Basic Reasons and First Philosophy: A Coherentist View of Reasons

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Abstract

This paper develops and defends a coherentist account of reasons. I develop three core ideas for this defense: a distinction between basic reasons and noninferential justification, the plausibility of the neglected argument against first philosophy, and an emergent account of reasons. These three ideas form the backbone for a credible coherentist view of reasons. I work toward this account by formulating and explaining the basic reasons dilemma. This dilemma reveals a wavering attitude that coherentists have had toward basic reasons. More importantly, the basic reasons dilemma focuses our attention on the central problems that afflict coherentist views of basic beliefs. By reflecting on the basic reasons dilemma, I formulate three desiderata that any viable coherentist account of basic beliefs must satisfy. I argue that the account on offer satisfies these desiderata.

What has happened to epistemic coherentism? Once a prominent epistemological view held by such luminaries as Nelson Goodman (1965; 1978), W. V. O. Quine (1960; 1970), Wilfrid Sellars (1963), and John Rawls (1999),[1] it

[1](Rawls 1999, 15–19) discusses the method of reflective equilibrium, explicitly noting both that this method is coherentist and that it comes from Nelson Goodman's attempted justification of the rules of deductive and inductive inference. Also see (Daniels 1996, 2008) for discussion on the method of reflective equilibrium.

is now widely marginalized.[2] Recent discussion on coherentism has focused either on the failures of probabilistic measures of coherence[3] or on answers to the widespread objections to coherentism.[4] There has been scant, if any, attention given to arguing *for* coherentism. One of my aims in this paper is to uncover a neglected argument for coherentism, an argument that also provides the key to formulating an adequate coherentist account of reasons. I begin my discussion by presenting a central difficulty in previous coherentist accounts–the "basic reasons dilemma." This dilemma reveals a wavering attitude that coherentists have had toward basic reasons. Moreover, the dilemma focuses our attention on the central problem coherentists must face. In the remaining sections of the paper, I develop three core ideas for a coherentist account of reasons: the distinction between basic reasons and noninferential justification, the plausibility of the neglected argument against first philosophy, and an emergent theory of reasons.

It is vitally important for a coherentist epistemology to have an adequate theoretical perspective on the nature of reasons. As I will argue, one of the central problems with coherentist views to date has been an ambivalent attitude toward basic reasons and, corresponding to this, an inadequate theoretical perspective on basic reasons. My aim in this paper is to settle this issue for coherentism. I present and argue for a coherentist account of reasons that is well motivated and distinct from foundationalism. The upshot of this paper is that the position of Goodman, Quine, Sellars, and Rawls is more plausible than recent history suggests.

1   The Basic Reasons Dilemma

A basic reason is a regress stopper. It is a noninferentially justified proposition that supports some other propositions. Coherentists face a dilemma concerning basic reasons: either the view sanctions basic reasons or it does not. If

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[2]For example, Timothy Williamson's *Knowledge and Its Limits* (2000) contains no mention of coherentism. Michael Bergmann's *Justification without Awareness* (2006) contains no discussion of coherentism. Probably the most extensive treatment of coherentism in a recent book occurs in BonJour and Sosa's *Epistemic Justification* (2003), but it is discussed primarily as a dialectical foil. At the close of his chapter on coherentism, BonJour writes: "Even the foregoing litany does not really exhaust or probably even come very close to exhausting the full range of objections to coherentism, but it surely suffices to make clear beyond any serious doubts the untenability of the central coherentist view" (BonJour and Sosa 2003, 59). Sosa takes a more optimistic view of some coherentist themes (2006, 224–226).

[3](Klein and Warfield 1994; Huemer 1997). For a book-length discussion and other references see (Olsson 2005).

[4](see Kvanvig 1995b,a, 2008; Kvanvig and Riggs 1992; Conee 1995).

coherentism sanctions basic reasons, then it is just another form of foundationalism and will succumb to arguments designed to undermine foundationalism, specifically the Sellarsian dilemma and the problem of arbitrariness. If, however, coherentism prohibits basic reasons, then it falls prey to circularity objections. On either horn, the prospects of a coherentist epistemology look bleak.

1.1   The First Horn

The first horn of the dilemma argues for the impossibility of a coherentist view that allows for basic reasons. One reason for this is terminological: any view counts as anticoherentist if it allows for basic reasons. The other, more important, reason is that the arguments designed to motivate coherentism over its foundationalist rivals demonstrate the impossibility of basic reasons. Let us briefly examine these arguments. I argue later that any form of coherentism should be consistent with the conclusions of the Sellarsian dilemma and the problem of arbitrariness.

