

Modest Foundationalism, Infinitism, and Perceptual Justification

§1. The justificatory question

Some justified beliefs depend upon other beliefs for their justification. Some justified beliefs do not so depend. Beliefs in the latter category are *epistemically basic*. An epistemically basic belief may receive *supplementary* justification from other beliefs. But at least one strand in its justification involves no other beliefs. *Modest foundationalism* asserts that epistemically basic beliefs exist. I will argue that modest foundationalism offers a more compelling analysis of perceptual justification than infinitism (§§2-3). I will then critique Klein's (2004) main objection to foundationalism: that epistemically basic beliefs do not halt the justificatory regress (§§4-5). I will argue that Klein adopts a misguided *hyperintellectualist* approach to justification.

I do not attempt to define "justification." I doubt that a non-circular definition is possible. Roughly speaking, justified beliefs are "epistemically licensed." As Pryor puts it, "*you have justification to believe P* iff you are in a position where it would be epistemically appropriate for you to believe *P*" (2005, p. 181). Thus, I use "justification" in an extremely broad sense that encompasses all epistemic warrant. Justification in this broad sense is widely instantiated by normal adults and even young children.¹

My main concern is the question: what makes it the case that a thinker has justification for believing *p*? Call this *the justificatory question*. Consider an ordinary thinker who sees a green cube, thereby forming a belief one might paraphrase as *That*

¹ Thus, I use the term "justification" to include both what Burge (2003) calls "justification" and what he calls "entitlement."

cube is green. Perceptual conditions are optimal: the light is normal, she is not under the influence of any drugs, and so on. I assume that she has justification for her perceptual belief, even if she is only five years old. There are philosophers who question this assumption, perhaps because they use the term “justification” in a more demanding way than I use it. I think that there is a clear sense in which the child’s belief is epistemically licensed. In *my* sense, she has justification for her perceptual belief. The justificatory question invites us to elucidate her justification. Why exactly is her perceptual belief “epistemically licensed”?

The justificatory question is distinct from various questions frequently posed by philosophers, including:

How might one convince a skeptic that there is a green cube?

How might one acquire justification for believing that one has justification for believing *That cube is green*?

How might one convince others that one has justification for believing *That cube is green*?

In answering such questions, we will surely cite cognitive resources unavailable to a normal child. Yet I assume that children have justification for suitable perceptual beliefs. A good answer to the justificatory question should not *hyperintellectualize* justification by citing overly sophisticated mental capacities.

With these preliminaries completed, I now compare how infinitists and modest foundationalists answer the justificatory question.

§2. Infinitist justification for perceptual belief

According to infinitism, every justified belief is associated with an infinite *epistemic chain*: an infinite chain of beliefs, each element justified by the next element in the chain. Klein summarizes infinitism through two doctrines (2005a, p. 136):

Principle of Avoiding Circularity (PAC): for all propositions, x , if x is warranted for a person, S , at t , then for all y , if y is in the reason-ancestry of x for S at t , then x is not in the reason-ancestry of y for S at t .

Principle of Avoiding Arbitrariness (PAA): for all propositions x , if x is warranted for a person S , at t , then there is some reason, r_1 , available to S for x at t ; and there is some reason, r_2 , available to S for r_1 at t , etc., and there is no last reason in the series.

Thus, every justified belief is associated with an infinite, non-repeating chain of reasons. A “reason for x ” is a proposition that bears some desirable epistemic relation to x . Klein remains neutral regarding the precise nature of this desirable epistemic relation.

Klein convincingly rebuts several prominent objections to infinitism. Specifically, he demonstrates that the “finite minds” and “no starting points” objections exert little force. Nevertheless, I think that a basic worry remains: infinitists have yet to provide any concrete demonstration that ordinary thinkers can delineate infinite epistemic chains.

We can easily imagine an infinite sequence of propositions, each logically entailed by the next element in the chain. Given any proposition p_1 , consider

p_1

$p_2 \ \& \ (p_2 \rightarrow p_1)$

$p_3 \ \& \ (p_3 \rightarrow p_2) \ \& \ (p_3 \rightarrow (p_2 \rightarrow p_1))$

.

.

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Similarly, Peijnenburg (2007) argues that probability theory allows us to construct an infinite sequence of proposition E_1, E_2, \dots , such that

E_2 makes E_1 probable

E_3 makes E_2 probable

E_4 makes E_3 probable

.

.

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In themselves, however, these abstract schemata provide no support for infinitism. The question is whether we can delineate an infinite non-repeating chain of *specific* propositions that yield a plausible epistemological analysis.

Consider an ordinary thinker who forms a justified belief *That cube is green* on the basis of perceiving a green cube. What relevant infinite epistemic chain is “available” to the thinker? Infinitely many sequences instantiate our abstract logical or probabilistic schemata. For instance, there is an absurd sequence that begins:

That cube is green

The moon is made of cheese & (The moon is made of cheese \rightarrow That cube is green)

Napoleon was born on Mars & (Napoleon was born on Mars \rightarrow The moon is made of cheese) & (Napoleon was born on Mars \rightarrow (The moon is made of cheese \rightarrow That cube is green))

.
.
.

