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The Concept of Basic Beliefs and Obligatory Grammatical Evidentiality: an Evidentiality-based Argument against Foundationalism

ABSTRACT: The paper discusses select problems of the foundationalist theory of epistemic justification; in particular, it analyses the key foundationalist concept of basic beliefs from linguistic perspective. The analysis is focused on Laurence BonJour's recent defence of foundationalism. The paper addresses the question of whether the concept of basic beliefs is defensible considering recent research on the grammar of certain languages with grammatically encoded and obligatory information source markers (evidentials).
KEYWORDS: epistemic justification • foundationalism • basic belief • grammatical evidentiality • evidentials

The aim of this paper is twofold; firstly, to discuss certain problems of foundationalism as a theory of justification, with special focus on Laurence BonJour's recent defence thereof[1]. The second goal is to examine the concept of basic (foundational) beliefs in the context of obligatory grammatical evidentiality – a category occurring in certain natural languages whose role is to mark in grammar the speaker's information source for a statement. Section one explains why a rather exotic linguistic category such as evidentiality should be taken into account when constructing a theory of epistemic justification. Since evidentiality is a grammatical category which is absent from most familiar Indo-European languages, a brief account thereof is provided in section two. Section three considers certain problems connected with the notion of "belief", and specifies how the term will be

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[1] Cf. L. BonJour, *The Dialectic of Foundationalism and Coherentism*, [in:] J. Greco & E. Sosa (Eds.), *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*, Malden, MA 1999, pp. 117–142; see also: L. BonJour, *A Version of Internalist Foundationalism*, [in:] L. BonJour & E. Sosa, *Epistemic Justification: Internalism vs. Externalism, Foundations vs. Virtues*, Malden, MA 2003, pp. 3–96.

understood in what follows. Section four is concerned with one of the main approaches to the problem of belief's justification: foundationalism. The premises of the foundationalist theory and some major objections to it are discussed; also, this section analyses BonJour's recent attempt to overcome the foundationalist main dilemma. Section five proceeds to the chief goal of our discussion, namely, the formulation of an anti-foundationalist evidentiality-based argument. The conclusion will be that the concept of basic beliefs and the foundationalist premises are even more untenable than they initially appeared to be.

1. Does linguistic evidentiality matter to epistemology?

Linguistic evidentiality is sometimes defined as "natural epistemology": "the ways in which ordinary people, unhampered by philosophical traditions, naturally regard the source and reliability of their knowledge"[2]. On the other hand, epistemology as a branch of philosophy is usually considered to be a fairly theoretical and normative discipline; it concerns the nature of knowledge, theories of truth and epistemic justification, the role of experience and reasoning, the problem of the *a priori*, possible arguments against skepticism and similar epistemic issues. The question arises whether "natural epistemology" (i.e., evidentiality) and philosophical epistemology have anything in common and whether linguistic evidentiality can contribute in any significant way to the discussion on theories of knowledge and justification.

In what follows, I would like to show that there are good reasons why "natural epistemology" matters, and the way ordinary believers reflect on their beliefs and form meta-beliefs is relevant to epistemological theory. First and foremost, disregard for folk epistemic concepts would be self-limiting for epistemology itself. Traditionally, epistemology is understood as a normative discipline aiming to elucidate and i m p r o v e the ways we form our beliefs. The ultimate goal of epistemic investigation is always getting to the truth and attaining more true beliefs. If the epistemic concepts of ordinary believers are rejected as naïve, unsystematic and generally uninteresting for epistemology, then there is nothing to improve and the important mission of epistemology is lost that way. Such epistemology may still proclaim its normative character, but it seems inadequate if it is concerned only with the idealized Cartesian-style epistemic agent, who is guided in her belief formation by the best criteria of knowledge, but is unaffected by real-life

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[2] Cf. W. Chafe & J. Nichols (Eds.), *Evidentiality: The Linguistic Coding of Epistemology,* Norwood, NJ 1986, p. vii.

psychological and linguistic mechanisms by which knowledge is actually produced and spread[3]. By claiming this due place for "natural" or "folk epistemology", I do not mean that the normative concept of knowledge is to be diluted and anything may be subsumed under the label of "knowledge". However, a normative epistemological theory which is not interested in how real people form their actual beliefs simply fails.

It might be argued that what we understand under the label of "natural epistemology" (evidentiality) could be much better situated within the project of "naturalized epistemology", proposed by Willard V. O. Quine and followed by some epistemologists[4]. Naturalized epistemology has abandoned the Cartesian tradition of pursuit for criteria and infallible foundations of knowledge, viewing this approach as leading inevitably to skepticism. Instead, it advocates a scientific explanation of the mechanisms of belief formation, thus replacing epistemology with cognitive science. The theories of knowledge which claim access to the project of naturalized epistemology do not have to completely give up the normative aspect of knowledge. But even if they maintain an interest in the problem of how our beliefs can be justified, and which beliefs deserve to be called knowledge, their primary interest is focused on how we actually arrive at our beliefs, not how we ought to arrive at them.

Despite the appeal of the naturalist approach and its clear connections with the linguistic aspects of belief-formation processes, this paper is concentrated on how grammatical evidentiality is related to what we may call standard epistemology; i.e., epistemology which is normative in character. I believe that certain key ideas of one of the main theories of justification, foundationalism, are worth reconsidering in the light of what grammars of evidential languages impose on the epistemic agent. In what follows, special attention will be paid to the concept of basic (foundational) beliefs.

When discussing the foundationalist theory and setting it in the context of grammatical evidentiality, it will be assumed that the epistemic agent is to be construed in a generic way, not necessarily as a member of an English speaking community. This should be an implicit assumption of any epistemology if it is to be understood in a standard normative way. Epistemology is the theory of knowledge regardless of the language in which

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[3] Cf. A. Goldman, *Epistemic Folkways and Scientific Epistemology*, "Philosophical Issues: Science and Knowledge", 1993, vol. 3, pp. 271–285.

[4] Cf. W.V.O. Quine, *Epistemology Naturalized*, [in:] W.V.O. Quine, *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*, New York 1969, pp. 69–90; see also: H. Kornblith, *In Defense of a Naturalized Epistemology*, [in:] J. Greco & E. Sosa (Eds.), *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*, *op. cit.*, pp. 158–169.

that knowledge is expressed. However, many of the ideas which are prominent and widely discussed in contemporary Anglo-American epistemological debates are heavily influenced by a different implicit assumption, namely, that the epistemic agent speaks what we might call, after Benjamin Lee Whorf, the Standard Average European language[5]. When considered from a non-Indo-European perspective, many of those ideas need reformulating.

Do we need to care about little known and rather exotic languages when constructing a theory of epistemic justification? I believe it is necessary; otherwise, we face a rather unwelcome prospect that norms and values regarding epistemic justification of beliefs be tagged with a footnote that they pertain to speakers of some languages only. It would be hard to find a normative epistemology thus limited. A viable theory of epistemic justification of beliefs must be language-neutral, which means that it must be equally defensible regardless of the language in which these beliefs are formulated. The premise of language-neutrality may seem a formidable constraint considering the vastly different architecture of the world's languages. However, linguistic diversity in the world is not a marginal phenomenon; therefore, any normative epistemic theory which makes universal claims should be ready to cope with language-grounded counterarguments.

