationally justified propositions could *ever* be less than knowledge.

The representative infallibilist foundationalist is Descartes, who in Meditation I:2 wrote,

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 that are patently false. So, for the purpose of rejecting all my opinions, it will be enough if I find in each of them at least some reason for doubt. (CSM II: 17)

Descartes immediately moves to propose that it is possible to doubt the reliability of many of the faculties through which he has acquired his beliefs. That suggests that even the *possibility* of falsehood is sufficient to undermine the foundational status of a putatively foundationally justified proposition. Moderate foundationalists think foundationally justified beliefs need not always meet this demanding standard. The most compelling arguments for moderate foundationalism start with examples of foundational beliefs that are probably true, are (allegedly) not based on some other belief, and yet are clearly not guaranteed to be true for the subject. Here are two such examples:

One morning, I caught a momentary glimpse of [a cat] through the corner of a window, as it dashed toward the house. At that time, two cats had staked claim to the territory, a black one and a grey one. The color of this particular cat, indeed, impressed me as being definitely either black or grey...[W]hile it was clear to me that I had seen a momentary flash of either black *or* grey, I was also unable to judge which of these specific colors it was. Nevertheless, it was clear to me that the color of which I was aware was a fairly specific shade and not a generic one; and moreover, that it was either a medium grey or black, not a compromise dark grey. (Fales 1996, p. 141)

I am in pain and the pain subsides until it no longer exists...Now assume that there really is some precise point along the continuum of mental states where the state is no longer pain. By hypothesis, that state is right next to a state that is pain, and I can't tell the difference between the two. My thought is that I might surely have *some* level of justification for believing that I am in pain even when I'm not, but where I am instead in a state that is only very similar to pain. At the very least, it seems plausible to claim that when in such a state I have *more* reason to believe that I am in pain, for example, than that I am in a state of ecstatic pleasure. (Fumerton 2010, pp. 380-1)

It is easy to come up with more examples once the phenomenon is clear. The phenomenon is that there are some experiences whose properties are determinate while a belief about the content of the experience may not perfectly describe the property in question; and if the belief does adequately fit the experience, the subject may be in a less-than-ideal situation to notice that fact. In Fumerton's example, there is something determinately pain-like in experience, even if it is not a pain, and so the belief that the experience is a pain is false while it is in a clear sense very nearly true. In Fales' example, there is something determinately black or determinately grey in experience, so the belief that the cat was (e.g.) grey is justified to some degree, even if the cat was in fact black.

We could easily modify these examples so that the beliefs are definitely true while the subject is poorly situated to recognize it. Suppose Fales believes the cat was grey and the cat he saw was grey. Still, the experience was so brief that he was unable to get clearly in focus the fit between the color-property in experience and the relevant belief. Suppose Fumerton believes the experience is a pain and it is, but the pain is on the pain-itch border. The belief would be true, but it may be difficult or impossible to be acquainted with the correspondence between the pain and the belief in this scenario.

There is some intuitive pull to grant that these examples are genuine cases of foundationally justified beliefs that fall short of infallible *knowledge*. However, there are arguments that attempt to show that there can be no such thing as fallible foundational justification, at least not on a traditional internalist view of justification.

3 Failed Arguments against Moderate Foundationalism

There are four prominent arguments against moderate foundationalism that fail to undermine it. First, the argument from C.I. Lewis (1952) later adapted by Timothy McGrew (1995, 2003) that

foundations must be probable to degree 1.0. Second, the argument from Nathan Ballantyne (2012) that moderate foundationalism is inconsistent with the motivation behind traditional internalism that justification provides assurance of truth. Third, the argument from Ted Poston (2010) that one's background beliefs may undermine one's fallible foundational justification. Fourth, the argument from Chris Tucker (2016) that to be justified in believing that p through acquaintance with some non-p fact requires additional justification. I will address them in this order.

3.1 The Lewis-McGrew Argument

C.I. Lewis (1952, p. 172-3) and later Timothy McGrew (1995, 2003) argue that facts about what it takes for a proposition to have a probability imply that foundational justification is infallible.

Lewis writes,

[A] statement justified as probable must have a ground; if the ground is only probable, then there must be a ground of it; and so on... The supposition that the probability of anything whatever always depends on something else which is only probable itself, is flatly incompatible with the justifiable assignment of any probability at all (1952).