Clearly, this absurd sequence provides no insight into an ordinary thinker's justification for perceptual beliefs.

We should not demand that infinitists provide a *completed* infinite epistemic chain. After all, human minds and lifespans are finite. Still, infinitists owe us concrete details. They must provide a tangible model of how an ordinary thinker can continue the justificatory regress indefinitely. Infinitists have not discharged this burden. I doubt that they can. Indeed, I doubt that an ordinary thinker attempting to justify a perceptual belief could proceed beyond a few steps in the regress. It depends partly on how one counts the individual steps. We surely lack any relevant examples longer than 1,000 steps, which is a trifle compared to infinity.

Ginet (2005) raises a similar challenge. Klein (2005b) responds that one can continue the regress by adducing a previously tacit belief that perceptual experiences are likely to be veridical. Subsequent steps involve defending that previously tacit belief. As Klein (2005b, pp. 151-152) notes,

Descartes was faced with just this problem in the *Meditations*, namely: Do we have any reason for thinking that our perceptual equipment typically yields the truth? We know his type of answer: there are *a priori* reasons available that show that the equipment is reliable. The currently more fashionable type of answer is based upon *a posteriori* reasoning involving mechanisms posited by evolutionary biology. Thus, I suggest it is easy to image how the reasoning could continue

because we have good examples of such reasoning. Will reasoning support of *that* tacit reason ultimately beg the question? I don't believe it need do so.

According to Klein, philosophical tradition furnishes a tangible model for continuing the regress indefinitely.

Let us grant, for the sake of argument, that Klein is correct. The question remains whether this tangible model illuminates the justification of ordinary perceptual beliefs. Even if *philosophers* can continue the regress indefinitely, how does that help *non-philosophers*? Imagine an uneducated human living thousands of years ago. She perceives a green cube. She has justification for the perceptual belief *That cube is green*. Yet I see no relevant sense in which abstract philosophical arguments are “available” to her.² I therefore charge Klein with rampant *hyperintellectualism*. Klein elucidates justification by citing sophisticated cognitive maneuvers far beyond the capacities of normal human adults, let alone young children.

Klein often insists that his primary concern is a sophisticated epistemic status that outstrips “justification” as I characterized that term in §1. He stipulates that his topic is “real knowledge” or “distinctive adult human knowledge,” which is “the highest form of knowledge” and is “akin to the traditional concept of *scientia*. It is knowledge that results from carefully examining our beliefs in order to determine which, if any, deserve to be maintained” (2007, p. 4). He labels this desirable epistemic status “knowledge_c.” He denies that young children attain knowledge_c. He acknowledges that ordinary language uses the word “knowledge” more liberally than “knowledge_c” (2007, p. 5):

² Klein does not say exactly what he means by “available.” One can formulate my objection as a dilemma. Either infinite epistemic chains are not “available” (in Klein’s sense) to ordinary thinkers, or else they *are* “available” (in Klein’s sense). In the latter case, Klein’s notion of “availability” is so permissive that it is irrelevant to answering the justificatory question.

In the right sort of environment, dogs, small children and security devices are good detectors of hands. They can even discriminate between the hands of one person and the hands of another. In general, I see no reason to deny that such detectors have some sort of knowledge.

According to Klein, a security device has knowledge but not knowledge_c. Knowledge_c requires an infinite non-repeating chain of reasons. Knowledge *simpliciter* does not.

I contest several aspects of Klein's analysis. First, I do not think there is any literal sense in which a security device "knows" propositions. Security devices do not have propositional attitudes. Second, I think that we must recognize substantial middle ground between an automated security device and adult critical reasoning. Klein acknowledges no such middle ground. He simply assimilates young children to security devices. As a result, he ignores a vast range of cognitive phenomena that are less sophisticated than adult critical reasoning yet that merit a central place within any complete epistemology.

I set these worries aside. My main objection is that Klein's infinitist account does not seem correct even as applied to knowledge_c. A mature non-philosopher can reflect upon whether to retain her perceptual beliefs. Presumably, she can elevate those beliefs to knowledge_c. Yet a mature non-philosopher cannot continue the justificatory regress indefinitely. At least, we lack any tangible model for how she might do so. Abstruse philosophical arguments are not "available" to her. Apparently, Klein renders knowledge_c the exclusive perquisite of an intellectual elite initiated into abstract philosophical reasoning. He thereby thwarts a fundamental goal of epistemology: to illuminate the epistemic status of an ordinary non-philosopher's perceptual beliefs.

I conclude that we lack a single compelling example of infinitist justification for ordinary perceptual beliefs.

§3. Modest foundationalist justification for perceptual belief

The contrast with foundationalism is stark. As I will now argue, modest foundationalists have provided numerous compelling examples.

A *perceptual experience* represents the world as being a certain way. The experience is veridical just in case the world is the way that the experience represent it as being.³ For instance, one can have a perceptual experience that is veridical only if some perceived object is green, cube-shaped, and located at a certain spatial position.