Before we proceed to the problem of basic beliefs and other dilemmas of foundationalism, a brief overview of the grammatical category of evidentiality will be provided in section two. We will return to the issue of obligatory grammatical marking of information source in section five, and show how it bears upon certain foundationalist premises.

2. Evidentiality as a grammatical category in natural languages

Evidentiality is a category in grammar whose primary function is to mark the source of information on which a statement is based. As a grammatical category, evidentials have recently aroused considerable interest in linguistics; several books and volumes of papers have been published on the topic[6]. However, it must be remembered that the study of evidentials as

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[5] Cf. B.L. Whorf, *Language, Thought and Reality. Selected Writings by Benjamin Lee Whorf*. Ed. by J.B. Carroll, Cambridge, Mass. 1956.

[6] See, for example, Z. Guentchéva (Ed.), *L'Énonciation Médiatisée*, Louvain, Paris 1996; L. Johanson & B. Utas (Eds.), *Evidentials: Turkic, Iranian and Neighbouring Languages*, Berlin 2000; A.Y. Aikhenvald, *Evidentiality*, Oxford 2004; A.Y. Aikhenvald & R.M.W. Dixon (Eds.), *Studies in Evidentiality*, Amsterdam, Philadelphia 2003; A.Y. Aikhenvald & R.M.W. Dixon (Eds.), *The Grammar of Knowledge. A Cross-Linguistic Typology*, Oxford 2014.

an independent grammatical category is a fairly new field in linguistics; its beginning dates to the 1980s[7]. Grammatical evidentials are absent from most Indo-European languages, including the classical ones, whose grammars used to be the reference point for describing other languages. Since evidentials as a distinct category did not exist in classical textbooks on grammar, and most well-known Indo-European languages do not have them either, the category was somewhat overlooked by typological and general linguistics. It happened despite the fact that certain remarks concerning grammatical markers of information source could be found in descriptions of several non-Indo-European languages[8].

Evidentiality does not seem to be a very common grammatical category. On the basis of studies conducted so far, it is estimated that grammatical evidentials are found in no more than about 25% of the world's languages[9].

As far as the areal distribution of evidentiality systems is concerned, languages with grammatical evidentials can be found on all continents, but they are relatively infrequent in Africa and Australia, where there are only isolated occurrences of evidentiality. Also in Europe, with the exception of the Balkan Slavic languages and languages from the Baltic region (Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian), grammatical evidentials do not occur[10]. In contrast, North and South American languages reveal exceptionally rich and elaborate systems of information source markers. Evidentiality seems to be a family trait in several language groups there, especially in languages of Northern California, Northwest Coast, Great Basin and Plains in North America, as well as the Amazon and the Andes regions in Latin America[11].

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[7] Cf. W. Chafe & J. Nichols (Eds.), *Evidentiality, op. cit.,* T. Willett, *A Cross-linguistic Survey of the Grammaticalization of Evidentiality*, "Studies in Language", 1988, 12–1, pp. 51–97.

[8] Cf. F. Boas, *Introduction*, [in:] *Handbook of American Indian Languages*, F. Boas (Ed.), Washington 1911, pp. 1–83; D.D. Lee, *Conceptual Implications of an Indian Language*, "Philosophy of Science", 1938, 5, pp. 81–102; for a brief historical review of evidentiality studies, see also W.H. Jacobsen, *The Heterogeneity of Evidentials in Makah*. [in:] W. Chafe & J. Nichols (Eds.), *Evidentiality, op. cit.,* pp. 3–28.

[9] Cf. A.Y. Aikhenvald, *Evidentiality, op. cit.,* p. 17.

[10] But see G. Diewald & E. Smirnova, *Introduction. Evidentiality in European Languages: the Lexical-Grammatical Distinction*, [in:] G. Diewald & E. Smirnova (Eds.), *Linguistic Realization of Evidentiality in European Languages*, Berlin 2010, pp. 1–14, where the problem of which linguistic devices can be regarded as evidentials is discussed.

[11] See W.H. Jakobsen, *The Heterogeneity of Evidentials in Makah*, *op. cit.,* pp. 7–8; see also the discussion of the geographic distribution of evidentiality in A.Y. Aikhenvald, *Evidentiality, op. cit.,* p. 303; V.A. Plungian, *Types of Verbal Evidentiality Marking: an Overview*, [in:] G. Diewald & E. Smirnova (Eds.), *Linguistic Realization..., op. cit.,* pp. 19–23.

Elaborate evidential systems can also be found in some Papuan languages spoken in New Guinea Highlands[12].

Systems of grammatical evidentials occur also in many languages in Asia, though they are different from those in native American languages and usually less elaborate. In particular, evidentials are found in the Turkic, Caucasian, Finno-Ugric and some other languages of the "Great Evidentiality Belt" ranging from the Balkan peninsula, through Asia Minor, the Caucasus region, to the central Asia and further to the Far East. Another big evidential family in Asia is the numerous group of Tibeto-Burman languages, where evidentiality is often interconnected with the marking of mirativity ("unexpected knowledge") and egophoricity ("first-person experiential knowledge")[13].

In the first volume of papers devoted strictly to evidentiality, published in 1986, Lloyd B. Anderson defines evidentials as follows:

> (a) Evidentials show the kind of justification for a factual claim which
> is available to the person making that claim, whether
> direct evidence plus observation (no inference needed)
> evidence plus inference
> inference (evidence unspecified)
> reasoned expectation from logic and other facts
> and whether the evidence is auditory, or visual, etc.
> (b) Evidentials are not themselves the main predication of the clause, but are rather a specification added to a factual claim ABOUT SOMETHING ELSE.
> (c) Evidentials have the indication of evidence as in (a) as their primary meaning, not only as a pragmatic inference.
> (d) Morphologically, evidentials are inflections, clitics, or other free syntactic elements (not compounds or derivational forms)[14].

Evidential languages vary in their requirements as to the frequency of evidential marking; in some languages, information source markers are obligatory (i.e., they occur in every declarative sentence), in others, they are optional[15].

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[12] Cf. W.A. Foley, *The Papuan Languages of New Guinea*, Cambridge 1986, pp. 165–166.

[13] See L. Johanson & B. Utas (Eds.), *Evidentials: Turkic, Iranian and Neighbouring Languages*, Berlin 2000; A.Y. Aikhenvald & R.M.W. Dixon (Eds.), *Studies in Evidentiality*, *op. cit.*; D. Hargreaves, *Agency and Intentional Action in Kathmandu Newar*, "Himalayan Linguistics", 2005, 5, pp. 1–48.

[14] Cf. L.B. Anderson, *Evidentials, Paths of Change, and Mental Maps: Typologically Regular Asymmetries*, [in:] W. Chafe & J. Nichols (Eds.), *Evidentiality, op. cit.*, pp. 274–275.

[15] Cf. A.Y. Aikhenvald, *Evidentiality, op. cit.*, pp. 67–104; see also F. De Haan, *Evidentiality and Epistemic Modality: Setting Boundaries*, "Southwest Journal of Linguistics", 1999, 18(1), pp. 83–101.

In those languages which have obligatory evidentials, one cannot formulate a sentence equivalent to English: *John is repairing his car*, without providing the source of that information in the same sentence. Giving the source of information whenever one makes an assertion is a prerequisite of successful communication in evidential languages; it is imposed by Grice's cooperative principle and, in particular, by the maxims of quantity and manner[16].