And here is McGrew:

[P]robability arises from a relation between the probable proposition and a body of evidence. This simple fact about probability creates a fatal dilemma for moderate foundationalism. If there are basic beliefs that are merely probable, then they are not basic at all; they are inferred, probable in relation to some other beliefs that support them. The focus of our inquiry shifts back to the supporting beliefs, and the dilemma gets started there once again: either they are basic or they are not. If they are not, we have to go back still further. If they are basic, then they cannot be merely probable (2003).

These arguments have in common the claim that for a proposition to be “merely probable”—that is, probable to some degree short of 1.0—requires that some other proposition is certain, and it is in virtue of the merely probable proposition's relation to the certain proposition that the merely probable proposition has any probability whatsoever. McGrew asks us to imagine a merely probable proposition, p. Given his principle about the nature of probability (stated in the first sentence of his quote), p's probability must derive from its relation to a body of evidence.

McGrew then claims that if p is probable to some degree only because some other proposition q is probable to some degree, then p is not foundational because p's justification depends on q's

justification. Clearly, if q is itself “merely probable” then McGrew’s principle requires another application, this time to q . The argument is a regress argument: if any proposition has any probability at all, then either that proposition has probability 1.0, or the proposition is probable relative to some other proposition that is ultimately related to a proposition that has probability 1.0 at the foundational level. And if no certain foundation can be found, then no proposition has a probability.

There are two problems with the argument. The first is that it contains a premise that entails that moderate foundationalism is false. Clearly, no moderate foundationalist will accept the principle that any proposition that has a non-zero, non-one probability depends for its justification upon some other proposition. Because of that premise, the Lewis-McGrew argument is question-begging. Not all question-begging arguments are bad. But in this case, the question-begging premise is also *unsupported*: neither Lewis nor McGrew *argue* for the requirement that propositions with a probability between 0 and 1 necessarily have derived probability. Moderate foundationalists including Fales and Fumerton, however, *do* give arguments (above) that some propositions are non-derivatively probable to a degree below 1.0. Plainly, no argument that relies on a premise that is not only question-begging but also unsupported is sufficient to undermine moderate foundationalism.

Second, there is no principled reason why the demand for further justifying propositions applies only to “merely probable” propositions and not certain ones. That is, no reason is given as to why the principle that a proposition’s probability derives from its relation to other propositions that have a probability does not also apply to propositions that are 1.0 probable. If p is 0.7 probable, Lewis and McGrew say p needs support from q . But suppose p has probability 1.0. Why should p not still need support from q ?⁸ For all the Lewis-McGrew argument says, there is nothing special about the proposition being probable to 1.0 rather than to some other degree. Unless there is something special about a proposition having the highest possible degree of probability, then even if p is 1.0 probable, p ’s probability derives from its relation to another proposition with some degree of probability. So, the argument shows too much, for if the central

⁸ The demand for a non-question-begging justification for putatively known foundational propositions resembles the basic challenge that Peter Klein has used to argue for infinitism (1998).

assumption is true, what it really shows is that non-skeptical foundationalism is false because even known propositions require support from further propositions, *ad infinitum*.⁹

3.2 Ballantyne's Argument

One motivation for traditional internalism is the thought that one is justified in believing a proposition when one has *assurance* that the proposition is true. According to Fumerton (2006a), what provides assurance that p is true is being directly acquainted with p's truth-maker. A similar story could be told for other traditional internalists, as outlined above. Nathan Ballantyne (2012) identifies a tension with the traditional internalist view on this point and directs his criticism specifically toward Fumerton's view. Many traditional internalists, including Fumerton, want to allow that one can be foundationally justified in believing that p when p is false—that is, when there is *no* truth-maker for p. Trivially, if p has no truth-maker, one cannot be acquainted with p's truth-maker. Ballantyne argues upon this basis that moderate foundationalism is incompatible with an important motivation behind traditional internalism, namely that foundational justification that is constituted by relations of direct awareness provides one with *assurance* that the proposition one believes is true.

Here is Ballantyne:

I shall call a case of noninferentially justified true belief a *good case* and a case of noninferentially justified false belief a *bad case*...