The Sellarsian dilemma targets foundationalist attempts to end the regress of reasons in a nondoxastic, experiential state.[5] In its most basic form, the dilemma runs as follows. Either experience has truth-evaluable content or it does not. If experience lacks truth-evaluable content, then it cannot serve as a reason for believing that a claim is true. If, however, experience has truth-evaluable content, then we need an additional reason for thinking that the content of experience is true. On either horn, experience cannot function as a basic reason. If the Sellarsian dilemma is defensible, it constitutes a powerful weapon in the coherentists arsenal.

The second argument against the possibility of basic reasons is the problem of arbitrariness.[6] The problem is that it is arbitrary for a putative item of empirical knowledge to rest on a contingent claim for which no additional reason is offered. That is, for any contingent claim, there will be a class of skeptical scenarios in which it would seem to us as if the claim were true even though it is false.[7] In these skeptical cases, ones belief is reliably false; ones belief is not based on truth-indicative grounds. Consequently, because basic reasons permit these skeptical scenarios and provide no reason to think

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[5]See Sellars's essay "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" in (Sellars 1963) and (BonJour 1985, ch. 4).

[6](Klein 1999, 2000, 2004) has rehabilitated this old objection to foundationalism. Klein's discussion has generated a number of responses. See (Huemer 2003; Bergmann 2004; Howard-Snyder 2005; Howard-Snyder and Coffman 2006)

[7]Timothy Williamson's (2000) antiluminosity argument provides one powerful consideration for this.

that these scenarios fail to obtain, it is epistemically arbitrary to continue to insist that the basic reason is nonetheless epistemically potent. Unless there is some additional reason to think that a skeptical scenario fails to obtain, it is objectionable to use a basic reason as a premise for another belief.[8]

Both of these arguments lead to the conclusion that basic reasons are impossible. One way to stress this point is to restate the Sellarsian dilemma in terms of basic reasons instead of experience. Either a basic reason has truth-evaluable content or it does not. If a basic reason lacks truth-evaluable content, then it cannot function as a reason to believe the world is one way rather than another. If, however, a basic reason has truth-evaluable content, then we need an additional reason for thinking that its content is indeed true.[9] Either way there cannot be basic reasons.

William Lycan's "explanatory coherentism", developed in *Judgment and Justification* (1988), succumbs to the first horn of the dilemma. Lycan's coherentism falls in line with the explanatory coherentist accounts of Goodman, Quine, Sellars, and Rawls by including a commitment to conservatism, the thesis that the mere holding of a belief confers some epistemic justification on its content.[10] As Lycan explains, conservatism is required because unless there is some justification for the data used for explanatory reasoning, the view succumbs to the circularity objection (164–165). Even though Lycan distinguishes his view from foundationalism–saying that conservatism yields "only a credibility value of $.5 + \epsilon$, where ϵ is vanishingly close to zero" (171)–it clearly implies that there is some noninferential justification. In a more recent paper, Lycan explicitly states that his brand of explanatory coherentism implies that "at least some noninferential beliefs will be justified" (2002, 431). Keith Lehrer, remarking on the conservative nature of these forms of coherentism, charges that this amounts to abandoning the theory of justification under consideration (Lehrer 2000, 109).[11] It appears then that any coherentist view that attempts to surmount the circularity objection by adopting conservatism lands back in the foundationalist camp and, more importantly, is besieged by the Sellarsian dilemma and the problem of arbitrariness.

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[8](White 2006) presses a similar problem against some accounts of noninferential justification.

[9]One reply to this argument is that we have infallible access to the truth of some claims. Unfortunately, we lack this kind of access; see (Williamson 2000, ch 4); (Poston 2010); and (Poston and Meeker 2010).

[10]See (Quine 1960; Sellars 1963; Harman 1986)

[11]Lehrer explicitly discusses Quine's and Sellars's attempts to conserve the observation statements.

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1.2   The Second Horn

The second horn of the dilemma argues for the impossibility of a coherentist view without basic reasons. The rationale is that without basic reasons coherentism falls prey to circularity objections.[12] This problem plagued Laurence BonJour's attempt to argue for coherentism and eventually proved to be the reason for his conversion to foundationalism.[13] In his defense of coherentism, BonJour argued that the very feature of a cognitive state that enables it to function as a reason–its assertive propositional content–creates the need for it to be justified (1985, 78). But later on, reflecting on the fact that the data used in coherence reasoning must itself be justified, BonJour recognized that coherence alone cannot justify the data (101–106). At the time, BonJour proposed "the doxastic presumption" as a way out of this difficulty. The doxastic presumption stated that ones metabeliefs–ones beliefs *about* ones beliefs–are true. But BonJour now recognizes that this move is a hopeless attempt to get around the basic problem of justifying the data used in coherence reasoning (BonJour 1997, 14). Thus, apart from a convincing reply to the circularity objection, coherentism cannot get off the ground.

