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Skepticism, Foundationalism, and the Epistemic Regress Problem: Can Basic Beliefs Help to Answer the Epistemic Problem

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Skepticism, Foundationalism, and the Epistemic Regress Problem: Can basic beliefs help to answer the epistemic regress problem?

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Advisor: Dr. Andrew Cling

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The debate over the epistemic regress problem is one of the most philosophically challenging and important ones philosophers encounter. The problem directly affects whether or not we can have reasons for propositions. There are numerous theories postulated by philosophers that purport to solve the problem. The proposed responses can be divided into two groups, skeptics and anti-skeptics. Skepticism rejects all of the theories that argue we can have evidential support and, in its strongest version, claims that we cannot have reasons for propositions. This skeptical problem provides a significant challenge to anti-skeptical arguments because it is based on propositions the anti-skeptic seems to be committed to. Anti-skeptical views are attempts to respond to the epistemic regress problem. One such response is the foundationalist response. I propose that the foundationalist response provides the best answer to the epistemic regress problem because it allows for a stopping place in reasoning necessary to have non-arbitrary reasons for support. One problem a foundationalist faces is when determining what kinds of propositions could end the epistemic regress problem. I propose that the kinds of things that can end the regress of reasons without themselves requiring support are sensory states. In this paper I will consider the epistemic regress problem and the skeptical argument, and then defend a view of non-doxastic support proposed by Peter Markie.

The epistemic regress problem is an epistemological problem. Epistemology is the study of knowledge and related notions: the study of how and even whether we can have evidence-providing reasons for belief. The regress problem poses a problem about how and even whether we can have evidential support for propositions. Obviously, almost all people believe they can have evidential support for some things they believe. It seems that if we do not have any evidential support for some of the important things we believe, such as propositions about moral values, those beliefs look to be arbitrary, and we do not want our beliefs to be arbitrary. If our

beliefs are arbitrary, how will we know which beliefs are correct and which are false? How can we be responsible thinkers if our beliefs are arbitrary? In a society that values being able to choose between right and wrong, allowing arbitrary beliefs is unacceptable, at least in the areas in which we think it is necessary to be able to discern between a wrong and a right. The epistemic regress problem poses a significant challenge to our answers to what makes our reasons non-arbitrary. It challenges whether or not we can have evidential support for propositions. The regress problem attacks a specific kind of support. We can propose to use anything we want as support regardless of whether it is actual evidence or not. The epistemic regress problem wants to examine what it takes to have evidential support for a proposition. Evidential support is support that makes belief in the proposition supported more likely to be true. Good evidential support ought to make it more reasonable to believe whatever it is the evidence is supporting. For example, if the proposition is "Jack ate a carrot today," evidential support would be something that makes it more reasonable to believe he is orange such as "Mary saw him eating a carrot at lunch."

If the skeptical argument succeeds, it would be the case that we do not have at least a certain kind of support for our beliefs that we would like to have. Since we value having beliefs that are not arbitrary, the problem is important. By further considering our commitments about evidential support, the regress problem forces us to make difficult decisions about what kinds of support we can actually have. Each of these commitments is used to formulate the skeptical problem, and eventually, the skeptical argument that is one response to the epistemic regress problem. So, let us look at the epistemic regress problem. In order to evaluate the skeptical argument, I will first have to formulate the skeptical problem that constitutes the epistemic regress problem. The skeptical problem is different from the skeptical argument because the

skeptical argument is a proposed answer to the skeptical problem. The skeptical problem is simply the set of propositions that anti-skeptics seem to be committed to. In order to have the most powerful version of the skeptical problem, I will be using the version of the problem as set forth in Andrew Cling's article, "Reasons, Regresses, and Tragedy: The Epistemic Regress Problem and the Problem of the Criterion."[1] Cling sets up the skeptical problem as a set of independently plausible but jointly inconsistent propositions. By this it is meant that each of these propositions is a commitment an anti-skeptic seems to be committed to, but that cannot all be true. The three propositions are:

1. "It is possible that some proposition is evidentially supported by a proposition."