Imagine that Paul is an acquaintance theorist who admits the possibility of bad cases; he is a fallibilist. Paul happens to believe that P: 'I am in pain'. Then he asks himself: *Why think that my present case is good rather than bad?*...

What would satisfy Paul's curiosity in a good case? From his perspective, it is an open possibility that he is in a bad case. Paul can't merely believe that his case is a good one; and it won't do for the case to simply be a good one. To gain satisfaction, Paul must believe his case is good and have justification to so believe...

⁹ McGrew argues that justified empirical foundational propositions include *de re* reference to qualitative features of consciousness. In this way, forming the belief expressed by "I am experiencing *this*" guarantees that the belief is true, because that exact belief could not be formed if there were no 'this' that the belief includes as its content. In this way, McGrew's account of foundational justification implies infallible foundationalism. But it is important to distinguish his account of infallible foundations and his argument against moderate foundationalism. I have just argued that the latter fails, and I left untouched his arguments for his positive view, which I find much more compelling.

[T]o attain assurance with respect to a particular belief, given his fallibilist acquaintance theory, Paul must form a slightly more complex belief and become acquainted with a slightly more complex correspondence relation than he has met before. And, distressingly for him, Paul's theory allows him to sensibly ask whether *that* correspondence relation in fact obtains; he can always be curious about that. Therefore, gaining assurance with respect to a particular belief requires Paul to form each of an infinite series of increasingly complex beliefs while becoming acquainted with each of the infinite series of increasingly complex correspondence facts. (427-428)

Ballantyne's regress argument goes as follows. Suppose I believe that p and I want to have *assurance* that p is true, but p may (for all I can tell) be false. I satisfy the conditions for fallible foundational justification. Given the outstanding possibility of error, I should ask myself, "Why think that p is true rather than false?" To eliminate the possibility that my belief is in fact false, I have to 'level-up' and get some additional justification. I now need assurance that I am not led to *falsely* believe that my satisfaction of the conditions of first-level justification resulted in a true belief. So, to get *assurance* at this second level, I need to become acquainted with some more complex, higher-level facts. But given the possibility of error that is compatible with satisfying conditions for second-level justification, meeting those conditions will not be sufficient for getting assurance either, so I must move up a level again and become acquainted with even more complex facts, and so on, *ad infinitum*. Therefore, fallible foundational justification based in direct acquaintance cannot provide assurance.

The argument is question-begging because it trades on a conception of assurance that moderate invariantists do not accept. After it is granted that Paul satisfies the conditions for fallible foundational justification and asks himself the question, "Why think that my present case is good rather than bad?" Ballantyne asserts, "From his perspective, it is an open possibility that he is in a bad case. Paul can't merely believe that his case is a good one; and it won't do for the case to simply be a good one." (p. 428, quoted above). Why will it not do for the case to simply be a good one? The moderate foundationalist thinks that it precisely *can* simply be a good one. The crucial assumption in the argument is that when one is *assured* of the truth of p, there should be *no basis whatsoever* for doubting whether p. In fairness to Ballantyne, there is intuitive pull to that idea, especially if one thinks of having assurance that p is true just is having grounds for being absolutely certain that p is true. But aside from the intuitive case for linking assurance and justified certainty, it is important to note that Fumerton's actual *use* of the notion of assurance is

more limited, and there is no dialectically neutral reason for other moderate foundationalists to accept the stronger conception of assurance.¹⁰ The more limited sense in which traditional internalists who are moderate foundationalists may claim that fallible justification provides assurance is that when one has justification for believing that *p*, one can in some sense ‘point to’ some basis in experience that makes *p* probably true.