Suppose a thinker has a perceptual experience as of a green cube. Modest foundationalists can say that her experience provides *prima facie*, immediate, defeasible justification for her belief *That cube is green*, where the mental demonstrative *that cube* refers to the perceived cube. This justification does not depend on any other beliefs, including beliefs such as:

My perception system is functioning reliably.

I am not in the Matrix.

I am not being deceived by an evil demon.

I have not ingested a pill that distorts my color vision.

³ Recently, some philosophers have denied that perceptual experiences have truth-conditions (Brewer, 2007), (Campbell, 2010), (Martin, 2004), (Travis, 2004). I believe that this view clashes both with common sense (McLaughlin, 2010) and with contemporary perceptual psychology (Burge, 2010). Of course, simply saying that perceptual experiences have truth-conditions leaves many questions unanswered. For instance, is perceptual content conceptual or non-conceptual? Object-dependent or object-independent? A complete account must address these and many other questions. For present purposes, we may ignore such questions.

If the thinker acquires evidence for those additional beliefs, then that evidence can strengthen the justification provided by her perceptual experience. Conversely, if she acquires evidence against one of those additional beliefs, then that evidence can defeat the justification provided by her perceptual experience. Lacking defeating factors, she has all things considered justification for the belief *That cube is green*.

Alston (1993), Audi (1989), Burge (2003), Peacocke (2004), Pryor (2000), and many others advocate a version of modest foundationalism along the lines just sketched. Pryor resurrected the term *dogmatism* to describe this position. Dogmatists can cite numerous plausible examples, including the following perceptual beliefs:

That long slender cylinder is oriented vertically.

That loud noise is located to my left.

This body is heavy and smoothly-textured.

That₁ large sphere is located farther away than that₂ small cube.

That₁ yellow sphere is moving faster than that₂ red cube.

The subscripts indicate distinct demonstrative elements in thought. Dogmatists can also extend their analysis from demonstrative thought to existentially quantified thought. For instance, a perceptual experience as of a green cube justifies the existentially quantified belief *There is a green cube before me*, either directly or else by way of a demonstrative belief (*That cube is green*) and deductive reasoning.

As Wright (2007) observes, dogmatism faces a *demarcation problem*. Which beliefs can receive immediate perceptual justification? Here are some problematic cases:

Causal beliefs (e.g. *That₁ red cube caused that₂ yellow sphere to move*)

Beliefs about other people's mental states (e.g. *He is sad*)

Beliefs about natural kinds (e.g. *That is an apple*)

Obviously, one can form these beliefs based on perception. The question is whether perceptual experience can *immediately* justify such a belief, without any epistemic dependence upon other beliefs. For instance, does the belief *That is an apple* epistemically depend on a further belief that apples have certain distinctive visual features? Or can it receive justification solely from a perceptual experience of an apple?

In my view, any solution to the demarcation problem must include a substantial empirical component. When evaluating whether perception can immediately justify a belief, one must ask whether perception can represent the properties represented by that belief. Take a belief that one object caused another to move. To decide whether perception can immediately justify this belief, one must decide whether perceptual experiences can represent causality. If they cannot, then a dogmatist analysis has no chance of success. Collateral beliefs must underwrite the transition from perception to causal beliefs. On the other hand, if perceptual experiences can represent causal relations, then a dogmatist analysis may prove compelling. Whether perception represents causality is an empirical question that psychologists continue to debate (Rips, 2011). Hence, one cannot settle the demarcation problem from the armchair.⁴

Despite these complexities, I think that dogmatism can offer numerous convincing examples. Common sense and contemporary science both confirm that perceptual experience represents various distal properties, including shape, color, size, depth, location, motion, slant, texture, orientation, loudness, pitch, weight, and many others (Burge, 2010). Perceptual beliefs involving these properties are plausible

⁴ This paragraph isolates a necessary, not a sufficient, condition for receiving immediate justification from perceptual experience. Burge (2003) suggests possible examples where perceptual experience can represent a property without providing immediate justification for beliefs involving that property.

candidates for a dogmatist epistemology. Dogmatists should regard the demarcation problem as an impetus to further research, not a serious challenge to their view.

Wright (2007) offers a different assessment. He holds that the demarcation problem poses a serious challenge to dogmatism. He claims that dogmatists should accept the following constraint (p. 46):

An experience dogmatically warrants the belief that *P* just in case, should the belief be false, the explanation must include misperception or some other form of illusion.

Call this *the Misperception Constraint*. Wright holds that the Misperception Constraint undercuts dogmatism. He illustrates through the belief *There is a red wall before me*: “it does not follow from my being mistaken about there being a red wall before me that my receiving the appearance of a red wall involved misperception --- there need be no misperception precisely when what I am seeing is a white wall cunningly illuminated by red light” (p. 46). Since the belief *There is a red wall before me* violates the Misperception Constraint, we cannot apply a dogmatist analysis to it. Wright contends that his analysis extends to virtually all beliefs about the distal environment.

Wright’s specific example --- *There is a red wall before me* --- strikes me as ill-chosen. It is hardly clear that perception can represent the property *wall*. Thus, it is hardly clear that dogmatists should *want* to say that perception immediately justifies the belief *There is a red wall before me*. Let us change the example from *red wall* to *red cube*. Presumably, that simple change should not impact Wright’s analysis.