2. "Necessarily, if a proposition P1 is evidentially supported by a proposition P2, then there is a proposition P3 that evidentially supports P2."

3. "Necessarily, if it must be that proposition P1 is evidentially supported by a proposition P2 only if P1 and P2 are the first two members of an endless sequence of propositions, each of which is evidentially supported by its successor, then no proposition can be evidentially supported by any proposition."[2]

Cling posits these propositions as individually plausible but jointly inconsistent. Consequently, they constitute a paradox. You cannot consistently accept all three. So, let us look first at what must be done to get out of the problem and then at why the premises at least seem plausible to the anti-skeptic who wants to argue we can have evidential support for propositions.

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[1] A Cling, "Reasons, Regresses, and Tragedy: The Epistemic Regress Problem and the Problem of the Criterion," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 46, no. 4 (2009): 333–346.
[2] Ibid., 334.

In order to get out of this paradox, you must reject at least one of the propositions. You cannot consistently accept all three propositions. If you think proposition 2 and Proposition 3 are true, you must believe that proposition 1 is false because 2 & 3 entails that 1 is false. If (1) evidential support is a possibility and (2) evidence- providing reasons must be supported, then you must believe infinite regresses do not block evidential support, not (3). You can form a deductively valid argument for the negation of any of these propositions by taking two of the propositions as true as your premises and taking the negation of the third as your conclusion, as shown.

The first proposition of the epistemic regress problem as posited by Cling is "It is possible that some proposition is evidentially supported by a proposition."[3] This claim seems to be the most simple and plausible of the three statements. This is also the statement which, if rejected, commits us to the view that we cannot have evidential support. The plausibility of this proposition can be seen through our judicial system. When a prosecutor proposes proposition E, that Edward murdered Bella, we believe he can have evidential support for this proposition. Our law system is based upon the belief that we can have evidence for propositions. People are convicted on the basis of evidence which a judge or jury deems to be evidentially supporting enough to prove something like assertion E. In order for our system to be non-arbitrary, we must be able to have evidence that provides support for propositions. Without evidence in a court of law, the decisions of the court would be arbitrary, a fact that we certainly do not wish to be the case. It seems necessary that in order to keep our courts from being arbitrary, we must admit that there can be evidential support for a proposition. This premise must be plausible and is a defining commitment of the anti-skeptic.

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[3] Ibid.

The second proposition of the skeptical problem deals with what kinds of things are required for good evidence-providing reasons. To restate the exact proposition as Cling does it is, "Necessarily, if it must be that proposition P1 is evidentially supported by a proposition P2, only if P1 and P2 are the first two members of an endless sequence of propositions, each of which is evidentially supported by its successor, then no proposition can be evidentially supported by any proposition."[4] Essentially, this proposition says evidence-providing reasons must themselves be supported by good reasons. Once again, I will use our judicial system as an example. With the previously stated proposition E, suppose we have evidence P1 for proposition E. (2) states that in order for this evidence P1 to provide evidential support for proposition E, P1 must have a proposition P2 that provides as evidential support for it. So, let P1 be the proposition *Edward was arguing with Bella the morning of the murder*. In order for this proposition P1 to support E, P1 must also have proposition P2, make it *Bella's neighbor saw Edward and Bella arguing from her front porch*. Now it seems P1 can function as evidential support for proposition E. However, this continuing need for evidential support will lead to problems when considering the third proposition of the skeptical problem, but for now, we may conclude that in order for our evidence to function as we assume that it does in a court of law, in which we attempt to uphold and apply societal and moral values that are near and dear to our belief systems, this premise is plausible.

The third proposition, "Necessarily, if it must be that any proposition P1 is evidentially supported by a proposition P2 only if P1 and P2 are the first two members of an endless sequence of propositions each of which is evidentially supported by any proposition."[5] If you reject this premise, you are more than likely arguing for some form of Infinitism or Coherentism.

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[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.