To clarify their notion of assurance, the moderate foundationalist would remind us here of their preferred examples of fallible foundational justification. If I believe that I see a purple patch but I am actually acquainted with a deep blue that is nearly purple, my belief that I am acquainted with a purple patch is quite a bit more likely to be true than the belief that I am acquainted with neon green. I have *some* assurance that I see purple, even if it is not so strong as to rule out all possibility of error. To demand more is, again, to beg the question against moderate foundationalism by insisting that assurance of truth equates to an infallible guarantee of truth.¹¹

3.3 Poston’s Argument

Ted Poston (2010) presents a general argument that satisfying traditional internalist standards for foundational justification—whether fallible or infallible—cannot provide the kind of anti-skeptical assurance traditional internalists seek.¹²

Here is Poston’s primary motivating case:

Suppose one is acquainted with the thought that one is in pain, the fact that one is in pain, and the correspondence between the two. Moreover, assume that one cannot easily mistake the fact that one is in pain with the fact that one has an itch. And *yet* one is firmly convinced that one may easily mistake an itch for a pain. One has read, for instance, Daniel Dennett’s article ‘Quining Qualia’ and Dennett’s argument has convinced one that a neuroscientist could switch one’s memory-based dispositions to respond to pains and itches such that one may easily mistake an itch for a pain. Whether or not this is genuinely possible does not matter; as long as one is convinced that this is a possibility it undermines the transparency of the belief that one is in pain. (Poston 2010, p. 373)

¹⁰ This point also applies to the argument in (Poston 2010) discussed in the next section. Also see the next footnote.

¹¹ To be fair to Ballantyne (and, in a moment, Poston) there are places where Fumerton seems to closely connect having assurance and acquaintance with factors that *actually do* constitute the truth of what one believes. However, what Fumerton says about fallible foundational justification strongly suggests that his notion of assurance is not as demanding as his critics insist. See especially his (2006a).

¹² While Poston presents his main argument as a dilemma, the same basic argument appears on both horns, so I read that argument as his general argument.

Note that the setup of the argument, stated in the first sentence, concerns the traditional internalist's best-case scenario for foundational justification.¹³ The problem with the argument is that Poston is allowing what the traditional internalist would likely identify as an unjustified belief to defeat one's justification for believing one is in pain. No traditional internalist will allow that one's justification for believing that one is in pain when one is directly acquainted with the pain can be defeated by the stray belief that one might instead be acquainted with an itch that is not a pain, especially given that the belief is supported by factors that make the latter belief *far* less probable than the former. The overwhelming support, through direct acquaintance, favoring the belief that one is in pain surely overwhelms the much weaker support for the belief that one may be mistaking one's pain for an itch. Given their Cartesian sympathies, traditional internalists will be quick to point out that while one can entertain rational doubt that one has ever read a paper by Dennett, or even that Dennett exists, when one is acquainted with the pain, there is no rational *basis* for doubting that.

Insofar as the account Poston targets is an account of *propositional* justification and not *doxastic* justification, the traditional internalist can claim that the subject has infallible propositional justification *for* believing that p, but does not *believe* p justifiably.¹⁴ It is plausible (in this otherwise implausible scenario) that the subject is so impressed by Dennett that the subject does not believe that p at all, or that the subject believes Dennett because he is impressed by Dennett's beard rather than his arguments. But one may have the best justification possible for believing that p and yet fail to believe that p or to form the belief that p on the basis of something other than one's excellent justification for p.

A more convincing counterexample would grant that the traditional internalist's conditions for foundational justification for p are met while one also has a more strongly justified belief that q (that pains are easily confused with itches), while q defeats p (that I am in pain right now). Given the traditional internalist's standards, for q to be justified, q must either be

¹³ Later in the paper, Poston repeats this argument against weakened conditions for foundational justification that Fumerton has proposed in a few places (1995, 2002, 2006a, 2009). Those conditions say one can have foundational justification for believing that p when one is acquainted with the thought that p, the fact q that is very similar to p, and a relation very similar to correspondence between the thought p and the fact q. As Poston points out, correspondence is trivially very similar to itself, and fact p is trivially very similar to the fact p. So, Poston's argument that infallible foundations do not provide assurance also applies to fallible foundations. That is why I regard the argument that I discuss as the main argument of Poston (2010).

¹⁴ See footnote 1.

foundationally justified or justified by inference from other propositions that terminate in foundationally justified propositions. *Whatever* the chain of inferences supporting q is, the body of propositions that support q will be *far* less justified than p is. Consequently, even if the subject previously had some degree of fallible justification for believing that one could easily mistake pains for itches, that justification would be immediately defeated by one's excellent justification for believing that one is in pain on the basis of one's direct acquaintance with pain.