What does Wright mean by “misperception”? On one natural reading, “misperception” arises when a perceptual experience inaccurately represents the world.

For instance, misperception occurs when I mistakenly perceive a white cube *as* a red cube. On this reading, my belief *There is a red cube before me* satisfies the Misperception Constraint. We explain the belief's falsity by observing that the relevant perceptual experience is non-veridical. The experience represents the cube as being red, whereas the cube is actually white. By interpreting the Misperception Constraint in this way, we can offer the standard dogmatist analysis of *There is a red cube before me*. We can say that the perceptual experience immediately justifies the belief.

On a second interpretation, "misperception" involves malfunction or sub-optimal performance by the perceptual system. On this second interpretation, no misperception need occur when I perceive a white cube bathed in red light *as* red. The perceptual system may be functioning quite optimally while nevertheless misattributing redness to the white cube. If we embrace the Misperception Constraint as interpreted in the second way, then we can no longer offer the standard dogmatist analysis of *There is a red cube before me*. We can no longer say that perceptual experience immediately justifies the belief. But why should dogmatists accept the Misperception Constraint, as interpreted in the second way? Wright provides no argument that they should. He provides no argument that a dogmatist solution to the demarcation problem must even mention perceptual malfunctioning or sub-optimal processing. I think that dogmatists should simply reject the Misperception Constraint (under the second interpretation). The white cube bathed in red light is a counter-example to any such constraint.

Wright does not parlay the demarcation problem into a compelling argument against dogmatism. Despite what he maintains, dogmatists can illustrate their position through numerous plausible examples.⁵

§4. Regress? Which regress?

I now want to consider how Klein deploys the justificatory regress against foundationalism.

Klein imagines Fred, a *foundationalist*, debating Doris, a *doubter*. Klein emphasizes that Fred and Doris “could be sub-personal if we are envisioning a Cartesian-style, *sotto voce* meditation” (2005a, p. 133). Doris’s persistent challenges eventually lead Fred to assert a proposition *b* that he takes to be epistemically basic. If Doris demands Fred’s reason for believing *b*, then Klein (p. 133) says that

Fred, being a self-conscious circumspect foundationalist, will tell Doris that *b* doesn’t need a reason in order to possess the autonomous bit of warrant. He will say that her question “Why you believe that *x*?” though appropriate up to this point is no longer appropriate when “*b*” is substituted for “*x*” because *x* is basic.

Klein concedes that Fred’s reply is correct. He concedes that Fred’s belief in *b* is epistemically basic (or, in Klein’s terminology, *autonomously warranted*). Nevertheless, Klein insists that the regress continues (p. 133):

Doris should say to Fred, “I grant that *b* has autonomous warrant. But what I want to know is whether autonomously warranted propositions are, in virtue of that

⁵ Wright offers various additional arguments against dogmatism. See also (White, 2006) for various anti-dogmatist argument. I cannot discuss these various arguments here, except to state without defense that in my opinion the dogmatist has resources to answer all of them.

fact, somewhat likely to be true.” Her worry becomes a “meta.” But she went meta, so to speak, because Fred went meta first.

According to Klein, Fred now has three options, centered on the following proposition:

- (*) Autonomously warranted propositions are somewhat likely to be true in virtue of the fact that they are autonomously warranted.

Fred can assert (*), or he can deny (*), or he can withhold judgment. Klein thinks that all three options are disastrous. If Fred denies (*), then “how could he think that *b* could provide a good reason for thinking that the penultimate proposition was likely to be true?” (p. 134). How can Fred reasonably adduce *b* as a reason for believing other propositions, if he has no reason to believe that *b* itself is likely to be true? A similar worry arises if Fred remains agnostic about (*). On the other hand, if Fred affirms (*), then “*the regress has continued*” (p. 134). Fred must now defend (*) in response to Doris’s renewed challenges. Klein concludes that “foundationalism cannot solve the regress problem” (p. 134).

Klein mentions “the” regress problem. I think that there are actually four distinct regress problems in this vicinity. I will argue that Klein reaches his anti-foundationalist conclusion only by conflating the four regress problems with one another.

I draw two distinctions. The first distinction concerns *epistemic* versus *dialectical* regress. The second concerns *static* versus *dynamic* regress. These two distinctions yield four possible regress problems, which I summarize through the following table. Each box contains a question that initiates the relevant regress:

	<i>Epistemic</i>	<i>Dialectical</i>
<i>Static</i>	What makes it the case that a thinker is justified in believing p ?	What makes it the case that a speaker is warranted in asserting p ?
<i>Dynamic</i>	What happens when a thinker evaluates whether to believe p ?	What happens when one speaker challenges another speaker's arguments for p ?

I examine each regress, beginning with the static epistemic regress and proceeding clockwise.