1.3   Summing Up

The basic reasons dilemma argues for the impossibility of coherentism. The dilemma illustrates that coherentists face pressures that both push them in the direction of providing a general argument against basic reasons and pull them back to acknowledging the necessity of basic reasons. The interaction of these forces makes it difficult to formulate an adequate coherentist epistemology. Is coherentism, therefore, wrecked? My aim in the remaining pages is to answer "No." The ultimate conclusion of this paper is that a viable coherentist account of reasons can be found by (1) rejecting the assumption that the regress stoppers provide premises upon which to infer ones other beliefs by direct ampliative inference and (2) affirming the significance of holistic considerations to provide good reasons for one's empirical beliefs. This position grows out of reflection on the coherentist epistemologies of Goodman, Quine, Sellars, Rawls, Harman, and Lycan.

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[12]As seen above, this is the reason Lycan gives for requiring conservatism.
[13]For details, see (BonJour 1997)

2 Basic Reasons and Noninferential Justification

The basic reasons dilemma shows that coherentism faces an identity crisis. The dilemma aims to show that coherentism must allow for basic reasons but cannot have basic reasons. What the coherentists need is (i) a cogent argument against basic reasons that (ii) does not succumb to circularity objections and (iii) avoids the problem of arbitrariness. In the following, I offer a view that satisfies these three desiderata. In this section, I advance a general argument against basic reasons.

2.1 The Nature of Basic Reasons

A basic reason is an assertive propositional content that need not receive support from other assertive propositional contents in order to justify other propositions. A basic reason must be propositional because reasons need to stand in logical and probabilistic relations to other propositions. Minimally, a reason must represent the world as being one way rather than another, which requires that a reason be consistent with some propositions and inconsistent with others. The language of 'assertive' contents comes from BonJour's discussion of the doctrine of the given. According to BonJour, the key feature of a cognitive state that enables it to serve as a reason is "its assertive or at least representational content" (BonJour 1985, 78). The notion of assertoric force is best learned by example. The Müller–Lyer illusion is a case in which the proposition 'these lines are of unequal length' has assertoric force. When we look at the Müller–Lyer lines, the proposition 'these lines are of unequal length' is presented as true.

Basic reasons have two properties: (i) they possess noninferential justification, and (ii) they can be used in "direct ampliative inference" to justify belief in another proposition. Direct ampliative inference is a special kind of nondeductive inference. Nondeductive inference is varied, but it comes primarily in two forms: inference to the best explanation and straightforward induction (e.g., enumerative induction).[14] When I speak of direct ampliative inference, I mean a straightforward induction with two additional properties: (1) the premises of the inductive argument are epistemologically prior to the conclusion, and (2) the premises *exhaust* the evidence for the conclusion.

Let us work with a simple example of inductive inference to illustrate the nature of direct ampliative inference. Consider the inference from (a) 'there are 100 sampled instances of black ravens' and (b) 'there are no sampled instances

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[14]I discuss Bayesianism below in its Keynesian form.

of nonblack ravens' to (c) 'all ravens are black'. This is an instance of direct ampliative inference only if the premises are known or justifiedly believed prior to the conclusion being known or justifiedly believed. In the present inference, there is no difficulty with the claim that the justification of (a) and (b) does not depend on (c). The problematic claim with *direct* ampliative inference is that the premises must exhaust the evidence for the hypothesis. This restriction is important because it prohibits background claims from tacitly serving as additional and unstated evidence for the conclusion. For instance, the claims that 'the color of a raven is a natural kind property' and 'natural kind properties are stable in species' cannot be in the background if the above inference is a direct ampliative inference. One could explicitly *add* those background claims to the premises, but then the direct ampliative inference would include two lawlike claims, and lawlike claims are not suitable candidates for basic reasons. As the foundationalist sets up the regress, basic reasons are supposed to be propositions that are directly observable. This illustrates the tension in a foundationalist epistemology between a reasonable reconstruction of ampliative inference and a reasonable account of the nature of basic reasons.

This point about proper restrictions on which premises can be used in direct ampliative inference bears stressing. Direct ampliative inference must not include any premises to the effect that some hypothesis is the best explanation of some other proposition. Direct ampliative inference eschews explanatory premises, lawlike claims, general plausibility considerations, or tacit principles like the principle of induction. The rationale for this is the foundationalist motive that the most fundamental premises to be used in direct ampliative inference must be noninferentially justified and that explanatory and/or lawlike claims are not suitable candidates for basic reasons within a foundationalist epistemology.