However, it is not only the pragmatics of a given language that determines the presence of an evidential marker in a clause. In languages with obligatory markers of evidentiality, it is impossible to omit them, because the grammatical structures of these languages impose their use. Furthermore, evidentiality is often fused with other grammatical categories in a kind of *portmanteau* morphs (see below). To illustrate in brief how grammatical evidentiality works, I will quote an example from Tuyuca, based on Janet Barnes's description of this evidentiality system[17]. Tuyuca is a language from the Eastern Tucanoan group, spoken on the border of Colombia and Brazil by about 940 native speakers[18]. The language has a complex system of five information source markers fused with person and tense. If a simple declarative English sentence like *He played soccer* is translated into Tuyuca, one has to provide the verb stem *apé* ('play') with a suitable suffix (there are five options available), in which different meanings are fused in one form: the third person singular masculine, the past tense, and one of five possible sources of information, the one on which that assertion is based, as in the example below.

English *He played soccer*
Tuyuca[19]

díiga	*apé-*	*-wi*	*-ti*	*-yigɨ*	*-yi*	*-hiyi*
soccer	play-	-3Sg(m). Past. Visual	-3Sg(m). Past. Auditory	-3Sg(m). Past. Reported	-3Sg(m). Past. Inferred	-3Sg(m). Past. Assumed
'He played soccer'		'I saw him play'	'I heard, but did not see, him play'	'someone else told me'	'I see evidence for it'	'it is reasonable to assume so'

[16] Interlocutors are expected to make their contributions as informative as needed, and as clear as required; see P. Grice, *Studies in the Way of* Words, Cambridge, Mass. 1989, pp. 26–28.
[17] Cf. J. Barnes, *Evidentials in the Tuyuca Verb*, "International Journal of American Linguistics", 1984, 50, pp. 255–271.
[18] https://www.ethnologue.com/language/tue; date of access: 11.12.2017.
[19] Cf. J. Barnes, *Evidentials in the Tuyuca Verb*, op. cit., p. 257.

Thus, for the speakers of Tuyuca, marking the source of information on which an assertion is based is unavoidable, both from the pragmatic and morphosyntactic points of view[20]. In evidential languages, one has to be precise about one's information source. Obviously, it is possible to lie and provide a false source of information, but the grammatical marker of information source has to be included in a clause. The linguists who have described evidentiality systems in native American languages often point to the fact that speakers of those languages show remarkable metalinguistic awareness of how important it is to provide the information source[21].

Languages with grammatical evidentiality can vary widely in how big their evidential systems are (i.e., how many information sources they specify and mark), and whether a given system allows for evidentially neutral statements or not. There are languages with small systems, where only one type of information source is formally marked with a grammatical evidential, and other information sources go unmarked (or they are marked lexically). For example, only the reported, or, in other languages, the non-firsthand evidence will be marked, and thus opposed to unmarked "others". In contrast, there are languages with systems consisting of as many as five (see the example above) or more evidentials for different information sources, and all of them are formally marked and obligatory – there are no evidentially neutral assertions in such languages[22].

As regards their slot in a sentence, evidentials are most often inflectional suffixes attached to a verb, and consequently, their placement in a sentence is thus predetermined. If they are obligatory themselves or fused with an obligatory category (e.g., tense), they cannot be omitted. Evidentials can also be enclitics; i.e., independent suffixes attachable to any sentence constituent. In that case, their slot in a sentence can be less regular because they do not take part in the obligatory verbal morphology; their placement will vary depending on the system and its pragmatic constraints.

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[20] This type of evidentiality is considered to be a common trait of many languages from the Vaupés river region, on the border between north-west Brazil and Colombia. Systems of five (or four) evidentials, fused with tense markers, and possibly person, are found also in other languages of the area, also those genetically unrelated to the Eastern Tucanoan family; e.g., in Tariana, which belongs to the Arawak group, but has a similar system of five evidentials: visual, non-visual, inferred, assumed, reported; see A.Y. Aikhenvald, *A Grammar of Tariana from Northwest Amazonia*, Cambridge 2003, pp. 285–323.

[21] *Idem*, *Evidentiality*, Oxford 2004, pp. 9–10.

[22] See examples from Tariana in A.Y. Aikhenvald, *A Grammar of Tariana, op. cit.*, pp. 285–323; see also R.L. Oswalt, *The Evidential System of Kashaya*, [in:] W. Chafe & J. Nichols (Eds.), *Evidentiality, op. cit.*, pp. 29–45.

Evidentials may develop certain semantic extensions, usually modal epistemic or mirative. Then, apart from the normal job of pointing to the information source, they also indicate, or imply, a degree of reliability of the information provided (epistemic extension), or its novelty and unexpectedness (mirativity). For example, a sentence with the reported evidential, equivalent to English: *Mr Jones has moved to Bristol (plus reported evidential: I've been told)* will imply that the information is not as reliable as it would have been if the visual marker had been included.

Peter H. Matthews defines "evidential" as "(Particle, inflection) which is one of a set that make clear the s o u r c e o r r e l i a b i l i t y of the evidence on which a statement is based" (emphasis added, E.Ł.)[23]. This definition makes it explicit that the role of evidentiality may also be marking the speaker's attitude to the reliability of information, not only the source thereof. A similar stance is adopted by Wallace Chafe[24], Francis R. Palmer[25] or Thomas Willett[26]; they claim that since modal epistemic meanings are found in many evidentiality systems, it is unwarranted not to include this aspect in a cross-linguistic definition of evidentials. Other authors, for example Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald[27] or Ferdinand De Haan[28], opt for a narrow definition of grammatical evidentiality – as markers of information source only. Also Anderson (see the above-quoted definition) writes that

> it is important to distinguish true evidential categories from other forms which SEEM evidential, but are not. [The notion of 'evidential'] does not simply include anything one might consider to have an evidential function, that is to express evidence for something else. Rather, evidentials are a special grammatical phenomenon[29].

The problems of what makes evidentials and what does not, how evidentials should be cross-linguistically defined, as well as the overlap of evidentiality with other semantically related categories (epistemic modality, egophoricity and mirativity) are contentious and oft-discussed issues in the growing literature on evidentiality systems, but they need not concern us in what follows. For the purposes of the present paper, it is sufficient to note that

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[23] Cf. P.H. Matthews, *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Linguistics*, Oxford 2007, p. 129.
[24] Cf. W. Chafe, *Evidentiality in English Conversation and Academic Writing*, [in:] W. Chafe & J. Nichols (Eds.), *Evidentiality, op. cit.*, pp. 261–272.
[25] Cf. F.R. Palmer, *Mood and Modality*, Cambridge 1986, p. 51.
[26] Cf. T. Willett, *A Cross-linguistic Survey …, op. cit.*, pp. 51–97.
[27] Cf. A.Y. Aikhenvald, *Evidentiality, op. cit.*, pp. 4ff, 333.
[28] Cf. F. De Haan, *Evidentiality and Epistemic Modality, op. cit.*, pp. 83–101.
[29] Cf. L.B. Anderson, *Evidentials, Paths of Change, and Mental Maps, op. cit.*, p. 274.

evidentials constitute a grammatical category found in many natural languages, whose primary function is providing the information source on which a statement is based. Those who speak languages with obligatory grammatical evidentiality cannot omit evidential markers in their utterances; they have to be precise about where their information comes from. It is unavoidable for both grammatical and socio-pragmatic reasons; evidentials are intrinsically embedded in the grammatical structure of those languages, and are regarded as essential for adequate communication. Also, they are highly valued meta-textual expressions, and trustworthy speakers are expected to use them properly wherever needed.