However, this premise looks plausible as by looking further at proposition E's support system; if (2)—Reasons Require Reasons— is true, then we must have an endless regress whenever we have any reason for belief because we believe we can have reasons (1) and we always need a reason (2). If we always need support and we have supported beliefs, we must have infinite regress of reasons supporting our reasons. There are two ways assert we can have evidence this way, through circles of reasons or by an infinite sequence of reasons. In order to have a supported proposition, we would either have to have an endless supply of reasons or we would have to be justified in believing circular arguments. I do not believe either of these can give support.

In the case of an infinite sequence of reasons the regress begins to appear because for P2 to provide evidential support for P1, according to this premise P2 must also be evidentially supported by a proposition P3, make this proposition *Bella's neighbor has very good eyesight*. We begin to see that if proposition (2) is true, we are going to have an infinite sequence of propositions each of which is supported by its successor because we will have to add P4 to support P3 and continue on *ad infinitum* in order to keep from convicting Edward on the basis of arbitrary evidence. However, at this point there is a problem. As proposition (3) states, if having reasons always require an endless regress, then we cannot have reasons. If this kind of evidential support were required, our judicial system would never come to a decision. Unfortunately, if an infinite regress was required, we would have to have an attorney stand in front of a judge and list reasons forever in order to continue supporting the proposition which was previously stated. Edward's murder trial would never end. Also, since we are finite beings, we could never give an infinite sequence of reasons, and therefore, we could never have support since we would never be able to support any of the propositions we had already asserted in support of the original

belief. Thankfully, in the case of our legal system we do have a stopping point which we believe to be non-arbitrary more often than not. An infinite sequence of reasons could never give support because you could never have an infinite number of reasons. Edward's imaginary murder trial will come to an end because we do not believe the prosecuting attorney would have to have an infinite regress of reasons in order to support.

An infinite circle of reasons is not able to provide support either. This type of reasoning is fatally flawed because at some point the proposition being supported becomes support for itself. For example, the support for *Edward killed Bella* cannot be *Edward killed Bella.* If we could be justified in our belief of a proposition by asserting the proposition itself as support, we could be justified in believing anything. We do seem to believe there are some beliefs that are not justified, and if we do believe as such, we must not be able to justify every belief. In the end, proposition (3) is plausible because either we would never have support for anything or we could be justified in believing anything. We would have to come to the end of a discussion by running out of evidentially-supporting propositions, never having support, or supporting a proposition by asserting itself as justification. We do not take any of the exhaustion of evidential-support, a never-ending chain of support as evidential support, or self-justifying support as good solutions to the regress problem. I think the anti-skeptic must admit that this premise looks plausible as well. Now we are able to formulate the skeptical argument and assess its soundness in answering the skeptical problem.

Now that we have an idea what the skeptical problem is, I must formulate the skeptical argument. The skeptical argument arises if you assert that it is necessary that an evidentially supporting proposition is also itself evidentially supported (2) and infinite regresses of propositions cannot provide evidential support (3). It follows from these claims that it is not

possible to have evidential support, not (1).[6] This is the proposed skeptical response to the epistemic regress problem. The skeptic proposes there is no good anti-skeptical answer. Solving the skeptical problem is a fruitless endeavor as the anti-skeptic is trying to solve an unsolvable problem. More simply stated, the skeptic proposes that (1) is false, and that a proposition P is never evidentially supported for S. The skeptical argument concludes we cannot have evidential support— the kind of support that the anti-skeptic wants— for any proposition.

Since the skeptical argument is a deductively valid, we must find the problem in the skeptical argument. The first objection to the skeptical argument I think is relevant is that the argument itself is self-defeating by undermining its premises through its conclusion. While I do not believe premise 2 is true, I will set aside that objection for the moment and look at what is happens with the skeptical argument itself as it is constructed above. A skeptic undermines his premises because he does not want to commit himself to his conclusion being evidenced by his premises. A skeptic would say that he is able to assert the premises of the skeptical argument without himself having any support for them whatsoever, and that his argument is still a problem for the anti-skeptic. All he must be committed to is the fact that other people, anti-skeptics, have formulated a logical system in which if the premises are true, whatever logically follows from those premises is deductively valid. The skeptic thinks he gets out of committing himself to the use of evidential support in his argument because he can assert the premises based on the fact that they support his conclusion, but they do not provide the kind of evidential, non-arbitrary support the anti-skeptic proposes we can have. It could also be argued the skeptic has a kind of reason, a non-evidence providing reason, which in a way supports his conclusion without contradicting his mistrust of the anti-skeptics' evidence providing reasons.