Direct ampliative inference figures prominently in the regress argument for foundationalism. As a foundationalist sets it up, the aim of the regress argument is to specify the ultimate reasons for ones empirical view, the foundational premises from which one can reconstruct ones view through legitimate inference. The inferential relations between the basic reasons and the next level are construed in a linear manner. The basic reasons constitute *premises* from which one infers propositions at the next level in the attempted rational reconstruction of ones view. Furthermore, because the regress aims for ones ultimate reasons, these alleged reasons constitute the only evidence for the conclusion in question.

The significance of this conception of basic reasons is that it identifies two distinct elements in a foundationalist theory of reasons: (a) a theory of justification and (b) a theory of inference. The foundationalist theory of justification says that some propositions are noninferentially justified, while the theory of

inference specifies that those propositions may be used in direct ampliative inference. The composite nature of this view of reasons opens logical space to consider a view of reasons that denies either of these claims. Since it is implausible that one could have reasons without justification, the most plausible position to investigate is that some propositions may have some justification without being able to be used in a justifying direct ampliative inference. In the following, I will argue that coherentists should adopt this view. There is some noninferential justification, but propositions that possess *merely* this justification cannot support directly ampliative inference, for all ampliative inference involves coherence reasoning. This view makes sense of the conservative element in previous coherentist epistemologies as witnessed in the positions developed by Goodman, Quine, Sellars, Rawls, Harman, and Lycan. Furthermore, this view fits naturally with the emphasis those philosophers place on the failure of first philosophy.

2.2 Basic Reasons and First Philosophy

A prominent theme in coherentists writings is the revisability of all our beliefs and the fundamental role of the theoretical virtues in revising beliefs. The stress on the theoretical virtues in belief revision conflicts with the possibility of direct ampliative inference. If all justified ampliative inference invokes explanatory considerations and such considerations do not fit into the simple representation that direct ampliative inference requires, then given a good argument that all justified ampliative inference invokes explanatory considerations, we would have a powerful argument for coherentism. In this case, we would have an argument that there cannot be basic reasons–reasons that are noninferentially justified and can be used in direct ampliative inference. This would provide at least one key step in a defense of coherentism. I turn to substantiate these points.

There is a neglected argument in many coherentists' texts that supports the claim that all justified ampliative inference is fundamentally explanatory in nature.[15] This argument forms a key contention against foundationalism by arguing against basic reasons. This is the argument that there is no first philosophy or as Lycan puts it "all philosophical arguments are really explicit or implicit comparisons of plausibility" (Lycan 1988, 18). If all arguments are

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[15]I will focus on Lycan's development of this argument but comparable arguments can be found in (Quine 1960, ch 1), and (Sellars 1963) (see "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" and "Some Reflections of Language Games"). Similar considerations can be found in Goodman's (1965) discussion of the justification of deductive and inductive rules as well as Rawls's (1999) discussion of the method of reflective equilibrium, which he explicitly grounds in Goodman's discussion. Also see Nozick's remarks on explanation (1981, 13–18)

comparisons of plausibility, then any ampliative inference is either explicitly and implicitly a weighing of explanatory virtues. After all, a judgment about the comparative plausibility of various claims relies on judgments (perhaps tacit) about the relative theoretical merits of the respective claims. It is hard to see how one could think that some proposition p is more plausible than another proposition q without having views about how simple, conservative, fruitful, testable, explanatory, or empirically adequate p or q are.[16] Thus, if there is a good argument that each justifying ampliative inference invokes plausibility considerations, then no noninferentially justified proposition supports direct ampliative inference.

Let us examine Lycan's presentation of the argument against first philosophy (Lycan 1988, 115–122). Lycan begins by introducing a position he calls "deductivism." He describes this as a metaphilosophical view according to which "proper philosophical argumentation consists in the construction of valid arguments with true premises, or more specifically deductively valid arguments whose premises are obvious, self-evident, indisputably true, or at least uncontroversial" (116). Lycan employs the regress argument to show that there must be some ultimate premises for arguments of this sort and, hence, that deductive inference cannot be the whole story. But concerning these ultimate premises, we may ask about their justification. On pain of regress, the deductivist must claim that they are justified without requiring any additional justification. But assuming that there are no infallible or incorrigible reasons, this lands us squarely in the problem of arbitrariness.[17] In an attempt to avoid arbitrariness, the deductivist could answer only that accepting that these claims is more plausible than rejecting them or suspending judgment on them. Thus, an attempt to carry out deductivism rests upon comparisons of plausibility. As Lycan says, "Even if we try to be deductivists ... we seem to be stuck with the conclusion that all philosophical arguments are really explicit or implicit comparisons of plausibility" (118). Because plausibility reasoning is a form of explanatory reasoning, it follows that every form of ampliative inference involves explanatory reasoning. Direct ampliative inference is a myth.