Having introduced this basic information about grammatical evidentials in natural languages, we may return to the topic of belief, justification and the foundationalist theory. How obligatory grammatical evidentiality bears upon certain ideas connected therewith will be the subject of the final section.

3. The notion of "belief"

Traditionally, in epistemology, knowledge has been defined as a j u s t i f i e d t r u e b e l i e f (JTB); to know something is to believe a proposition which is both epistemically justified and true[30]. Since our interest in this paper is focused on the foundationalist theory of justification (i.e., basic beliefs and what may confer justification upon them), not on different theories of truth, for the purposes of our discussion, we will simply understand truth as correspondence with mind-independent reality. Despite various objections it raises, the classical theory of truth (or some version thereof) still appears to be most resistant to critique and intuitively most appealing in comparison to its rivals: the coherentist or pragmatic theories. Accordingly, after Aristotle, we will assume that a proposition is true if it corresponds to a fact or state of affairs in the really existing world and is false if it does not, without further investigating the notion[31].

Much more important for our further discussion is explaining the notion of belief. In section five, an evidentiality-related argument

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[30] It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the Gettier problem; see E. Gettier, *Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?*, "Analysis", 1963, 23, pp. 121–123; for a discussion of the difficulties connected with the JTB definition of knowledge, see L. Trinkaus Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind. An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge*, Cambridge 1996, pp. 283–292.

[31] The literature on different theories of truth is too extensive to be cited here satisfactorily; cf. J. Woleński, *Epistemologia. Poznanie, prawda, wiedza, realizm*, Warszawa 2005, pp. 63–354.

undermining the notion of basic belief will be formulated; therefore, it is essential to clarify how the term "belief" will be used in what follows, and what it means that someone b e l i e v e s t h a t *p*.

Probably the most common understanding of the term in contemporary analytic epistemology and philosophy of language, but certainly not the only one, is that belief is a p r o p o s i t i o n a l a t t i t u d e [32]. Other propositional attitudes include desire, hope, doubt, fear, etc.; these are all mental states of having some attitude to a proposition expressed in a sentence. In the case of belief, it is an attitude of accepting a given proposition as true. Thus interpreted, belief must be expressed/expressible in words; typically (but not necessarily) in the form: *S believes that p*, where *S* stands for the believer and *p* is a proposition expressed in a sentence – whatever it is that is believed by *S*. Since we could say that belief consists in a special relation between a psychological state of the believer and an object of belief (i.e., a proposition), this approach can also be called a s t a t e - o b j e c t v i e w of belief[33].

We will not dwell on the subject of ontological status of propositions which are objects (contents) of beliefs; a straightforward view will be adopted that a proposition is the content of whatever is asserted or believed, aloud or in thinking, and that content is somehow represented in the mind (be it Fodor's "language of thought" or otherwise), it is stored there, and it can be retrieved from memory if needed. Those mental representations of propositions are most probably somehow structured if they are to be processed and recombined in a productive and systematic way; hence, it

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[32] Notably, W.V.O. Quine and D. Davidson did not regard beliefs as propositional attitudes; for a discussion, see H.J. Glock, *Quine and Davidson on Language, Thought and Reality*, Cambridge 2003, pp. 268–293.

[33] See P.K. Moser, *Belief*, [in:] R. Audi (Ed.), *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, Cambridge 1999, pp. 78–79. In the Polish philosophical literature, there is a useful distinction, dating back to the Lvov–Warsaw School and the influence of Franz Brentano's philosophy, between the *object* of belief and the *content* of belief. Accordingly, an object of belief is the existence of a real object or state of affairs and the belief's content is a proposition. So, for example, the proposition expressed in the sentence *The shirt is white* is the content of the belief whose object is the existence of the whiteness of the shirt; Cf. D. Łukasiewicz, *Brentanian philosophy and Czeżowski's conception of existence*, [in:] A. Chrudzimski & D. Łukasiewicz (Eds.), *Actions, Products and Things: Brentano and Polish Philosophy*, Heusenstamm nr. Frankfurt 2006, pp. 183–215; see also M. Lechniak, *Przekonania i zmiana przekonań. Analiza logiczna i filozoficzna*, Lublin 2011, pp. 27–57. However, in the Anglo-American epistemological literature, traditionally, the object of belief has been a proposition, so the object and the content of belief come to the same. Because this paper discusses one of justification theories set within that tradition, I will follow this simplifying approach to avoid confusion in the use of terms.

is quite probable that they are structured in a language-like fashion[34]. We will return to the relation between mental representations and linguistic representations of propositions, but whatever view on the nature of the former we adopt, it is clear that the object (content) of belief, which is a proposition, must be expressed (or be expressible) in a natural language, be accessible and recognizable to the believer as the content of her belief. Otherwise, one cannot claim that one believes that p[35].

Sometimes, our way of speaking about beliefs is ambiguous. The term "belief" refers either to the mental state of believing that p (i.e., the mental state of regarding the proposition p as true), or to an act of assertion whose content is p or, for short, the proposition p itself, as contained in the mind and represented by a sentence. These are ontologically distinct things; a mental state of accepting a proposition as true is clearly different from a proposition, or from an act of assertion, or from a sentence expressing a proposition. In what follows, by belief is meant the believer's attitude to regard p as true. A proposition is an object (content) of belief; it is not belief itself.

Another ambiguity may arise when we speak about the logical value of beliefs; i.e., their being true or false. If what is meant by "belief" is a mental state of the subject, strictly speaking beliefs cannot be true or false because mental states do not have logical value[36]. Being true or false is a feature of propositions; i.e., objects/contents of beliefs expressed in sentences. However, since the term "belief" is often used in the epistemological literature, especially in the Anglo-American analytic tradition, to refer both to the mental state of accepting the proposition p as true and to the proposition p

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[34] Cf. J. Fodor, *The Language of Thought*, New York 1975; *idem*, *LOT 2. The Language of Thought Revisited*, Oxford 2008; see also E. Schwitzgebel, *Belief*, [in:] *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2015, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/belief/#Bib, date of access: 11.12.2017.

[35] As noted by M. Lechniak, it is possible to distinguish a category of "iconic beliefs" whose object could be described as "a cognitive scheme"; that is, a complex image of a situation, temporal event or a spatial arrangement, which may be the basis of our thinking or acting in a particular way. However, the content of such iconic beliefs is extremely complex to grasp and express in language – it is practically impossible, though such a cognitive scheme is capable of providing a quick and easily recognizable answer to a question posed. Since such iconic beliefs are by definition not expressible in language, and therefore, nothing can be said about their content, they will not concern us in what follows; Cf. M. Lechniak, *Przekonania i zmiana przekonań. Analiza logiczna i filozoficzna*, Lublin 2011, p. 94.