The static epistemic regress

In my view, the static epistemic regress is by far the most important of the four regress problems. It arises when we examine *the fixed justificatory structure of a given thinker's beliefs at a given moment*. What makes it the case that thinker X currently has justification for believing p ? In §1, I called this *the justificatory question*. In some cases, the answer to the justificatory question is that p derives its justification from additional propositions that X believes. But what provides X with justification for believing those additional propositions? We can iterate the justificatory question, thereby generating a regress regarding X 's justification for believing p .

I favor a foundationalist resolution (Alston, 1989), (Audi, 1993). The regress halts with an *epistemically basic belief*, which has some justification that depends on no other beliefs. An epistemically basic belief has *immediate justification*. Perceptual experience is one source of immediate justification. Other possible sources include recollective memory, sensation, and self-evidence. Over the past few decades, philosophers have

extensively discussed these and other sources. Much work remains to be done. But the general approach seems compelling. Overall, I think that foundationalism satisfactorily resolves the static epistemic regress, at least regarding perceptual beliefs.

The static dialectical regress

To generate the static dialectical regress, we presuppose some notion of “warranted assertability.” Certain assertions are “warranted,” while others are not. What makes a speaker “warranted” in asserting a proposition? To a first approximation, Brandom holds that a speaker is “entitled” to assert a proposition only if the speaker can defend that proposition in response to challenges (1994, pp. 176-178). Any defense will require asserting additional propositions, so one naturally asks what would make the speaker warranted in asserting those additional propositions. Thus, “tracing back an entitlement... potentially sets off a regress” (Brandom, 1994, p. 176).

This regress arises only under specific assumptions about warranted assertion. We assume that assertion falls under a constitutive norm along the following lines:

The Defensibility Norm: One should assert only propositions that one can “adequately” defend.

Many philosophers reject anything like Defensibility Norm. Williamson (2000) favors:

The Knowledge Norm: One should assert only propositions that one knows.

Other candidate norms of assertion include:

The Honesty Norm: One should assert only propositions that one believes.

The Truth Norm: One should assert only true propositions.

The Warrant Norm: One should assert only propositions that one believes with

“sufficient” warrant.

It is not clear that these alternative norms generate a comparable regress.

I myself reject all of the foregoing norms. I reject the very notion of “warranted assertability.” In (Rescorla, 2009a), I argue that the constitutive norms of assertion do not restrict which propositions a speaker should assert. Rather, the norms govern how a speaker should respond when other speakers contest her assertion. One possible norm along these lines runs as follow:

The Defense Norm: When challenged to defend an asserted proposition, one must either provide a cogent, non-circular argument for the proposition or else retract it.

The Defense Norm does not entail the Defensibility Norm, let alone the other restrictive norms mentioned above. If my position is correct, then there is no static dialectical regress, because there is no viable notion of “warranted assertion.”

I set these points aside. Let us assume that something like the Defensibility Norm is correct. In that case, regress looms. Nevertheless, I think that the regress is *explanatorily derivative*. An adequate solution to this regress must emphasize what happens when a speaker provides arguments aiming to vindicate her initial assertion. Thus, the explanatorily fundamental regress here is dynamic, not static. We may safely ignore the static dialectical regress, turning instead to the dynamic dialectical regress.

The dynamic dialectical regress

Suppose that a speaker asserts a proposition p . Her interlocutor persistently demands justification for p and for subsequent propositions asserted in p 's defense. Thus,

the speaker never vindicates p . She never provides an argument for p based on premises that her interlocutor accepts.

Many philosophers claim that the persistent interlocutor's challenges eventually become illegitimate (Brandom, 1994, pp. 176-178), (Leite, 2005), (Williams, 1999, 2004). On this view, certain propositions are *dialectically basic*. A mere request for justification does not obligate the speaker to defend a dialectically basic proposition.

Plausible dialectically basic propositions include:

That cube is green.

I have hands.

I have a headache.

$2+2=4$.

The world has existed for more than five minutes.

Thus, the basic idea is to replace the Defense Norm with

The Default-Challenge Norm: When faced with a *legitimate* challenge to defend an asserted proposition, one must either provide a cogent, non-circular argument for the proposition or else retract it.

A mere request that the speaker justify a dialectically basic proposition is not a *legitimate* challenge, so it does not obligate the speaker to respond. Dialectically basic propositions halt the dynamic dialectical regress.

Klein denies that there are any dialectically basic propositions. He holds that a speaker must always defend asserted propositions in response to challenges. In particular, epistemically basic beliefs do not help halt the regress. For instance, a speaker who

asserts *That cube is green* must defend her assertion when challenged. If she cannot, then she is not justified in believing the asserted proposition.

I disagree with Klein in two respects.

First, I suspect that *a few* propositions are dialectically basic, including elementary logical, mathematical, or conceptual truths (Rescorla, 2009c). For present purposes, this disagreement is not important. I agree with Klein regarding the core propositions relevant to this paper: propositions about the observable environment. Contrary to Brandom, Leite, and Williams, I think that such propositions require defense when challenged. Thus, I agree with Klein that one cannot halt the dynamic dialectical regress simply by asserting a proposition such as *That cube is green*.