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[6] Ibid.

However, soundness in the anti-skeptic's system of logic is different from validity. In order for an argument to be sound, the argument must be logically valid, as the skeptical argument is, but it must also have true premises. Simple validity does not imply the truth of the conclusion while soundness does. A valid argument can be made for anything by using the valid argument form modus ponens. You could state MP1, if the moon is round, then popsicles do not exist. Then you assert MP2, the moon is round, and you can validly conclude MP3 that popsicles do not exist. However, although this is a valid argument, the premises are not true and therefore, the argument is not sound. By not committing himself to his premises providing evidential support for his premises, the skeptic commits himself to the fact that he cannot show his argument is sound. For, by showing that his premises evidence his conclusion, he would be committing himself to evidential support, but skeptics do not believe in evidential support. The skeptic concedes that of course this is the case because the skeptic does not believe we can have evidential-support anyway.

I do not see how the skeptic is arguing anything more substantive than any argument which can be deductively proved but untrue. A valid argument can conclude anything, even false propositions. The argument itself is an if-then proposition. If the skeptic will not commit himself either to the truth of his premises, which would undermine his argument since evidential support not being possible and some propositions are supported cannot both be true at the same time, we have no reason to believe skepticism can be true. If it is not possible there is some proposition somewhere that is evidentially supported, then it also cannot be the case that a supporting proposition is supported. If the skeptic does not commit himself to the fact that his premises could be true, he cannot give any reason that his argument is sound, meaning anti-skeptic can dismiss it as if it were an argument for the non-existence of popsicles. In other

words, a valid proof does not make popsicles no longer exist just as a valid argument that there can be no reasons does not exclude reasons from existence. If the skeptic commits himself to the truth of his premises, he commits himself to contradiction since his conclusion cannot be true along with either of his premises. This skeptical paradox leads to either contradiction or irrelevance.

A skeptic could respond to this argument by arguing that of course this is true. Showing that this problem with the kinds of commitments anti-skeptics are committed to leads to contradiction only further shows the skeptical argument's power. The argument shows that if the anti-skeptic is committed to both (2) and (3) being true, then he is caught in the skeptical web. The skeptic can conclude that when leading to a contradiction, under the accepted rules of logic, anything follows. Therefore, we cannot definitively and non-arbitrarily conclude anything. In this case, the anti-skeptics conclusion, although valid by the rules of inference, is not more valid than the skeptic's conclusion that there is not evidential support. Since the anti-skeptic is the one tied most strongly to non-arbitrariness, this is a problem for the anti-skeptic while it is not a problem for the skeptic because he believes we cannot have evidence-providing support for propositions in the first place. A skeptic may state the fact that the only way to get out of the regress problem leads to contradiction shows that our convictions about evidential support are completely erroneous. The skeptic states that the problem arises out of the anti-skeptics own commitments.

I do not think this response pulls a skeptic out of the skeptical paradox or shows the anti-skeptic's responses cannot be sound. We can never know if the skeptical argument about the epistemic regress problem is correct. As long as an anti-skeptic rejects either (2) or (3), the anti-skeptic is not committed to the truth of both (2) and (3) which the skeptic uses to create the