[36] This problem is discussed by J. Łukasiewicz in *O zasadzie sprzeczności u Arystotelesa* (Kraków 1910); however, in the writings of T. Czeżowski, another representative of the Lvov–Warsaw School, beliefs (*przekonania*) are either true or false; i.e., *beliefs* are ascribed truth-value (*Główne zasady nauk filozoficznych*, Wrocław 1959, p. 7).

itself (the object/content of belief, see the footnote above), in consequence, beliefs may be ascribed a truth-value[37].

Nonetheless, what is essential for this approach (belief as a propositional attitude) is that one's belief should always have propositional content p, which is semantically determined (i.e., it must be clear what is believed) and has a truth value (i.e., the proposition believed is objectively true or false, though the believer may have no cognitive access to that truth value, of course).

One should mention that belief could be understood somewhat differently – as a disposition to act in a certain way. According to dispositionalists, "to believe p" means to have behavioural dispositions related to p; namely, dispositions to act as if p is the case. In the dispositionalist approach, the focus is on the pattern of actual or potential behaviour caused by belief[38]. There are some obvious and oft-mentioned problems that dispositionalists must cope with. Perhaps the most basic is that the dispositionalist approach seems explanatorily deficient; it does not explain the role beliefs play in our acting as we do. When we explain our actions via our beliefs, we must refer to their content, to w h a t we actually believe; otherwise, we are not able to explain the causal power of belief. Hence, in what follows, we will adopt the view that the presence of propositional content p is inescapable and essential for belief.

The most important advantage of this view of belief, however, is that it allows us to assess the content of beliefs as true or false. Since belief is an attitude of acceptance towards a proposition, and its content is expressed in a sentence we can refer to, the above quoted traditional definition of knowledge as justified true belief (JTB) makes sense. Belief understood as a disposition to act does not have a truth value. Also, since our main concern

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[37] In fact, the above-mentioned traditional JTB definition of knowledge ("knowledge is a justified and true belief") also obscures the distinction between the mental state and the object/content of belief.

[38] The dispositional view on belief is argued for, among others, by G. Ryle (*The Concept of Mind*, London 1990, pp. 112–147). The ambiguity of the notion of b e l i e f (Polish: *przekonanie*) is discussed also by K. Twardowski in his essay *O czynnościach i wytworach* (Cf. K. Twardowski, *Wybrane pisma filozoficzne*. Warszawa 1965 [1912]). As pointed out there, some terms, like *przekonanie* (belief) or *sąd* (judgment), may be used in two or even three senses: to refer to a mental activity, a product of that activity or a disposition to act in a certain way. Other members of the Lvov–Warsaw School understood the term *przekonanie* (belief) most often as referring to the mental act of assertive judging (J. Łukasiewicz, K. Ajdukiewicz, W. Witwicki), less often as a disposition (K. Szaniawski), or adopted combined interpretations (T. Czeżowski, W. Marciszewski). A more detailed analysis of the notion of *belief* in the Lvov–Warsaw School is to be found in M. Lechniak, *Przekonania i zmiana przekonań. Analiza logiczna i filozoficzna*, Lublin 2011, pp. 27–57.

in this paper is the foundationalist theory of epistemic justification and the concept of basic beliefs as defended by BonJour (see below), it is only natural that our understanding of the term "belief" will be similar to that adopted in the theory under discussion.

4. Epistemological foundationalism: the major premises, critique and defense

Our beliefs are interconnected with other beliefs we hold in a justificatory relation; we believe that p because we have a prior, apparently justified belief that q. Our belief that q, in turn, is a result of our prior belief that x, and so on. Now, the problem is what provides the ultimate justification in that chain of beliefs: $\ldots \to x \to q \to p$. Is that ultimate justification itself a belief or not? If it were a belief, it would not be of much help in providing justification since that belief itself would require justification and the chain of justification might go on interminably. The issue of the ultimate justification in a chain of beliefs lies at the heart of what is called the "epistemic regress problem"[39]. Generally speaking, there are four possibilities regarding the beginning of any justificatory chain. The first is that the chain begins with a belief which simply lacks justification. But in that case, of course, any belief dependent in its justification chain on that prior unjustified belief will be unjustified as well. In the second, the justificatory chain does not have a beginning, any belief is supported by an infinite number of other beliefs and the chain of reasoning goes on interminably. Since in this case none of our beliefs can enjoy its ultimate justification and we must assume an infinite number of beliefs to provide justification for any belief, this alternative is not very compelling[40]. The third option is that our justificatory chain, no matter how long, is circular. It will always look as follows: $p \to \ldots \to x \to q \to p$. In consequence, a belief would have to provide justification for itself (*via* other beliefs). Certainly, it does not appear intuitively convincing that self-justified beliefs can be the foundation of our knowledge.

Because these three options cannot account for the ultimate justification of our beliefs and the epistemic regress problem remains unsolved, many epistemologists have opted for a fourth alternative. They claim that since we do have justified beliefs and it would be absurd to negate this, some of our beliefs must be justified non-doxastically; that is, by something other than

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[39] The epistemic regress argument was first formulated by Aristotle in *Posterior Analytics* (1.3, 5–23).

[40] But see P. Klein (*Foundationalism and the infinite regress of reasons*, "Philosophy and Phenomenological Research", 1998, LVIII, pp. 919–926), where infinitism is argued for.

belief. Such beliefs are called "basic beliefs", or "unconditionally justified foundational beliefs", because they do not derive their justification from other beliefs, at least not in any significant degree. It is true that they can be supported by other beliefs, but primarily, their source of justification lies elsewhere; otherwise, we would face the regress problem (see above). All other beliefs are non-basic, or in other words, conditionally justified, because their being justified depends on the justifiedness of some prior beliefs from which they are deduced. The obvious question then arises: what makes me justified in accepting some of my beliefs as foundational for other beliefs (i.e., as properly basic), though in their justification I cannot appeal to any other beliefs. In other words, what confers justification on basic beliefs?

To begin with, it must be underlined that not too many options are available. Introspection is one such source of justification. Beliefs about my own conscious mental states and sensations are unconditionally justified for me – they are basic beliefs. When I have a belief that *I am perceiving a cup on the table in front of me*, I cannot doubt the fact that I have that belief, even if that belief is caused by hallucinations and there is actually no cup there. Similarly, my belief that I am in pain or that I feel sad or happy are immediately justified for me. I cannot doubt my belief that I feel happy when I am experiencing such an emotion. Beliefs about my own mental states or sensations do not require correspondence with the external world; they are justified for me immediately, simply by my considering those states. Mathematical and logical/analytical truths make another group of basic beliefs; for example, *Two plus two is four, Red is not green,* or *All red squares are square.* These beliefs are indubitable truths.

The view that all our justified beliefs belong to either (1) immediately justified basic beliefs or (2) a more numerous group of non-basic beliefs which must derive their ultimate justification from basic beliefs (possibly through a chain of other beliefs) is to be found in all versions of epistemological foundationalism. Its proponents claim that a set of basic beliefs which are immediately and non-doxastically justified makes the foundation of our k n o w i n g anything. However, the different strands of foundationalism vary remarkably in their constraints on what can provide that immediate non-doxastic justification for a basic belief, or, in other words, which beliefs are basic.