My second and more important disagreement with Klein concerns the epistemological import of dialectical basicness. Klein places great weight upon the thesis that epistemically basic propositions do not halt the dynamic dialectical regress. He deploys that thesis to support infinitism over modest foundationalism. I reject Klein's argumentative strategy. In my view, nothing of epistemological significance follows from denying that a proposition is dialectically basic. Dialectical basicness concerns the norms governing rational dialectic. There is no reason to expect that dialectical norms align straightforwardly with epistemic norms. An inability to continue the dynamic dialectical regress does not suggest that the corresponding beliefs are unjustified (Rescorla, 2009b).

More concretely, consider a speaker who asserts *That cube is green*. Her interlocutor challenges her to defend the assertion. She replies "Well, I see that it's green." The interlocutor challenges this assertion. The speaker is flummoxed. I agree with Klein that the speaker has somehow *failed*. She has fallen short of some normative

standard intrinsic to rational dialectic. It does not follow that she lacks any justification for believing *That cube is green*. As Alston (1989), Audi (1993), and many others have urged, we must sharply distinguish the *process of justifying* from the *state of being justified*. The latter is a positive epistemic status that certain beliefs have and that other beliefs do not have. Why should we suspect that a belief has this positive epistemic status only if the speaker can successfully *defend* the corresponding assertion to other speakers? Most ordinary speakers are quite poor at defending their beliefs. Why should lack of dialectical skill impugn justification? To posit any intimate link between justification and dialectical performance is rampant hyperintellectualism.

The Fred-Doris dialogue illustrates Klein's hyperintellectualist tendencies. Fred asserts a proposition p and then asserts that his belief in p is epistemically basic. Klein holds that Fred does not thereby halt the dialectical regress. I agree. But how does Klein's imagined scenario bear upon the epistemic justification enjoyed by mature non-philosophers, let alone young children? Non-philosophers cannot even approximate the rarefied dialectical maneuvers that Klein attributes to Fred. Certainly, a non-philosopher will not assert propositions that attribute epistemic basicness to other propositions. A non-philosopher will not get much farther than saying, "I see the green cube," or at best "It *looks* as if I'm seeing a green cube, and my visual system has been reliable so far." The Fred-Doris dialogue is irrelevant to ordinary perceptual justification.

Philosophers often motivate epistemological positions by adducing imaginary reason-giving dialogues. I believe that this methodology is unsound. It conflates intuitions about epistemic norms and intuitions about dialectical norms. Epistemology studies the epistemic status of mental states, not the proprietary of linguistic

performances. If our interests are epistemological, then we should ignore reason-giving dialogues, except insofar as we are studying epistemological issues specific to linguistic interaction. We should not study justification by examining “the game of giving and asking for reasons.” Epistemologists should not take as their paradigm a situation where one speaker tries to convince another speaker of a proposition.

Klein claims that his appeal to two speakers is inessential, since an individual thinker could just as easily replicate the Fred-Doris dialogue within his own *sotto voce* reasoning. Let us therefore consider how Klein analyzes *sotto voce* reasoning.

The dynamic epistemic regress

Suppose Fred examines a proposition p to evaluate whether it merits belief. He identifies a proposition q that supports p , another proposition that supports q , and so on. Either the regress continues indefinitely, or else it circles back on itself, or else Fred reaches some proposition in whose support he can enlist no further proposition.

More concretely, consider the perceptual belief *That cube is green*, formed while visually inspecting a green cube. According to Klein, it would be *arbitrary* for Fred to halt the dynamic epistemic regress at this perceptual belief: “[h]opefully the sometimes muted inner voice of epistemic responsibility would speak up and say to Fred: ‘Fred, this is mysterious. It looks arbitrary. Why do you think it is permissible to stop at b , when you kept tracing reasons back many, many steps?’” (2007, p. 14). Klein maintains that Fred can remove the taint of arbitrariness only by continuing the regress. If Fred cannot continue the regress, then he should withhold judgment from the perceptual belief.

I disagree. Let us suppose that Fred cannot continue the regress. In my view, this does not even suggest that Fred's perceptual belief is unjustified. The belief derives justification from Fred's perceptual experience. It retains this justification whether or not Fred can continue the regress. Since Fred cannot continue the regress, he cannot convince a Pyrrhonian skeptic to share his perceptual belief. He may also lack justification for believing that his perceptual belief is justified. It does not follow that the perceptual belief is unjustified. As Alston (1989) emphasizes, we must sharply distinguish *first-order* and *higher-order* epistemological questions. First-order questions concern the epistemic status of ordinary non-epistemic beliefs (e.g. *That cube is green*). Higher-order questions concern the epistemic status of epistemological beliefs (e.g. *My belief that that cube is green is non-arbitrary* or *My belief that that cube is green is justified*). It is a level confusion to slide from higher-order justificatory questions to first-order justificatory questions. Justification for believing p does not require justification for believing that one has justification to believe p .

Contrary to what Klein suggests, Fred's perceptual belief is *not* arbitrary. It is non-arbitrarily related to Fred's perceptual experiences. Fred may lack the cognitive resources to explain to himself or to others what makes the perceptual non-arbitrary. But it is a level conclusion to infer that the belief is arbitrary from Fred's inability to explain why it is non-arbitrary.