We can illustrate the argument against first philosophy by examining Humes criticism of induction.[18] Hume examines the human tendency to expect more of the same, given the regularities of past experience. But Hume argues that

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[16]Here is an anecdote to support this contention: when I discuss skepticism in my classes, one of the most common responses is that even if it were true, it is not useful and it would not make a difference at all to the way we live our lives.

[17]See note 7.

[18]See (Hume 2007) 'Of the idea of a Necessary Connection'. Goodman (1965) develops coherentism in response to the Humean skeptic about induction.

our belief that future experience will resemble past experience is unfounded because to be justified in believing this we have to rely on precisely the claim that future experience will resemble past experience. Thus, the attempt to present an argument that induction is reliable is viciously circular.

The purpose of discussing Hume's problem is to focus on the different metaphilosophical strategies in play. Advocates of first philosophy are rightly concerned about Hume's criticism of induction. Hume shows that there is no noncircular argument for the reliability of induction. But opponents of first philosophy need not be so concerned about the inability to find noncircular arguments for induction. Our inductive practices rest on plausibility reasoning, which resists a simple analysis in premise and conclusion form. Plausibility reasoning is a matter of weighing explanatory virtues. In the standard inductive cases, it is clearly more simple, conservative, productive, and explanatory to suppose that we shall have more of the same. Any attempt to provide a "more fundamental" justification of these practices is a reversion to first philosophy.[19]

The argument against first philosophy accentuates the ineliminable role of explanatory considerations in belief evaluation. One attempt to escape the role of explanatory considerations is the Keynesian strategy.[20] On the Keynesian strategy, the regress of reasons stops with an infallible awareness of certain probability claims that are alleged to be necessarily true. On this strategy, it is claimed (e.g.,) that one is aware of the necessary truth that one's experience of seeming to see a red circle *makes it probable* that there is a red circle before one. If one were aware of such probability claims, then direct ampliative inference could be vindicated. In this case, one could have a premise describing one's evidence and then another premise that links that evidence with the probable truth of some conclusion. Thus, the regress of reasons would rest fundamentally on ones perceptual evidence and ones infallible awareness of these Keynesian probability claims.

The main problem with the Keynesian defense of direct ampliative inference is simply that it is extremely doubtful that one is actually aware of such probability truths. I have considered the case carefully, and I can report that I am not aware of any such claims. Richard Fumerton, discussing the "internal relation of making probable" posited by the Keynesian, concurs. He writes, "I cannot quite bring myself to believe that I am phenomenologically acquainted with this internal relation of making probable. And in the end, I strongly suspect that the probability relation that philosophers do seek in order to avoid skepticism concerning inferentially justified beliefs is an illusion" (Fumerton

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[19]For a recent development of this theme, see (Maddy 2007).
[20]See (Fumerton 1995, 197–203)

1995, 218). In addition to this judgment, there is a simpler explanation for why persons can be pushed in the direction of thinking such truths exist: these probability claims reflect plausibility judgments. Given the way we think the world works, we assign a fairly high probability to the proposition 'I am not in a radical skeptical scenario'. Thus, we assign a fairly high probability to claims that our experiences are truth-indicative.

3   Emergent Reasons without Arbitrariness or Circularity

The argument against first philosophy provides a clear line of reasoning against basic reasons and, thereby, fulfills the first desiderata of a coherentist account. What remains to be shown is that a coherentist account can have good reasons for empirical beliefs without lapsing into arbitrariness or circularity.

The concern about circularity is easily addressed. The circularity problem is that the data used in coherence reasoning requires some presumption in its favor, independent of its use in coherence reasoning. If an account allows for noninferential justification, then the account is not beset by circularity concerns. But the argument against first philosophy does not challenge whether there *is* noninferential justification; rather, it challenges the claim that reasons arise independently of a perspective. Consequently, a coherentist account that permits some noninferential justification is not fraught with circularity objections. Some propositions are justified independently of theoretical considerations. Coherentism has a strong history of adopting conservatism, the thesis that the mere holding of a proposition confers some positive epistemic status on it. Joined with the argument against first philosophy, this view holds that belief confers some positive epistemic status on its content but that belief alone cannot constitute a reason for another proposition apart from plausibility considerations.[21]

The worry about arbitrariness arises in the context of the regress argument in which one aims to specify the basic propositions upon which one can reconstruct by linear inference ones empirical view. We consider some p that supports q that supports r,..., until one has completed the reconstruction. The arbitrariness objection focuses on the fact that p is unsupported and yet contingent. Thus, p is possibly false, and yet there is no additional reason for thinking that p is true. It is consequently epistemically objectionable to think that p is true.