In Cartesian-style "classical" foundationalism, the standards are set very high; a basic belief must be infallible. Since basic beliefs provide justification for all other beliefs, it follows that all beliefs – if justified – are justified infallibly, or they are unjustified. The obvious problem with this approach is that it is counterintuitive. Since only beliefs based on

introspection (beliefs about one's own conscious mental states) and rational deduction (logical truths) meet the requirements of being infallibly justified, we are left with a very small body of justified beliefs, and, hence, a very small foundation for knowledge.

Beliefs based on perception, for example, a belief that there is a cup on the table before me when I can see that cup, will not qualify as justified because it is conceivable that I could be mistaken about the state of affairs in the world external to my mind. I may suffer from hallucinations, be dreaming or be somehow deceived in my perception, and therefore the proposition *There is a cup on the table before me* cannot be regarded as infallibly true. In consequence, it is not a justified basic belief. Nor can it derive justification from a basic belief about my mental state that *I am perceiving a cup on the table before me right now.* Beliefs about the external world cannot be infallibly deduced from beliefs about one's own mental states.

However, most people would answer to this reasoning that beliefs based on perception are as a matter of fact very well justified, though it may happen, rarely indeed, that some prove untrue. Perception, they would add, though not infallible, is a highly reliable source of justification for our beliefs; in fact, it is the chief source of such justification. Also, memory beliefs, for example, my belief that I was at work in the morning, can be regarded as basically justified beliefs provided there is no counter-evidence defeating them. This is the standpoint of "modest" foundationalism, which does not require that justified basic beliefs be infallible and includes perception and memory among the sources of immediate and direct justification[41]. Therefore, in modest foundationalism, perceptual beliefs about the external world can be justified basic beliefs. As a result, the body of basic beliefs which can serve as the ultimate justification for other (non-basic) beliefs is incomparably more impressive here than the sum of basic beliefs in the classical version of foundationalism. This makes modest foundationalism far more attractive as a justification theory.

The view that our knowledge must have its ultimate foundations in some unconditionally justified basic beliefs (whatever their nature might be) has been quite popular in epistemology and may seem an almost trivially obvious solution to the epistemic regress problem. Nevertheless, some strong objections to it have been formulated, mostly, but not only, concerning the question of whether it is possible to have justification for a belief which

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[41] Cf. W. Alston, *Two Types of Foundationalism*, "The Journal of Philosophy", 1976, 73, pp. 165–185; idem, *Has Foundationalism Been Refuted?*, "Philosophical Studies", 1976, 29, pp. 287–305; idem, *Perceptual Knowledge*, [in:] J. Greco & E. Sosa (Eds.), *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology, op. cit.*, pp. 223–242.

would not involve any prior beliefs. Since this problem, which is the core assumption of foundationalism, has generated most of the critique, let us discuss it in brief starting with Wilfrid Sellars's argument.

In his essay "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind", Sellars generally criticized the concept of "the given", and thus he also undermined the idea that non-belief-like experiential states can provide epistemic justification for beliefs[42]. What is described as "the given" – the sensory elements of experience given immediately, without any concepts involved, such as, for example, the sensation of red when seeing a red object – cannot make the foundation of empirical knowledge without ascribing to them a truth value. However, if the truth value is required, then the concept of truth plus some other concepts and an act of judging connected therewith are intrinsically involved in our immediate sensory experience. Thus, the idea of "the given" is undermined.

Sellars's argument was later elaborated by Laurence BonJour in *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*, where the line of reasoning is similar in essence; getting a non-doxastic (non-belief-like) justification for basic beliefs is an impossible task because either:

    (a) some inferences are necessarily involved in the process; otherwise, there is no ground for the subject to give one of her beliefs the status of being basic, but if any inferences are involved, the belief in question is no longer properly basic,

or

    (b) our non-doxastic experiential states are indeed exclusively qualitative and non-propositional, but then they will fail to justify anything[43].

In answer to (a), foundationalists usually claim that our basic beliefs are not formed on the basis of other beliefs because they are cognitively spontaneous. Do I have any introspective beliefs about my visual perception when I perceive a cup on the table? The modest foundationalist would answer that certainly not. I just see a cup on the table, without forming any meta-beliefs that I can see it, or that a cup appears to me to be on the table, etc. I do not need to have such second-order beliefs about my sensations when I am experiencing those sensations and forming first-order beliefs on their

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[42] Cf. W. Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, [in:] *Science, Perception and Reality*, Atascadero, CA 1963, pp. 127–196.

[43] Cf. L. BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*, Cambridge, Mass. 1985, p. 31; see also E. Sosa's paper from 1980, *The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge*, [in:] E. Sosa, *Knowledge in Perspective. Selected Essays in Epistemology*, Cambridge 1991, where anti-foundationalist arguments are discussed.

basis. Therefore, my perceptual basic beliefs are justified non-doxastically, by my non-propositional perceptual experience, without any accompanying beliefs. Also classical foundationalists would answer that (infallible) basic beliefs about our own mental states are justified non-doxastically by our immediate experiencing of those states. The aim of this strategy is to save the basic status of those beliefs and avoid infinite regress problem.

This line of defence, however, does not solve the problem. If we assume that beliefs have a truth value whereas sensory experiences do not, then my belief that *I see a cup on the table* or my belief that *there is a cup on the table* will be either true or false, whereas my seeing a cup on the table will not have any truth value. But since my seeing a cup is neither true nor false, the question arises of how such a non-propositional experiential state can provide justification for a propositional mental state (i.e., a belief), which has a truth value. Consequently, this leads to option (b) above. On the other hand, if we assumed that my seeing a cup has an "assertive propositional content" (i.e., it can be somehow presented to consciousness as true) as some foundationalists claim, and hence it can be ascribed a truth value, then it would need justification itself, and there would be no difference between a belief and that experiential state. In consequence, the latter could not stop the justificatory regress chain.

In his more recent works, by contrast to his 1985 publication mentioned above, BonJour claims that Sellars's dilemma is misconceived and foundationalism can be defended[44]. The problem of impossible justification arises when we see the dilemma as it is usually formulated, which is more or less as follows: a basic belief must be justified by an experiential state which is not belief-like; otherwise, the justificatory regress chain would not stop and the belief would not be basic. But it is an impossible task because if that experiential state is non-propositional and non-judgmental in character, then it will not justify anything. It is not possible that such a purely non-propositional experience, involving no conceptual claim concerning its character or relevance, could give us a reason for accepting a relevant propositional belief. However, if that experiential state is regarded as propositional and judgmental in character, then it will justify a relevant belief, but it will require justification itself, and then it will not stop the regress chain.

BonJour claims that the dilemma could be successfully avoided if we assumed that what provides justification for a basic belief – be it second-

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[44] Cf. L. BonJour, *The Dialectic of Foundationalism and Coherentism*, *op. cit.*, pp. 117–142; see also L. BonJour, *A Version of Internalist Foundationalism*, *op. cit.*, pp. 61–65.

order belief (meta-belief) or perceptual belief – is a non-apperceptive and non-propositional a w a r e n e s s   o f the content of our conscious mental state[45]. Our meta-beliefs and our sensory experiences are conscious mental states, and they have, as BonJour claims, a "built in" constitutive awareness of their appropriate content. In the case of second-order beliefs (meta-beliefs), it is an awareness of the propositional content of a certain first-order belief and of our acceptance thereof, whereas in the case of sensory experience, it is an awareness of the (non-propositional and non-conceptual) content of that sensory experience. That non-apperceptive and non-propositional awareness of the appropriate sort of content is inescapable; we just have it by experiencing a given conscious mental state since that awareness is "built-in" and constitutive of that mental state. Importantly, it is an a w a r e n e s s   o f the appropriate sort of content, not an a w a r e n e s s   t h a t I believe or I experience so-and-so, which would be a propositional, second-order awareness that would require justification itself[46].