paradox. If the anti-skeptic commits himself to both (2) and (3), then he must conclude that he does not have a reason. We do not need to blow up the system of evidential support for an argument that is a reminder of what we cannot do. An anti-skeptic is not committed to both (2) and (3), or he is a skeptic. The anti-skeptic proposes to reject either (2) or (3) in order to get out of the paradox while the skeptic remains in the position of arguing that if an anti-skeptic commits himself to all both (2) and (3), then skepticism emerges. The skeptic remains in a position of lying in wait for an anti-skeptic to mistakenly commit himself to both (2) and (3). The skeptical argument is a good reminder to the anti-skeptic of the kinds of things he cannot commit himself to as long as he wants to assert that he has evidential support for propositions. The problem then for the anti-skeptic is to show a plausible account including the rejection of (2) or (3). In other words, whether the skeptical argument fails due to contradiction is a moot point because if the anti-skeptic is successful, he can show a sound argument whereas the skeptic could never do so.

If the skeptical argument does not succeed, we must turn our attention to which anti-skeptical response might answer the epistemic regress problem more effectively. I believe foundationalism provides the best answer to the epistemic regress problem. It is formed by accepting (1) and (3) as true and negating (2) as the conclusion. It could be state as follows:

(1) It is possible that some proposition is evidentially supported.

(2) <u>An Infinite Regress cannot provide evidential support.</u>_____

(3) It is not necessary that every evidentially supported proposition is evidentially supported.

This view is a version of Foundationalism. The foundationalist accepts the claim that we can have evidential support for our propositions and that endless regresses and circular reasoning

cannot provide evidential support, but the foundationalist rejects the statement that we must have evidential support for all our evidence-providing reasons. The foundationalist asserts that we can have states that provide support for propositions where the belief- supporting the proposition is not itself supported. The foundationalist believes that there are states that provide support for beliefs that are supported by states that do not themselves need support. These states then help to end the epistemic regress. Stated another way, the foundationalist believes it can be the case that P1 is supported by proposition P2, but P2 does not have support from any proposition P3 and does not need it. Instead, proposition P2 is supported by a state that makes belief in P2 justified, but the state supporting P2 does not itself need to be justified because it is not itself a belief. We can use P2 as evidential support for P1 based simply on the fact that P2 is adequately supported by a state that does not need justification. By positing these kinds of states, the foundationalist attempts to solve the epistemic regress problem. I believe this view is the best response to the epistemic regress problem.

One specific aspect of the foundationalist account is the basing relation between the non-doxastic states and the basic beliefs they support. I believe the basing relation should be divided into two separate categories, one for contingent empirical propositions and one for non-contingent propositions. Each category needs its own separate account for how a basing reason works. This could also be stated as asserting we need separate accounts of basic belief for contingent propositions— which can be based on sensory experiences— and propositions about necessary truths. These should be separate because the way we receive each is different, and as such, the justifications for belief will be different just as the means of understanding either one is different. Correct thought processes, intuitions, are expressed on the understanding of non-contingent truths about the world and deducing from those propositions what follows.

Mathematics is the most common example of this kind of reasoning. On the other hand, justified contingent empirical beliefs are expressed and understood from sensory perceptions of the various things happening around us at any time. These perceptions can be expressed in propositions, but their justification does not lie in expression in propositions, it comes from something outside propositions completely. Another difference between the intuited and sensed justifications is the actor involved. The actor in any intuited justification can be the thinker himself or truths like math and logic. Math and logic are both non-contingent truths which we can gain through sense perception. These truths lie within the mind of the actor or in the outside world. In contrast, sense perceptions are *of* or *about* only things outside of the actor himself. None of these truths can be found in the mind. The appearance of the color blue is received from something outside of our minds. We receive the experience of blue from things, not from the action of our own mind. We do not act upon the color blue; the color blue is received from something separate from us.

Having considered what a foundationalist account proposes to do, it is apparent that the notion of a basic belief is integral to any foundationalist account. A basic belief is any reason which on its own does not receive or need to receive support from any other proposition or propositions for its justification. By avoiding propositional evidential support, a basic belief terminates an infinite regress of reasons and becomes the basing belief for a non- circular series of justified propositions that could be any finite length. The problem of a basic belief becomes evident when it is asserted that the belief must not be based on any propositional content. The very attribute which makes it a possibility to end a regress also makes it difficult to explain and account for in a way that avoids propositional content. Because our minds work in such

linguistic fashion, it is difficult to explain or imagine how we would have justification without using any kind of propositions.

