

PHIL 5983
Epistemology Seminar: Basic Beliefs
T 3:30-5:50, MAIN 315

Jack Lyons

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MAIN 312: MWF 10:30-11:30

575-5825

According to a standard foundationalist theory of justification, a basic belief is one whose justification does not depend on inferential or evidential connections to other beliefs. After a bit of background introduction to the general epistemological literature, we will turn to the issues concerning basic beliefs thus construed. Are basic beliefs even possible, despite various coherentist objections to the very idea? Must basic beliefs be self-evident, infallible, incorrigible, and the like, or can we make sense of the recently popular idea that some beliefs about the external world are basic? Can reliabilism be fruitfully viewed as a type of foundationalism? The outcomes of such investigations will have bearings on certain theories about the justification of moral beliefs, religious beliefs, and beliefs based on the testimony of others. We will try to determine whether, and if so how, basic beliefs are possible, and we will examine various proposals about which beliefs are basic. We will pay special attention to the claim that ordinary perceptual beliefs (beliefs about physical objects) are basic.

Assignments: one shorter paper/presentation, one commentary on another student's paper, participation in classroom discussions, and a longer final paper. In determining grades, equal weight will be placed on each of these.

The first part of the course will consist of lectures and discussions of the assigned readings, typically 2-3 papers or chapters per class. The last several classes will also contain a presentation of a paper, along with a commentary and a general discussion. Your papers should be in the neighborhood of 12 pages and will be made available to the rest of the class before 3pm on the Friday before the class for which you are responsible. You will summarize your paper in class and your commentator will read a roughly 5-page commentary. Commentators should get copies of the comments to the presenter 24 hours in advance. Final papers should be roughly 20 pages and are expected (but not required) to be based on the presented papers.

The topics I intend to cover are, in order:

- Introduction to the central issues in epistemology
- Foundationalism and coherentism
- Varieties of foundationalism
- The (im)possibility of basic beliefs
- Externalism
- Direct realist theories of perception
- Resurrecting Old-fashioned Foundationalism?
- Conceptual/nonconceptual content
- The basing relation
- Religious belief
- A priori knowledge
- Theories of basic beliefs
- Testimony?

Below is a tentative and partial schedule of topics and readings for seminar meetings:

Date	Topic
8/27	Introduction: central issues in epistemology
9/3	Background: foundationalism vs. coherentism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BonJour, 2002a: "Foundationalism and coherentism"; Sosa, 1980; Alston, 1983
9/10	Varieties of internalist foundationalism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pollock & Cruz, 1999: Ch 2, Ch. 3.5, Ch. 7.1-3; Lyons ms
9/17	The (im)possibility of basic beliefs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lehrer, 1990; Steup 2000; Alston, 2002
9/24	Externalist theories <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alston, 1988; Goldman, 1979; Lyons ms
10/1	Direct Realism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brewer, 1997; Huemer 2001 (selections); Pryor, 2000
10/8	Cont'd <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BonJour, 2002b; Fumerton (1985), Neta, forthcoming
10/15	Old-fashioned foundationalism and its critics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DePaul, 2001
10/22	Cont'd
10/29	Conceptual/nonconceptual content <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • McDowell, 1994, etc., Peacocke, Kelly
...	The basing relation
	Religious belief
	A priori knowledge/justification
	Which beliefs are basic?

(Partial) Bibliography

readings in brackets are either suggested for background or are otherwise less likely to be read than the others.

- Alston, W. P. (1976). Has foundationalism been refuted? *Philosophical Studies* 29, 287-305.
- [----. (1983). What is wrong with immediate knowledge? *Synthese* 55, 73-95.]
- . (1988). An internalist externalism. *Synthese* 74, 265-83.
- . (1991). *Perceiving God*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell.
- [----. (1999). Back to the theory of appearing. In J. E. Tomberlin, ed., *Philosophical Perspectives* 13, *Epistemology*.]
- . (2002). Sellars and the myth of the given. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 65,
- [BonJour, L. (1999). Foundationalism and the external world. In J. E. Tomberlin, ed., *Philosophical Perspectives* 13, *Epistemology*.]
- . (2001). chapters in ROFF
- . (2002a). *Epistemology: Classical problems and contemporary responses*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- . (2002b). In search of direct realism. Presented at Rutgers Epistemology Conference
- Brewer (1997). Foundations of perceptual knowledge. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 34, 41-55.
- [----. (1999). *Perception and reason*. Oxford: Oxford.]
- [Chisholm, R. M. (1977) *Theory of knowledge*, 2nd ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall]
- [----. (1982). A version of foundationalism. In *The foundations of knowing*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.]
- DePaul, M. (2001). *Resurrecting Old-Fashioned Foundationalism*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield. **(ROFF)**
- Fales, E. (1996). *A defense of the given*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Foley, R. (1987). *The theory of epistemic rationality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard.

- Fumerton, R. A. (1985). *Metaphysical and epistemological problems of perception*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- (1995). *Metaepistemology and skepticism*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- [----- (1998). Externalism and epistemological direct realism. *Monist* 81, 393-406.]
- [----- (1999). Foundationalist theories of epistemic justification. In Stanford Encyclopedia]
- (2001). chapters in ROFF
- [Gibson, R. (1996). McDowell's direct realism and Platonic naturalism. In E. Villanueva, ed., *Perception*. Atascadero: Ridgeview.]
- Goldman, A. I. (1979). "What is justified belief?" in G. Pappas, ed. *Justification and knowledge*. Dordrecht: Reidel.
- (1998). Internalism exposed. *Journal of Philosophy* 96, 271-93.
- Hales, S. (2000). The problem of intuition. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 37, 135-147.
- [Heck, R. G. (2000). Nonconceptual content and the 'space of reasons'. *Philosophical Review* 109, 483-523.]
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- Kelly, S. (2001). The Non-conceptual content of perceptual experience. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 62, 601-608.
- Korcz, (1997). Recent work on the basing relation. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 34, 171-91.
- [----- (2000). The causal-doxastic theory of the basing relation. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 30, 525-550.]
- Kvanvig, J. (forthcoming). Justification and proper basing.
- Lehrer, K. (1990) Chisholm, Reid, and the problem of the epistemic surd. *Philosophical Studies* xx, 39-45.
- McDowell, J. H. (1994). *Mind and world*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP.
- Neta, R. (forthcoming). Perceptual evidence and the new dogmatism.
- [Pasnau, R. (1993). Justified until proven guilty: Alston's new epistemology. *Philosophical Studies* 72, 1-33.]
- [Peacocke, C. (2001). Phenomenology and nonconceptual content. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 62, 609-615.]
- [Plantinga, A. (1983). Reason and belief in God. In A. Plantinga & N. Wolterstorff, eds. *Faith and rationality*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.]
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- Pollock, J. L. (2001). chapter in ROFF
- Pollock, J. L. & J. L. Cruz (1999). *Contemporary theories of knowledge*, 2nd ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Pryor, (2000). The skeptic and the dogmatist. *Nous* 34, 517-49.
- Sosa, E. (1980). The raft and the pyramid: Coherence vs. foundations in the theory of knowledge. In P. A. French, T. E. Uehling, & H. K. Wettstein (eds.), *Midwest Studies in Philosophy, Volume V: Studies in Epistemology*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- [Steup, M. (1996). *Contemporary epistemology*. Xxxxx]
- (2000). Unrestricted foundationalism and the Sellarsian dilemma. *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 60, 75-98.
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