This non-propositional and non-apperceptive awareness of the content of meta-belief or sensory experience, built in and constitutive of any conscious mental state, confers justification and is "foundational", or, in other words, properly basic. Can the Sellarsian dilemma be thus avoided? BonJour is quite optimistic. On the one hand, that direct awareness of the content is not propositionally structured, so it is not a belief-like state that would require justification itself. On the other hand, it is sufficiently "built in" a given meta-belief or sensory experience to dismiss doubts that it will be too vague to reflect in any way the relevant content and, in effect, it will fail to justify anything. On the contrary, that awareness of the content gives any conscious mental state (meta-belief or sensory experience) its specific character and makes it this or that particular mental state[47].

That justificatory awareness of the content of a conscious mental state is at work in providing justification for second-order beliefs (meta-beliefs) and perceptual beliefs alike; although in the latter case the route is less direct (see below). Bonjour claims that it is irrelevant that in the case of perceptual beliefs we are dealing with an awareness of a non-propositional content (sensory experience), while in the case of meta-beliefs we have an awareness of a propositional content. In both cases, the direct awareness of content is non-apperceptive and foundational for relevant beliefs. Whereas, in the case of second-order beliefs, BonJour's account appears quite convincing, the

[45] Cf. *idem*, *The Dialectic of Foundationalism and Coherentism*, *op. cit.*, pp. 131–133; also L. BonJour, *A Version of Internalist Foundationalism*, *op. cit.*, pp. 61–65.

[46] *Ibidem*, p. 63.

[47] *Ibidem*, pp. 61-76.

issue of justification for perceptual beliefs is more problematic. Before we go on to these problems, let us summarize in brief BonJour's explanation of how the relevant justification works in both cases. We will illustrate the point using BonJour's own example[48].

When I believe that I am presently having the belief that *foundationalism is more defensible than most philosophers think*, what can justify this second-order meta-belief? If we assume that it is a higher-order apperceptive awareness (i.e., awareness-*that*) with the content *I am presently believing that foundationalism is more defensible than most philosophers think*, then this sort of experience will be in need of justification itself. Therefore, this approach is not very helpful. BonJour's suggestion is different. Since any occurrent second-order belief is i t s e l f a conscious mental state, not only a state of which one can be conscious via a second state, it involves being consciously aware of two aspects: of the belief's propositional content (i.e., *foundationalism is more defensible than most philosophers think*) and of one's acceptance of that content. As BonJour puts it, "not to be consciously aware of that specific content would be not to have that specific conscious, occurrent belief at all"[49].

Thus, to have an occurrent second-order belief is to have a direct awareness of the content of that belief and that awareness is constitutive thereof. It is not of apperceptive (reflective) nature, nor does it involve any second-order mental acts with propositional content. It is that non-propositional direct a w a r e n e s s o f the belief's propositional content that justifies a second-order belief.

Does the above account pertain to the justification of perceptual beliefs about the external world? According to BonJour, the way non-apperceptive awareness of the content works for the justification of perceptual beliefs is very similar. When I am having a visual or other sensory experience of whatever kind, for example, I can see a cup on the table before me, and this experience is a conscious state, it necessarily involves being conscious of its content. That constitutive, built-in a w a r e n e s s o f the content of my conscious sensory experience is non-apperceptive and non-propositional in character, so it will not require justification itself (it is not an awareness-t h a t). But it is inescapable; that awareness of the sensory content just makes my sensory experience what it is. Significantly, it is a non-apperceptive and non-propositional awareness of a non-propositional and non-conceptual sensory content. Now, the question arises whether an awareness of the content

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[48] *Ibidem*, pp. 61–62.
[49] *Ibidem*, p. 63.

of this type can justify any perceptual belief which is p r o p o s i t i o n a l in character (cf. Sellars's argument above). As noted by Davidson, the relation between a sensory experience and a perceptual belief can only be causal, but it cannot be logical because sensations are not beliefs or other propositional attitudes[50]. BonJour admits that the specific content of a sensory experience we are consciously aware of when perceiving something[51] is of non-conceptual character; however, that non-conceptual content of sensory experience can be c o n c e p t u a l l y   d e s c r i b e d in a belief, with at least some degree of precision. As BonJour explains the point:

> The relation between this non-conceptual content and such a conceptual description thereof may not be strictly l o g i c a l, as Davidson uses the term, i.e., may involve nothing like the relations of inference, consistency or inconsistency, etc., that may exist between two propositions, but it is obviously not merely a causal relation. Rather it is a d e s c r i p t i v e relation, having to do with the accuracy or inaccuracy of fit between a conceptual description and a non-conceptual object that the description purports to describe. And while the assessment or evaluation of the accuracy of a description is not quite the same thing as the logical assessment or evaluation of an inference, it is nonetheless normative and even logical in a broader sense that would have no application to a merely causal relation. […] Thus when I have a conscious state of sensory experience, I am, as already argued, aware of the specific sensory content of that state simply by virtue of having that experience. And hence if an apperceptive belief that I entertain purports to describe or conceptually characterize that perceptual content, albeit no doubt incompletely and abstractly, and if I understand the descriptive content of that belief, i.e., understand what an experience would have to be like in order to satisfy the conceptual description, then I seem to be in a good, indeed an ideal, position to judge directly whether the conceptual description is accurate as far as it goes, and if so, to be thereby justified in accepting the belief[52].

Summing up the main point: I am directly aware of the content of my non-conceptual sensory experience simply by having that experience. That awareness gives rise to my apperceptive belief which attempts to

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[50] "Sensations cause some beliefs and in this sense are the basis or ground of those beliefs. But a causal explanation of a belief does not show how or why the belief is justified" (D. Davidson, *A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge*, [in:] D. Henrich (Ed.), *Kant oder Hegel*, Stuttgart 1983, p. 428; quoted after BonJour, *ibidem*, p. 71).

[51] Naturally, it is the content we are consciously concentrated on, because our overall sensory experience is too detailed and variegated to be grasped by any awareness.

[52] L. BonJour, *A Version of Internalist Foundationalism*, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-73.

conceptually grasp or "describe" the non-conceptual content of that sensory experience. If I understand the descriptive content of that belief and I can assess that it is accurate, then I am justified in accepting that belief. The key point for BonJour's justification of such beliefs is that it is the direct non-apperceptive awareness of the non-conceptual content of sensory experience that constitutes the reason for accepting the description as accurate or not. So that awareness provides justification for the relevant perceptual belief. However, can this justification stop the regress chain?