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[21]For a defense of conservatism, see (Lycan 1988), chs. 7 and 8.

Whether or not one accepts this argument, the position developed does not succumb to the arbitrariness objection. This is because a coherentist epistemology that is motivated by the argument against first philosophy does not sanction basic reasons. Rather, the idea is that one has a reason for some other belief only if one has a framework of commitments that support the belief. On this picture, "being a reason" is an emergent property of a proposition. An emergent property is one that arises out of more fundamental properties without being reducible to those fundamental properties. C. D. Broad famously held that consciousness was an emergent property. Conscious experience is a unique, nonreducible property that arises from neurophysiological properties. On this picture, emergent properties are, in a sense, mysterious. It is a mystery just how a new property arises out of the lower-level realizer properties. This essential feature of emergent properties makes those properties resistant to a regressive analysis. With a genuine emergent property, one cannot explain in a stepwise procedure how the property comes to be from its lower-level realizers.

The failure of emergent properties to reduce to lower-level properties is similar to the coherentists' contention that a regressive analysis of reasons fails. Just as consciousness cannot be reduced to lower-level neurophysiological properties, so to the reasons we have for our empirical view cannot be reduced to noninferentially justified propositions that are used in direct ampliative inference to defend our empirical view. This analogy suggests that coherentists should view "being a reason" as an emergent property that derives from a framework of justified commitments. The central idea is that a proposition p is a reason for another distinct (non-entailed) proposition q only if p is a member of a coherent set of propositions.[22] Furthermore, the property of "being a reason" cannot be reduced to more fundamental properties such as consistency or probability-raising. This view of reasons does not succumb to the arbitrariness objection aimed against foundationalism because there are no epistemically unmoved movers.

We can fill out an emergent theory of reasons extending Jonathan Kvanvig's use of INUS conditions to explain how coherentists may appeal to appearance states as a significant factor in a beliefs justification. Kvanvig's idea is that appearance states are *I*nsufficient, *N*onredundant conditions of a larger *U*nnecessary but *S*ufficient condition for justification.[23] For instance, if it appears to one that "it is raining," then this state is an insufficient condition for the corresponding belief's justification. In addition to this appearance state,

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[22]For the purposes of this paper, I leave open the nature of coherence. For one view of the nature of coherence, see (BonJour 1985, 93–101).

[23]For details, see (Kvanvig and Riggs 1992; Kvanvig 1995b). The original notion of an INUS condition comes from J. L. Mackie (Mackie 1974).

the belief's justification requires that (e.g.,) one believe that "conditions are normal" and that "I am reliable." Nonetheless, this appearance state is a nonredundant condition for the belief's justification. Furthermore, the larger condition for the belief's justification is itself unnecessary; there are other sets of propositions that could justify the belief. But given a large set of coordinated propositions, this forms a sufficient condition for the belief's justification.

Kvanvig's INUS conditions account can be extended to formulate an emergent account of reasons. I will first state the account and then comment on it below. In stating the account, I need to make the reference to a subject explicit because reasons are always reasons for a subject to believe thus and so. The emergent account of reasons follows:

Emergent Reasons: A proposition p is a reason for a distinct (non-entailed) proposition q for a subject S if and only if

1. S is justified in believing p,

2. p is an INUS condition for q's justification, i.e.,

    (a) p is insufficient for q's justification,

    (b) p is a nonredundant part of a larger set of conditions (i.e., propositions) that are unnecessary but sufficient for q's justification, and

3. S is justified in believing at least one of those larger set of conditions (i.e., propositions).

In terms of its structural features, **Emergent Reasons** rules out the circularity objection by conditions 1 and 3. These conditions impose the requirement that the reasons cannot arise out of unjustified commitments. The basic materials for reasons are justified commitments. But **Emergent Reasons** addresses the arbitrariness concern by condition 2. Reasons cannot be reduced to justified commitments and simple enumerative inference. Rather, reasons require a larger framework of coherent commitments. Finally, **Emergent Reasons** fits naturally with the argument against first philosophy. Thus, **Emergent Reasons** provides a helpful model for a coherentist account of reasons.

We can illustrate **Emergent Reasons** using the example of inductive inference from above. There we considered the inference from (a) 'there are 100 sampled instances of black ravens' and (b) 'there are no sampled instances of nonblack ravens' to (c) 'all ravens are black'. On the emergent theory of reasons, (a&b) provides a reason for (c) only if (a&b) is an Insufficient, Nonredundant part of a larger Unnecessary but Sufficient condition for (c)'s justification. The argument against first philosophy shows that (a&b) is an

insufficient condition for (c)'s justification because one needs general principles like 'the color of a raven is a natural kind property' and 'natural kind properties are stable in species' to constitute a sufficient condition for (c)'s justification. Nevertheless, (a&b) is a nonredundant part of (c)'s justification because it provides some of the crucial evidence for (c), which within a broader framework provides unnecessary but sufficient condition for (c)'s justification. Thus, (a&b) becomes a reason for (c) by adding that a subject is justified in believing (a&b) and further that a subject is justified in believing a larger set of propositions that is one of several (and so unnecessary) sufficient conditions for (c)'s justification.