Bergmann (2004) presses a similar objection to Klein. In response, Klein concedes that “[p]erhaps... there is a good sense of ‘arbitrary’ in which believing b is not arbitrary” (2004, p. 170). Nevertheless, Klein insists, this concession “will not help in resolving any misgivings about p 's truth unless one thinks that Fred's entitlement to

believe that *b* is connected to *b*'s truth" (p. 170). If Fred is attempting to defend *p* against a skeptical interlocutor Sally, then *b* is just as arbitrary a stopping point as any other:

"even if one is a modest foundationalist... the point of the why-game is to give Sally a basis for believing *p*" (p. 171), and that goal is not achieved simply by adducing a further belief *b* that Sally disputes. Klein (p. 171) contends that a similar point persists

if the dialogue is an inner, solipsistic one --- a meditation. Suppose I think I need a reason for *p* and I give (myself) the reason *q*...and finally arrive at a basic proposition, *b*. Even if I were entitled to believe that *p*, why should I think I have provided any warrant for *p* by my reasoning unless I thought that *b*'s possession of basic-warrant was truth-conducive?

An epistemically basic belief provides an arbitrary stopping point within the "why-game." Thus, foundationalism "cannot provide a basis for Fred to solve the regress problem --- the problem of making beliefs doxastically justified" (Klein, 2007, p. 15).

Klein says that "the" regress problem is "the problem of making beliefs doxastically justified." Non-philosophers sometimes face a problem along these lines. For instance, one can evaluate a mathematical proposition by trying to prove it. To some extent, all normal adults can generate justification for propositions by tracing justificatory relations to other propositions. But why should we assume that the capacity to trace these justificatory relations bears directly upon ordinary perceptual justification? An ordinary thinker does not need to *make* her perceptual beliefs justified. The beliefs *are* justified. She forms countless justified perceptual beliefs every hour, without even momentarily reflecting upon justificatory relations to other propositions.

Klein's focus upon "making" propositions justified exemplifies his hyperintellectualist orientation. He emphasizes two paradigms:

A speaker trying to convince a skeptical interlocutor.

An isolated thinker who evaluates her beliefs by assuming the roles of both speaker and skeptical interlocutor.

I think that neither situation is paradigmatic for epistemology. Of course, every normal human adult has some capacity to engage in rational dialectic, whether externalized or internalized. Some adults have very sophisticated cognitive and dialectical capacities. Those capacities deserve careful philosophical scrutiny. But they are not central to ordinary perceptual justification. Our most fundamental concern is the *fixed justificatory structure of an ordinary thinker's mental states at a given moment*. We are not studying the *dynamic process through a sophisticated thinker evaluates a proposition's rational credentials*, let alone *sophisticated dialectical interactions between two speakers*. Klein's emphasis upon the "why-game," whether between two speakers or within *sotto voce* reasoning, illicitly imports dialectical considerations into epistemology.

In a revealing passage, Klein claims that the "'starting point' of reasoning... is doubt. A proposition becomes questionable and consequently, it lacks the desired rational credibility. Reasoning scratches the itch" (2005a, p. 137). This description has impeccable Pyrrhonian and Cartesian lineage. Nevertheless, it strikes me as mistaken. One can certainly doubt a proposition. Doubt can lead one to inspect a proposition's epistemic credentials. When inspecting those credentials, one almost invariably assumes other propositions, including propositions based upon perception. Doubting one's own perceptual beliefs is not the usual "starting point" of reasoning.

Klein might reply that global doubt is a normative ideal. A few philosophers, including Descartes, have defended this position. I see no reason to accept it. I see no reason to think that, strictly speaking, the most rigorous rational inquiry begins by discarding all of one's present beliefs. As Quine argued, rational inquiry begins *in medias res*, not by attaining some imaginary Archimedean point.

Klein may respond by emphasizing his concern with knowledge_c. He may insist that knowledge_c is attained only by moving indefinitely up the regress, even if lesser kinds of knowledge are not so demanding. In this vein, Klein offers the following definition: “[a] belief that *h* is doxastically justified for *S* when and only when *S* is acting in an epistemically responsible manner in believing that *h*” (2007, p. 6). Klein explains that *epistemically responsible* agents are those who “examine their beliefs in order to determine which, if any, are worthy of being kept” (2007, p. 6). He claims that doxastic justification, in his sense, is necessary for knowledge_c. He also claims that Fred is epistemically responsible in retaining an epistemically basic belief *b* only if Fred can continue the regress beyond *b*: “if Fred is to be an epistemically responsible in holding his beliefs, he will have to provide a reason for thinking that *b* is true” (2007, p. 15).

I think that Klein's definition of “epistemic responsibility” is far too demanding. In *some* cases, an epistemically responsible agent will consider whether to retain a belief. For instance, an epistemically responsible agent raised in a bigoted society will question his racial stereotypes. But I see no reason why an epistemically responsible agent must systematically examine *every* belief. Suppose Fred perceives a green cube. I see no reason why epistemic responsibility requires him to consider, even for a moment, whether the belief *There is a green cube before me* is “worthy of being kept.” As long as

he bases his belief in the proper way upon perceptual experience, he is epistemically responsible in retaining the belief.⁶ Carefully examining the belief's epistemic credentials seems less like a normative ideal than a complete waste of time.