3.4 Tucker's Argument

Chris Tucker (2016) argues that acquaintance with a fact q that is very similar to the fact p, the thought p, and the near- or partial-correspondence between q and p cannot provide foundational justification for false thoughts. Suppose I believe I am in pain but I am acquainted with a painless itch that is similar to a pain. Because traditional internalists ground one's foundational justification in facts one is directly acquainted with, there has to be some fact about the painless itch that makes it very similar to a pain, and one must be acquainted with that similarity-fact. Tucker then says,

“[A]wareness of X's similarity to things of type T provides justification for thinking X is T *only if* one has some antecedent justification for believing that X's having these similarities reliably indicates being of type T” (2016, p. 52).

And because facts about what reliably indicates what are *contingent* facts, Tucker concludes that to have justification for believing that one's painless itch is a pain on account of some similarity-fact, one must have some antecedent, *empirical* justification for believing that sensations with a certain character are usually pains. So, one cannot have fallible *foundational* justification for believing one is in pain when one is acquainted with a painless itch rather than a pain.

Tucker is arguing that traditional internalists should hold that having justification for believing that one is in pain when one is acquainted with a painless itch requires the following:

- (1) Being acquainted with the painless itch that feels much like a pain (call the state “X”), the thought that one is in pain, and the near-correspondence between the itch (X) and the thought.
- (2) Having antecedent, empirical justification for believing that similarities between painless itches (Xs) and pains makes it probable (“reliably indicates”) that this painless itch (X) is a pain.

Some traditional internalists accept (1), so satisfying condition (2) is the problem. When justification for believing something requires having justification for believing something else, it is not foundational, but inferential. Although Tucker presents the problem as one of requiring empirical justification, it ultimately does not matter whether the justification for (2) is empirical or not. Even if (2) is justified *a priori*, the fact that there must be *any* additional justification for believing claims like (2) undermines the allegedly foundational status of false thoughts about pains and the like.

Tucker does not argue for (2). The requirement is problematic. Tucker's (2) looks suspiciously like a strong awareness principle restricted to justification for false thoughts. The *unrestricted* strong awareness principle says that if *e* is relevant to one's justification for believing *p*, then one must justifiedly judge that *e* supports *p*.¹⁵ Once the requirement is introduced, an infinite regress of justification follows. One must *justifiedly* judge (A1) *that e supports p* in order to have justification for believing that *p*; but for (A1) to be justified, one must justifiedly judge (A2) *that some other evidence (e') supports (A1)*; of course, (A2) must be justified as well, which requires yet more justified judgments, and so on, *ad infinitum*. The principle is not only incompatible with a traditional internalist version of moderate foundationalism, but *any* non-skeptical version of foundationalism, including infallibilist foundationalism.¹⁶ To see this, notice that the regress would still follow if one's evidence *guaranteed* the truth of the proposition one believes, for according to the strong awareness principle, one would need further justification for believing that the evidence that entails the proposition indeed supports the proposition, and so on. No version of foundationalism can accept an unrestricted principle like (2) without facing vicious regress.¹⁷

However, Tucker does not offer an *unrestricted* strong awareness principle. Tucker does not require antecedent justification for *true* thoughts, even though he grants that in some cases, those thoughts "could be mistaken" in a sense. He allows that one may have foundational

¹⁵ For some relevant literature on the principle, see (Bergmann 2006, BonJour 1985, Fales 2013, Fumerton 1995, Stoutenburg 2015b).

¹⁶ That is why Laurence BonJour (1985) used a strong awareness principle to undermine any version of foundationalism—both internalist and externalist—on the way to developing his coherence theory of justification.

¹⁷ Not all traditional internalists think the principle implies vicious regress. BonJour (in BonJour and Sosa 2003) argues that the principle does not imply any regress, while Fales (1996, 2013) argues that the regress is not vicious.

I have argued (2015b) that vicious regresses do not always undermine epistemological theories that generate them. But most epistemologists are reluctant to accept regress-generating principles.

justification when one is acquainted with a marginal pain, the thought that one is in pain, and the weak correspondence between them (45). It is not clear why on Tucker's view the thought's being false triggers the need for an extra condition on justification when from the subject's perspective the thought would be just as likely to be true as it would be if the thought had actually been true. To be consistent, Tucker should require additional justification in both cases or in neither. As it stands, his demand is unprincipled. But the cost of being principled while making a demand for additional justification generates vicious infinite regress.