Lehrer provides another useful example that can be used to illustrate **Emergent Reasons**. Lehrer's general strategy is similar to the argument against first philosophy. He argues for the claim that "there is nothing other than ones beliefs to which one can appeal in the justification of belief. There is no exit from the circle of ones beliefs" (Lehrer 1974, 188). Lehrer considers the case in which he believes that he sees something red before him and that he has no reason to doubt this. Does this provide him with complete justification for his belief that there is something red before him? Lehrer answers "no." He writes, "The belief does not depend on anything other than my beliefs for complete justification. Among these beliefs is a belief about the chances of error in such matters. I believe that there is comparatively little chance of such beliefs being in error" (188). The original perceptual belief that "he sees something red before him" is an insufficient but nonredundant condition of a larger unnecessary but sufficient condition for the justification of the belief that "there is something red before him." The upshot of the emergent theory of reasons is that reasons arise only within a broader theoretical perspective. Lehrer echoes a similar point, though in terms of complete justification rather than reasons. He writes, "The complete justification of our perceptual beliefs depends on a myriad of other beliefs, about ourselves, about others, about experience, and about the entire universe" (199). In general this holds for every belief that we have. To the extent that it provides a reason for a distinct belief, it is because it is an INUS condition for the latter's justification.

Emergent Reasons fits well with the argument against first philosophy by requiring a broader framework for reasons. Reasons do not arise mysteriously from nowhere. Rather reasons arise out of a framework of justified commitments. On the emergent account of reasons, justified commitments are conceptually prior to reasons. Thus, the emergent account of reasons requires conservatism according to which ones doxastic commitments have some small measure of justification simply because one has these commitments. Epistemic conservatism is often aligned with conservatism. The coherentist epistemologies of Quine, Sellars, Goodman, Harman, and Lycan all include a conservative

element. In addition, these philosophers each deploy the argument against first philosophy to motivate their coherentist epistemologies. **Emergent Reasons** makes sense of these connections. Reasons arise within a perspective of justified commitments. Thus, we have a viable coherentist account of reasons that conflicts with foundationalist accounts of reasons.

4 Is the Emergent Reasons Account Just Weak Foundationalism?

One objection to this coherentist account of reasons is that it is a form of weak foundationalism. The term 'weak foundationalism' comes from BonJour's discussion of foundationalism. BonJour describes weak foundationalism as the view "according to which basic beliefs possess only a very low degree of epistemic justification on their own, a degree of justification insufficient by itself either to satisfy the adequate-justification condition for knowledge or to qualify them as acceptable justifying premises for further beliefs" (BonJour 1985, 28). As BonJour characterizes weak foundationalism, basic beliefs are not sufficient to justify further beliefs. Depending on what BonJour means by 'premises for further beliefs', the view BonJour describes as weak foundationalism could be similar to the view I have expounded in this paper. BonJour does not mention the argument against first philosophy nor does he come anywhere close to developing an emergent theory of reasons. Nonetheless, BonJours brief discussion of weak foundationalism shares some similarities with the emergent account of reasons. As BonJour sees it, the mere presence of noninferential justification is a sufficient condition for an epistemic views counting as foundationalist.[24] But this is wrong. Foundationalism is a historical position that develops out of the regress argument.[25] Accordingly, the coherentist position I have proposed is a viable alternative to a foundationalist account of basic reasons. In the following, I offer seven reasons for thinking that it is a mistake to take the presence of noninferential justification as a defining feature of foundationalism.

First, the thought that any view that allows for noninferential justification is a version of foundationalism obscures the assumption of linear inference

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[24]Various reconciliation projects endorse views that are stronger than the position being developed here (e.g., Earl Conee's project in 'The Basic Nature of Epistemic Justification in (Conee and Feldman 2004)). Conee writes, "sensory experience does not in turn require substantiation by beliefs in order to act as a constraint on justified belief" (Conee and Feldman 2004, 40). Part of Conee's reason for this claim is in his belief that the content of experience is nonconceptual.

[25](Kvanvig 1984) has a similar take on foundationalism.

in the classic regress argument. The regress argument aims to reveal the structure of empirical knowledge. On the foundationalist branch, the aim is to reconstruct rationally evaluable inferences from some basic reasons. As the regress argument is originally run, these inferences are linear. Thus, the original foundationalist view is committed to the regress of linear support relations.