But let us set this point aside. Suppose Fred wants to achieve "epistemic responsibility" in Klein's sense. Fred wants to "examine [his] beliefs in order to determine which, if any, are worthy of being kept." For instance, suppose Fred considers whether to retain the belief *There is a green cube before me*. How can he proceed? He can observe the color and shape of the green cube. If he is extremely diligent, he can take extra precautions, such as viewing the cube from various angles, manipulating the lighting conditions, or estimating the cube's shape through touch. But these extra precautions are supererogatory. Careful visual observation of the cube's color and shape from a single fixed vantage point suffices. Careful observation establishes that his perceptual belief is "worthy of being kept."⁷

Observation does not *always* suffice for epistemic responsibility. Fred might know that he has ingested a pill that sometimes distorts color vision. He might know that white cubes in his environment are frequently bathed in green light. He might know that he is in the Matrix. But suppose that no such defeaters are present. Suppose that Fred has no reason to believe that perceptual conditions are sub-optimal. I claim that the "epistemically responsible" policy is to retain his perceptual belief in light of careful observation, without any need for elaborate reasoning.

⁶ Here I am eliding a very difficult question: what is it for a belief to be "based in the right way" on a perceptual experience? The nature of the "basing" relation is a central topic for epistemology. This topic confronts all epistemologists, not merely dogmatists.

⁷ One might hold that the standards for "epistemic responsibility" shift with the context. For instance, the standards might depend upon the thinker's practical interests. Or they might depend on the conversational context in which *we* evaluate whether the thinker is "epistemically responsible." If any such view is correct, then I should modify my analysis as follows: careful visual observation suffices for epistemic responsibility (relative to many common contexts).

I therefore reject Klein's claim that epistemic responsibility requires Fred to "provide a reason for thinking *b* is true." This formulation is hyperintellectualized. It assimilates epistemic responsibility to reason-giving within dialectic. Evaluating what to believe is not always a matter of constructing arguments. It is not always a matter of entering into "internal dialogue" with oneself. There are other epistemically responsible ways to evaluate propositions. Specifically, one can evaluate whether a perceptual belief is "worthy of being kept" not by pondering how one might convince an interlocutor but by *looking at the distal environment*. Klein rejects this procedure. He insists that explicit reasoning modeled after rational dialectic is the only epistemically responsible way to evaluate beliefs. He owes us an argument for that conclusion.

Despite my criticisms, I agree with a crucial aspect of Klein's discussion. Dogmatists should go beyond stating that perceptual experience immediately justifies perceptual belief. They should also explain *which features* of perceptual experience enable it provide immediate justification for perceptual belief. They should supplement their modest foundationalist epistemology with a convincing meta-epistemology. Quite plausibly, an adequate meta-epistemology will cite "truth-conducive" properties of perceptual experiences. Quite plausibly, then, dogmatists should undertake the task highlighted by Klein. They should demonstrate that appropriate perceptual experiences render perceptual beliefs more "likely" to be true. But they should not undertake this task for the reason articulated by Klein. They should not undertake it so as to strengthen their *justification* for perceptual beliefs. Rather, they should undertake it so as to achieve greater *philosophical understanding*. Burge (2003) and Peacocke (2004) have recently supplemented dogmatism with meta-epistemological theories that emphasize truth-

conducive aspects of perceptual experience. Additional philosophical research in this vein might illuminate the links between justification and mental content.

§5. Does foundationalism halt the regress?

Here is my verdict for each of the four regress problems considered above:

The static epistemic regress is the key regress for understanding the structure of justification. Epistemically basic beliefs appear to halt this regress quite satisfactorily.

The static dialectical regress is the least important of the four regress problems. To the extent that there is a genuine regress here, it probably reduces to the dynamic dialectical regress.

The dynamic dialectical regress is the key regress for understanding the structure of rational dialectic. Epistemically basic beliefs do not halt this regress. Their failure to halt the regress shows nothing about the epistemic justification of perceptual beliefs.

The dynamic epistemic regress is the trickiest case. Typically, there is no reason to embark upon this regress in the first place. If one *does* embark upon it, then one can “responsibly” halt with an epistemically basic perceptual belief. One need merely determine through careful observation that the perceptual belief merits retention.

I conclude that, contrary to what Klein suggests, the regress of justifications poses no serious threat to foundationalism.

To make my case, I have critiqued three epistemological mistakes. The first mistake is to blur the distinction between *the state of being justified* and *the process of justifying*. The second mistake is to elide *epistemic* and *dialectical* considerations. The third mistake, which underlies the first two, is to *hyperintellectualize* justification. Various philosophers have highlighted these mistakes for several decades. Nevertheless, all three mistakes persist in the current literature. We should not let fascination with sophisticated cognitive and dialectical capacities detract attention from epistemology's core subject matter: the epistemic status of unsophisticated non-philosophers.

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