The problem that would arise if basing reasons had propositional content is devastating to foundationalist accounts. The difficulty arises out of the second proposition of the epistemic regress problem. If every reason must be supported by another reason, an allegedly basic belief with propositional content seems to itself need to be justified. The problem would then become that the reason which is asserted as basic then cannot give support unless the belief itself was justified by something, and if this were the case, we would not have an ending point in the regress of reasons. The regress would continue, and the foundationalist would need another basic belief. In order to circumvent this predicament, many foundationalists have proposed that our basing reasons do not have propositional content, and therefore, do not need justification. The argument becomes that our most basic means for justification are states that are imposed on us without any action on our part. We can use them as reasons in our deliberations without representing them as propositions which would require justification.

Two of the most interesting Foundationalist accounts I have encountered are Peter Markie and Paul Moser's accounts. Each takes the view that non- doxastic states can be evidence for basic reasons, but the states themselves do not need to be justified. Non- doxastic states themselves are simply states we have of which no propositional content is involved. In justifying our beliefs about perceptual states, both Markie and Moser believe these kinds of states can be basing reasons without a need for propositional content. They are both attempting to circumvent the problem of propositional content in basing reasons. Both theories are interesting and useful, but I will be focusing more on Markie's view than Moser's.

Moser's view is slightly different from Markie's in that he believes our basic beliefs are about our mental states. For Moser, instead of the proposition "I am seeing something blue" being basic, the proposition "I am being appeared to bluely" is basic. The thing that is appearing bluely, whatever it may be, may or may not actually be blue. In fact, whether the thing is blue or not cannot be basic on Moser's view. We do not know with certainty whether the thing is blue, but we do know that the thing we are observing is appearing to be blue to the observer. The only thing that could be basic is the state of belief in our mind that "I am perceiving something bluely." Instead of having basic beliefs about propositions about the world, we only have basic beliefs about propositions about how things appear in the world.[7]

On Markie's view, non-doxastic states justify beliefs in propositions about the external world. Whereas Moser believes statements about how we are appeared to are basic, Markie believes we can use non-doxastic perceptual states to justify propositions about things that are actually present in the world. His statement of how an experience is able to evidence a proposition without the need for justification is as follows:

> S- "S's experience E evidences that p for S if and only if (i) S has E, (ii) E is an instance of a phenomenological type T such that S has an epistemic norm that directs S to form the belief that p on the basis of T type experiences in the absence of defeaters, and (iii) S lacks an epistemic norm that directs S to form the belief that not-p on the basis of T type experiences in the absence of defeaters."[8]

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[7] P.K. Moser, *Empirical Justification*, 1st ed. (Springer, 1985), 141–210.
[8] Peter J. Markie, "Nondoxastic Perceptual Evidence," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 68, no. 3 (May 1, 2004): 530.

Let us take each component of Markie's principle separately. The first component of the principle is fairly straightforward and uncontroversial. If you are to explain how some experience evidences a proposition or belief, it seems necessary that you first have the experience proposed to provide evidence. All Markie is saying in clause (i) is that the perceiver, in this case denoted as S, must have whatever experience E that is supposed to be basic before that experience can actually evidence a proposition. For instance, suppose a blind man purported to have had an experience that he saw an orange elephant which was based on the basic experience of seeming to see an orange elephant. Markie would reject this inference because the blind man, by definition of his blindness, could not have had the sensuous experience as of an orange elephant. On the other hand, if a man with visual experiences had an experience as of an orange elephant, the first qualification of Markie's principle would be met. This clause could be met as long as the perceiver, S, had an experience E. Any kind of experience will do and it does not matter yet whether that experience is of any particular type.