Second, taking the genus of a foundationalist view to be any view that allows for noninferential justification fails to mark a significant distinction between basic reasons and noninferential justification. There has not been much discussion on the composite nature of foundationalism.[26] As BonJour characterizes it, foundationalism amounts to (i) noninferential justification and (ii) a theory of inference. But the original foundationalist motivation as witnessed by the regress argument shows that foundationalism is committed to a substantive program *vis–á–vis* (ii). One of the subsidiary purposes of this paper is to clearly point out the composite nature of foundationalism.

Third, BonJour's condition has the effect of misrepresenting a swath of self-described coherentists as in Goodman, Quine, Sellars, Rawls, Harman, and Lycan. All of these coherentists include an element of noninferential justification in their views. BonJour's countenancing these views as forms of foundationalism fails to note their significant disagreement with the majority of foundationalists.

Fourth, BonJour's condition mishandles the raft and pyramid metaphors. The position of Goodman, Quine, Sellars, Rawls, Harman, and Lycan fits well with the raft metaphor, but the majority of foundationalist views fit much better with the pyramid metaphor. Kvanvig observes that a central problem with characterizing foundationalism is that it is based on a metaphor. Kvanvig writes, "[T]o classify a theory as foundational is to assert that the theory can be understood in a helpful way on the analogy of a building, which has upper stories and a foundation. If one is not using the term 'foundational' in that manner then one is simply giving a stipulative definition of that term which does not accurately reflect the use of that term in the history of epistemology" (Kvanvig 1984, 184). While Kvanvig's larger point is that it would be a mistake to identify some features as defining marks of foundationalism (185), we have good reason to think that a characteristic component of foundationalism (at

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[26]See (Kvanvig and Riggs 1992) for a slightly different take. They argue that "their understanding of foundationalism which results from the regress argument involves two features" (210). The first feature is an asymmetry thesis that the justification for inferential beliefs is different from the justification on noninferential beliefs. The second feature is that foundational beliefs have some intrinsic or self-warrant. My proposal focuses on the use of direct ampliative inference for the basic beliefs in contrast to Kvanvig and Riggss focus on an account of intrinsic or self-warrant for basic beliefs.

least in its internalistic incarnations) is the possibility of direct ampliative inference from the basic beliefs. Moreover, this trait does reflect the use of the term foundationalism in the history of epistemology. Thus, it is a mistake to suppose that the mere presence of noninferential justification is sufficient for a foundationalist view.

Fifth, this coherentist view has a distinctive theory of reasons. Being a reason is an emergent property of propositions that arises only in a coherent set of information. On the emergent theory of reasons, a proposition is a reason for another belief only if it is an INUS condition for the beliefs justification. To classify this view as a form of foundationalism misses the crucial break with distinctive foundationalist accounts of reasons. Foundationalists hold that it is possible to limn the structure of knowledge beginning with the basic reasons and proceeding to the nonbasic beliefs that are supported by legitimate inferences. Coherentists object to this view of reasons. Reasons arise only within a broader standpoint.

Sixth, contrary to standard foundationalist accounts that restrict basic beliefs to specific subject matters (e.g., experiential beliefs), this view allows any belief to be noninferentially justified. A conservative epistemology does not restrict basic beliefs to experiential or memorial beliefs. Rather, it allows any belief to have some noninferential justification and then requires that it prove its merit by being incorporated into a broader theoretical perspective. To countenance this view as foundationalist loses sight of the restrictions foundationalists place on basic beliefs.

Finally, the operative virtue that accounts for the noninferential justification is conservatism. Conservatism is a typical pragmatic and coherentist virtue. It is on a par with the other explanatory virtues championed by coherentists.[27] Thus, a conservative coherentism should not be classified as a form of foundationalism simply because it permits some noninferential justification. However, it should be acknowledged that to some extent this is polemics. The merits of the view lie in its ability to help us to understand epistemological problems.

5   Conclusion

Coherentism has been driven by two motivations: to answer the skeptic and to explain the rationality of science. The first motivation pushes coherentists to assume that only coherence can be epistemically relevant and thus that no proposition has any noninferential justification. We have seen that this

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[27]See (Lycan 1988, chs 6–8).

approach fails because of circularity worries. The second motivation pulls coherentists toward conservatism and the other explanatory virtues. We have seen that this can appear to fall back into a form of foundationalism. I have argued, though, that this is a mistake. Coherentists have a central objection to foundationalism encapsulated in the argument against first philosophy. Further, coherentists have a distinct theory of reasons: reasons arise only within a larger framework of commitments. This provides a firm basis for a coherentist account of reasons.

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