Let us set that concern aside. Having noted the similarity between the demand for additional justification for false thoughts in (2) and the general demand for additional justification required by the strong awareness principle, we might use traditional internalists' responses to concerns stemming from the strong awareness principle in reply to (2). In work that Tucker (2016) is responding to, Fumerton argues that justifiably judging that one's evidence supports a proposition is unnecessary for foundational justification and that being directly acquainted with *e*'s supporting *p* is sufficient (1995, 2006a). A reply to Tucker along similar lines is that in cases of fallible foundational justification, one is directly acquainted with the fact that something's having a certain property makes it probable that the thing is a member of a certain class. So, necessarily, something's being a painless itch (that is very nearly a pain) makes it probable that it is a pain; and when we have foundational justification for believing false claims, we are acquainted with that sort of necessary truth. So, satisfying (2) is unnecessary, and in place of Tucker's (1) and (2), what is needed for fallible foundational justification for the belief that one is in pain is to satisfy this weaker requirement:

(1)* Being acquainted with *X*, the thought that one is in pain, the near-correspondence between *X* and the thought, *and the similarity of X to a pain*.

Perhaps it was to avoid this sort of response that Tucker insisted that one needs *empirical* justification for believing that having a similarity to pain reliably indicates being a pain. But we just saw that traditional internalists are prepared to claim to be acquainted with necessary epistemic support relations, so they may as well claim to be acquainted with the necessary truth that the similarity between painless itches like *X* and pains makes it probable that any given painless itch like *X* is a pain, and thereby avoid Tucker's objections.

Furthermore, traditional internalists will not accept that being justified in believing that a state is a pain involves that state ‘reliably indicating’ pains because internalists avoid construing the most important kind of probability for epistemic justification in terms of *frequencies*. Internalists think that if two subjects have the same experience while the beliefs one subject forms on that basis are generally true and the other’s beliefs are generally false, the two subjects would still have exactly the same justification for believing exactly the same propositions. It would not matter if those itches were *never* pains, provided that their phenomenal characteristics are similar enough. No traditional internalist would accept the requirement that having justification for believing the itch is a pain requires having additional justification for believing that those sorts of itches are in fact *usually* pains, as that would undermine the proposition’s foundational status.

4 A Question-Begging Argument for Infallible Foundations

Thus far we have considered several arguments that attempt to show that moderate foundationalism is incompatible with traditional internalism and found all of those arguments defective. Still, for my own part, there is a lingering sense that those arguments were on to *something*, even if the problem is not a matter of the incoherence of moderate foundationalism. Instead, I think that there is another intuition, a very compelling one, that favors infallibilist foundationalism. Recall Tucker’s principle:

“[A]wareness of X’s similarity to things of type T provides justification for thinking X is T *only if* one has some antecedent justification for believing that X’s having these similarities reliably indicates being of type T” (2016, p. 52).

Tucker does not argue for this principle. However, there is a strong intuition that favors some condition on justification like this. The examples that moderate foundationalists point to for support, like painless itches that are near the pain-‘border’, assume that the state in question is not a searing, obvious pain. For states like searing pains, it is very difficult to imagine that they could actually be anything other than what they present themselves as being. But when I experience one of those borderline non-pains that moderate foundationalists point to, it is hard to believe that it is probable for me that I am in pain rather than not. Per hypothesis, my state is *indistinguishable* from non-pain, and it is subjectively almost as likely to *not* be a pain as it is likely to be a pain. I am unable to tell whether I am experiencing pain that is nearly non-pain, or non-pain that is nearly pain. I am acquainted with some uncomfortable state, but that is the most

precise characterization I can give. There is nothing in my perspective that tells in favor of the experience being a pain experience rather than not.