The second component of Markie's principle is more complicated. Here Markie introduces the idea of a norm. I will address norms in more depth later, but for now a simple definition of the kind of idea Markie has in mind will suffice. A norm for Markie and many foundationalists is a type of "know how" that allows us to infer from basic beliefs in light of sensory experiences. It is important that this norm does not require that one believe it just as basic reasons cannot have propositional content to avoid furthering the regress. For if norms play a role in justification and must themselves believed, then (2) implies that they must be supported. This continues the regress. These norms can be correct or incorrect, and they play an essential role in belief-forming processes. So, Markie is saying in clause (ii) that an experience of some sensible type, be it sense, smell, sight, etc., must occur which allows the perceiver to put

to use a norm that permits the believer to form appropriate belief. This norm must coincide with the sensory experience being put into use. You could not use a norm for touch to justify a belief about sight.

Once the attention of the perceiver has been directed to this sensory state and a norm, the perceiver is justified in his belief as long as the believer does not have a norm that conflicts with his belief. In this instance, by "defeater" it is meant that the perceiver's belief in the attention grabbing sensation is not in some way already defeated. For instance, a perceiver might be defeated in his belief "That car is blue" on the basis of his experience because he has the defeater that he has just been told his sense of sight is always incorrect. It would be improper to conclude on the basis of a norm assuming that his sensation was correct when he has been told his sight is always deceptive. In this instance, the believer would have been justified in previous inferences about his sight because as of yet, he did not have the defeater of his sight being faulty. In the past, the believer had a justified but false belief. In this instance, the believer would not even have a justified false belief. The believer would have an unjustified belief because of the defeater for the belief sanctioned by the norm he put into use. In essence, Markie is saying that when a perceiver has an experience of a certain type and has a norm for forming beliefs given experiences of that type, the perceiver must not have a defeater for his belief to be justified. If the perceiver does not have defeating evidence for the particular belief he is forming, the second aspect of Markie's account is met.

Third, Markie flips the second requirement of clause (ii) in order to account for the law of non-contradiction. He wants to be sure that a perceiver could not have a properly evidenced belief when the perceiver also has a properly evidenced belief directly to the contrary. Markie wants to be able to circumvent justified inconsistent beliefs by stating the perceiver does not

have evidence if he has an epistemic norm directing him to believe a proposition incompatible with a given proposition. A believer cannot have an evidence- providing belief that relies on a norm forcing him to conclude P when he also has a norm telling him to conclude not-P. Markie states, "If we have two contradictory norms, one calling for the belief that p on the basis of an experience and on calling for the belief that not-p on that very same basis, then the experience is not evidence for us."[9]

As in the example of the believer with ineffectual sight, his belief "The car is blue" would not be evidence for him if the perceiver had formed norms which conclude both p and not p. If we assume that the perceiver got a second opinion on his eyesight where another doctor concluded his sight was not faulty, the perceiver might form another norm that he should believe the things he sees are truly the color he is perceiving. Based on that knowledge, the perceiver would have a norm directing him to believe both p (the object is actually the perceived color) and not-p (the object is not actually the perceived color) the next time he perceived a colored object. Markie would say the perceiver is not allowed to use this perception as evidence because the belief is not unequivocal. He must discard his belief that the car is blue because the believer already has a norm established for the type of experience he is experiencing which directs him to form contradictory beliefs. Therefore, if the color blind perceiver concluded "That car is blue" on the basis of the norms he formed, he would not have an appropriately formed belief from his experience.

In analyzing whether or not the proposed norm has a defeater, someone who does not hold a foundationalist view might object saying that the decision between norms constitutes a kind of normative judgment about the norms which could be construed as a normative judgment

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[9] Markie, 544.

as to the value of the norms proposed. This normative judgment between the two norms would then have to be justified leading to a continuation of the regress. However, I think this kind of objection would be mistaken and shows the importance of Markie's statement that with competing norms, the perceiver does not have evidence for his sensation. In making the decision to discard his evidence for a sensation turning into evidence, the perceiver does not have to make any normative decision about the norms themselves. The perceiver only has to have a contradictory norm for his belief to not constitute evidence. It does not matter if the perceiver thinks there are conflicting norms, but it does matter if the perceiver actually has conflicting norms. In which case, the perceiver is not justified in his belief. If Markie did think the perceiver had to make a decision on which competing norm should be chosen, then it could be argued that the regress must continue on the basis of the normative judgment between norms being made.