The suggested intuition is to follow Descartes's advice and claim that when it comes to foundational justification, one "should hold back... assent from opinions which are not completely certain and indubitable" (CSM II:17). If one's state is not *obviously* a pain, one should not form the *outright* belief that the state is a pain, rather than something more modest, like that the state is uncomfortable, or that the state is either a pain or something much like it. Clearly, moderate foundationalists will not accept that requirement. I cannot think of any non-question-begging additional commitment to point to and from which to infer that fallible foundations are *impossible*. But I find it very compelling that if I am aware of a property that as far as I can tell might be a pain or an itch or something else, I lack foundational justification for forming outright, unconditional beliefs as to what state I am in. I lack justification for believing that I am experiencing pain, I lack justification for believing that I am experiencing an itch, and so on for whatever other specific candidates there are. However, I have excellent, indeed, *infallible* justification for believing that I am experiencing an uncomfortable sensation, and from there I can easily *infer* that I am experiencing pain.

The argument against moderate foundationalism just given appeals to the premise that one 'should not' form outright beliefs about the nature of one's experience when there are grounds for doubt about the character of one's experience. For the argument to have any bearing on this issue, that 'should' would have to be an epistemic 'should' and thus the argument has a premise that presupposes the falsity of moderate foundationalism. However, it is a question-begging premise with powerful intuitive support, and sometimes one cannot argue by granting all of one's opponent's assumptions. Still, for that reason the argument is not entirely *dialectically* satisfactory. We hope to *persuade* opponents of the falsity of their position through arguments that do not presuppose the falsity of their position. Attempting to *refute* arguments for moderate foundationalism while granting its defenders' main premises is largely responsible for how some of the arguments against moderate foundationalism went wrong.

5 Infallible Foundational Justification and Fallible Inferential Justification

The trouble about moderate foundationalism stems from the seeming incongruity between identifying conditions for foundational justification with acquaintance with factors that actually

support one's belief, and allowing that acquaintance with those factors does not imply that the belief is true. It is because of this inherent tension among fundamental commitments of moderate foundationalism that infallibilist foundationalism should be the default view for traditional internalists. In this section, I will do more to characterize the infallibilist foundationalist version of traditional internalism that I recommend.

To begin, here is how the infallibilist foundationalist is able to make sense of the examples that appear to support moderate foundationalism. Fumerton said, "[I]t seems plausible to claim that when in [a state that is not a pain but is similar to one] I have *more* reason to believe that I am in pain, for example, than that I am in a state of ecstatic pleasure" (2010, p. 381). Perhaps in such a scenario we may have better justification for believing the one than the other, but our justification derives from foundational knowledge.¹⁸ I may (infallibly) *know* that I am in an uncomfortable state and recognize that my being in an uncomfortable state makes it probable to some degree that I am in pain, and thus come to have derivative justification for believing that I am in pain. Obviously, my being in an uncomfortable state does not make it probable that I am in ecstatic pleasure. Thus, by starting from my *knowledge* that I am in an uncomfortable state, I can come to have a reasonably high degree of *inferential* justification for believing that I am in pain.

Fales's example receives similar treatment. Fales said, "...[W]hile it was clear to me that I had seen a momentary flash of either black *or* grey, I was also unable to judge which of these specific colors it was. Nevertheless, it was clear to me that the color of which I was aware was a fairly specific shade and not a generic one; and moreover, that it was either a medium grey or black, not a compromise dark grey" (1996, 141). Given the uncertainty of Fales's experience, infallibilists will deny that either *the cat is black* or *the cat is grey* is foundationally justified. Rather, what is foundationally justified is the disjunctive proposition *the cat is black or grey*. Yet Fales is fallibly justified in believing (separately) *the cat is black* along with, independently, *the cat is grey*, because from the truth of the disjunction it follows that one of the disjuncts is true. So, some degree of probability short of 1.0 attaches to each disjunct separately and it does so by inference from the disjunctive proposition that is foundationally, infallibly known.

¹⁸ McGrew (2003) and Tucker (2016) make a similar suggestion.

Infallibilist foundationalists can preserve the examples offered by moderate foundationalists by identifying a bit of foundational knowledge and deriving the further fallibly justified belief from what the subject knows. In cases of experiences in which a determinate property is exemplified but where the subject is unable to attend to the determinate property—perhaps because the subject is only aware that some unknown range of determinate properties may be exemplified—infallibilists can offer the following general account. In such cases, there is a proposition (or thought) the content of which is *expansive* enough to correspond to whichever determinate properties in fact are exemplified in the experience. Such propositions may be disjunctions, as in the examples of Fumerton’s pain and Fales’s cat. Alternatively, such propositions may include in their contents entities with greater ‘breadth’, such as determinable properties under which the determinate properties exemplified in the experience may be subsumed, as *reddish* to *deep red*, or *quadrilateral* to both *rhombus* and *trapezoid*.¹⁹ The infallibilist will then claim that a subject has infallible foundational justification for believing that *p* when the sufficiently expansive content of *p* corresponds to whatever determinate properties are exemplified in the experience. When the subject is acquainted with that proposition, and the properties in the experience, and the correspondence between them, then the subject has infallible foundational justification for believing the proposition.

The subject who has infallible justification for believing such expansive propositions about experience may thereby also have *derivative* justification for believing more finely-grained propositions about the determinate properties in experience. One may have infallible justification for believing that a quadrilateral is exemplified in experience while one is simultaneously unaware of which precise quadrilateral shape it was, perhaps because the appearance disappeared in a blink or because it appeared as a quick flash on a screen. From that infallible foundation, one thereby possesses justification for a number of propositions that relevantly entail what one foundationally knows. Among those derivative propositions are *there is a rhombus*; *there is a rectangle*; *there is a trapezoid*, etc. Each of these has some degree of probability if the foundational proposition is certain, and the probability that each has is derived from the probability of the foundational proposition. Exactly what degree of probability accrues to each of

¹⁹ Note that this line of argument applies to the problem of the speckled hen (Chisholm 1942). One may have fallible inferential justification for believing that there are exactly *n* speckles when one has infallible foundational justification for believing that there is some definite range of speckles that includes *n*.

the inferred propositions depends on the exact nature of the experience. It is usually easy to tell if one is aware of a trapezoid rather than a rectangle, for instance: but if one is *really* unsure, if it is just as likely to be a trapezoid as a rectangle, then the probability of *there is a rectangle* and of *there is a trapezoid* may be 0.5 each.

Foundational justification is infallible justification, and all fallible justification is inferential. A remaining question is what the inferential links are that allow one to infer further propositions such as *there is a rectangle* from experiences that may contain a rectangle but may instead contain some other quadrilateral. More generally, a remaining question is what the inferential links are that allow one to infer from a certain, expansive proposition that is *known* to a proposition with more specific content, where the inferred proposition is not entailed by the foundational proposition. Motivated by concerns such as the new evil demon scenario (Cohen 1984), traditional internalists accept that there must be necessary principles of non-deductive inference that are knowable *a priori* and that subjects can use to infer propositions about the mind-independent world (Fumerton 1995). These same principles can be put to work in an account of fallible inferential justification. When a subject is justified in believing that q on the basis of p, where p does not entail q, the subject's justification depends upon the subject being aware of a non-deductive support relation between p and q.²⁰ When a subject *justifiably* infers from *there is a quadrilateral* to *there is a rectangle*, the subject is aware of a necessary, non-deductive inferential principle that makes the latter probable to some degree when the former is infallibly justified.

The best motivation for moderate foundationalism on a traditional internalist view comes from experiences that contain determinate properties when it is unclear to the subject having the experience which properties are exemplified. As we have seen, infallible foundationalism is able to account for how beliefs formed on the basis of such experiences can be justified. This undermines the appeal to such experiences as an argument for moderate foundationalism. Furthermore, infallibilist foundationalism better fits the characterization of traditional internalism as an epistemology that locates the foundations of knowledge and justification in factors that

²⁰ Such relations may be probabilistic or explanatory, but I am skeptical that there are any fundamental explanatory relations that do not reduce to probabilistic relations, so one must be careful offering accounts of justification that depend heavily on explanatory concepts. See Appley and Stoutenburg (2016), Fumerton (1980), Stoutenburg (2015a).

make a subject's belief true via direct acquaintance with those factors. Infallibilist foundationalism also better respects the Cartesian motivation for traditional internalism: that the foundations of reasonable believing includes only what is absolutely certain. Traditional internalists should be infallibilists about foundational justification.²¹

²¹ I thank Nathan Ballantyne, Landon Elkind, Richard Fumerton, Ali Hasan, Sam Taylor, Chris Tucker, and two anonymous reviewers for helpful comments on this paper at various stages.

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