Another objection to this kind of view is has to do with how we can have the kind of apprehensions required to realize we have experiences of the type Markie uses as an unjustified justifier for his norms. It could be argued that in order to understand sensory perceptions, we must at some point turn those perceptions into propositions. However, I believe these empirical basing reasons could be said to arise out of us before we even have the opportunity to form any propositional statement about them. Of course they can eventually be formed into propositions, but that fact itself does not mean we cannot justify the propositions through sensations without first putting them in the form of propositions. These perceptions are passively received and not reflected upon. They are immediately apparent because we are unable to ignore them, but we do not form beliefs about what these sensations mean until we have already received it. For instance, there is a headache and there is the feeling you have before you realize it is a sensation.

This feeling or sensation you have is the kind of sensation I believe Markie means to advance as unjustified but potentially itself justifying. We cannot deny it and it does not have to be reflected upon, it is imposed upon us. So, we might be incorrect about our having a headache because beliefs about the sensation may not be justified and our reasons for it may not be correct. However, we are justified in our knowing that we have the feeling that we have a headache if our norm directs us to that belief without defeaters.

A different possible objection asks how we get from these non-doxastic states to any useful ideas about the world or beliefs about things in the world. They might object that these non-belief states are so narrow as to not be of any use, but I believe the purpose of these broad, general states leads to more specific beliefs. Markie's principle S makes explicit use of a norm in order to bridge this gap, so further consideration of what norms might be is important. Norms as I understand them are kinds of ways of action which we acquire for many different kinds of things, and we subsequently use them when performing certain actions without making any determination about the justification of the norm. We do not have to think to apply them or make any judgment about their justification when we use them. They seem to be similar to reactions but in the sense that we use them without thinking instead of the strictly physical sense. We can reflect on them afterward to see what norm we might have followed. However, it must be seen acknowledged that anything coming after S could potentially be incorrect, and the inference from sensory states to propositions could be incorrect. On the other hand, if the correct norms are acquired, then the decisions that follow from S will be justified.

This is not to say that the norm is ingrained, there is also a justified norm as there is correct and incorrect logical inferences from justified propositions. However, unlike the basic states S uses, we can deny the correct norms used to reason from non-propositional basic states

to propositional language. Consider a man with a headache, call him Alfred, who infers from his state of pain in his head through an incorrect norm that pain in his head means he is having a heart attack means that he is justified in believing he is having a heart attack. Whatever norm Alfred used to get from the basic sensory state to the proposition "I am having a heart attack" is not the correct norm. This is made clear because we seem to believe we can distinguish medically between a heart attack and a headache. There is a correct interpretation of Alfred's pain, and he has not used it. There could be multiple incorrect norms Alfred followed to get to the heart attack conclusion. It does not matter which incorrect norm he used, but it does matter that there is a correct norm for his basic state which he did not follow.

The epistemic regress problem is complex. There are objections and concerns that come with every epistemological theory. There are multiple theories that I have not addressed such as Reliabilism, Contextualism, and Coherentism. In this paper have tried to object to the skeptical argument and defend the foundationalist argument. I believe the skeptical argument fails in its construction and we could never have a good reason to believe it. As long as the anti-skeptic does not commit himself to both (2) and (3) of the epistemic regress problem, the skeptical argument remains dormant. Foundationalism, a rejection of (2) of the epistemic regress problem, circumvents the paradox created by the epistemic regress problem and allows that we can have evidential support. The reason we can have this support is because basic sensory states provide justification while they do not need justification. The argument for these states brings multiple objections, but I believe I have answered a few of the criticisms of them. There will not cease to be new objections to the foundationalist view and the basing reason, but it is my belief that Foundationalism can withstand skeptical and other anti-skeptical attacks.

Works Cited

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