The above passage from BonJour's account has been quoted at some length because, as I understand it, he retreats there to a partly doxastic justification for the perceptual belief, which is not blameworthy in itself because "mixed" theories of justification may be quite appealing, but it is not the purely foundationalist position he declares. The second condition of accepting a given perceptual belief (cf. "and if I understand the descriptive content of that belief, i.e., understand what an experience would have to be like in order to satisfy the conceptual description …") states clearly that only by appeal to our understanding of the descriptive content of a perceptual belief can the belief be "judged" as accurately describing the sensory content. It is obvious that justification of that belief involves other beliefs, or a kind of assertive mental states, which are definitely judgmental in character and prior to the belief in question. The direct, non-apperceptive awareness of the content of sensory experience will not suffice as the justification for the relevant perceptual belief; my reason for accepting a given perceptual belief depends also on my judgment of its accuracy. This resembles BonJour's anti-foundationalist argumentation from *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* (1985, see above). Consequently, the infinite regress problem is unresolved.

Another problem is that in BonJour's account, the boundary between two levels of description, the conceptual "description" of sensory content and the semantic representation thereof (i.e., the propositional content of a given belief expressed in a proper linguistic form), is somewhat blurred. We will return to this later when discussing the problem of basic beliefs from the perspective of evidentials.

Regarding perceptual beliefs, another important issue is whether the awareness of the content of sensory experience will manage to justify beliefs about the e x t e r n a l world. Assuming the foregoing problems have been somehow solved, there is still the question of how awareness of an internal mental state can give us any reason to claim knowledge about the state of affairs in the external world. BonJour's account is less optimistic here. He offers tentative suggestions on how the correlation between the internal and

the external might work, but he admits that the problem of the external world is still unresolved[53].

Furthermore, such foundational basic beliefs, completely independent of other beliefs, are inconceivable. In foundationalism, basic beliefs may be supported by other beliefs, but they must be entirely and adequately justified by belief-independent factors. Other beliefs cannot contribute to the epistemic status of basic beliefs in any essential way because then the infinite regress problem emerges. However, as rightly pointed out by Ernest Sosa, such basic beliefs, essentially independent of other beliefs, are difficult to think of. He writes:

> Given that beliefs would not so much as exist without an extensive supporting cast of related beliefs, there is an air of unreality about the foundationalist claim that beliefs might nevertheless be justified independently of other beliefs. It is hard to conceive of the hypothetical cases that one would naturally invoke in support of such a claim, for these would be cases where one held the target beliefs along with the supporting conscious states but without the supporting cast of other beliefs. But you could not possibly so much as host the target belief without a lot of the relevant supportive beliefs. Nor does it seem that you could enjoy justification for the target belief in the absence of justification for a good number of those supporting beliefs, absent which you could not hold the target belief at all[54].

Let us recapitulate the chief premises and dilemmas of the foundationalist approach. First, all our knowledge about our mental states and the external world is ultimately justified by foundational basic beliefs. From those basic beliefs we have to reason (deductively and infallibly in classical foundationalism[55]) to other beliefs constituting our knowledge about the external world. The second premise is that those basic beliefs are justified by what is "given" to our conscious experience. These justificatory mental states (a w a r e n e s s o f) are not belief-like and do not involve any further beliefs, so they themselves do not require justification; otherwise, we would face the infinite regress.

It seems improbable that there might be any real epistemic agents able and willing to pursue the task of justifying the whole content of their

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[53] Cf. L. BonJour, *The Dialectic of Foundationalism and Coherentism*, *op. cit.*, pp. 134–139; also: *idem*, *A Version of Internalist Foundationalism*, *op. cit.*, pp. 81–96.

[54] E. Sosa, *Reply to BonJour*, [in:] L. BonJour & E. Sosa, *Epistemic Justification*, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

[55] Modest foundationalism allows for defeasible justification; justification need not be infallible, and it can be undermined by new evidence (see above).

knowledge by deducing it from a limited number of basic beliefs. The task appears to be beyond the capacities of even those who are epistemically most gifted and responsible. In sum, the justification procedure that foundationalism offers is rather unattractive. A still bigger problem is whether it is possible in the first place to validly justify beliefs about the external world when having access to internal mental states only. These are difficult problems for foundationalism, still lacking a satisfactory solution. In the next section, however, I would like to return to what seems the most problematic premise, namely the issue of basic beliefs which are justified "immediately", by non-propositional experiential states, without involvement of any other beliefs.

5. Grammatical evidentials as obligatory meta-beliefs. Concluding remarks

The core idea any modest[56] foundationalist must defend is that basic beliefs of the type *There is a cup on the table* do not require for their justification any other beliefs, which means that they do not involve any meta-beliefs concerning their truth-value, or meta-beliefs about the content of sensory perception, or any other mental states of propositional character. I think the issues concerning the nature of basic beliefs and their non-doxastic justification are worth reconsidering from the perspective of grammatical evidentiality. This linguistic perspective is, to my knowledge, absent from the writings on foundationalist justification, which is somewhat strange. The main questions in foundationalism concern, after all, the nature and justification of our basic beliefs, and these beliefs must be formulated in one of natural languages; in order to have a truth value, they must be expressed in a propositional form (see section 3 above). Grammars of languages with obligatory evidentials impose their own constraints on what a grammatical sentence expressing a given proposition must include, and these constraints may be, and usually are, quite different from those imposed by the English grammar. As noted in the first section of this paper, one of the key assumptions in our discussion is that any theory of epistemological justification of beliefs – if it is to be viable as a normative project – must be language-neutral, or, to put it more precisely, it must be equally defensible regardless of the language in which those beliefs happen to be formulated. That means, applied to the case under discussion, that any thesis about the

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[56] Let us concentrate on the modest version of foundationalism, which allows for more basic beliefs.

nature of basic beliefs and their justification held under the assumption that the epistemic agent speaks English should be equally defensible if those basic beliefs are expressed in another language, say, in a language with obligatory grammatical evidentiality (e.g., Tuyuca, see section two). However, there arise some obvious problems here.

Consider an example of a simple basic belief based on perception (i.e., a basic belief within modest foundationalism) like: *There is a cup on the table*, formed in the circumstances when I can see a cup on the table before me, the light is good, etc. Can this belief be justified without any accompanying supportive beliefs? It is very difficult to defend this thesis in the light of what we know about grammatical evidentiality. Let us leave on the aside now the problematic issue whether the foundational conscious state ("the given") justifying that belief has any assertive propositional content or not, and concentrate on the linguistic form of the above proposition. If expressed in English, the question of whether this basic belief necessarily involves other beliefs is open to debate. Direct realists will argue that the above belief is justified "directly" by sensory experience and the relation of that experience to the physical object in the external world; thus, it does not require other beliefs[57]. Indirect realists will claim that this perceptual belief can be justified, but only "inside the head", via our meta-beliefs or the awareness of the relevant sensory experience (BonJour; see above). The issue may remain unresolved for now; the debate continues.

However, if the above belief, with the same propositional content: *There is a cup on the table*, is expressed in a language like Tuyuca[58] (see section 2), or any other in which a grammatical information source marker is obligatory, the sentence cannot be formed without the visual evidential marker (or the direct/firsthand evidential in smaller systems)[59]. A sentence expressing this belief cannot be formed without simultaneously encoding the information that the propositional content is based on visual/sensory evidence – whatever morpho-syntactic devices this evidential marking might require in that language. This means that the above perceptual belief will unavoidably involve another belief expressed by the grammatical evidential; i.e., a meta-belief about the source of information on which the assertion is based. Otherwise, our perceptual belief cannot be expressed in

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57 Direct realism is argued for by W. Alston; Cf. *Perceptual Knowledge*, [in:] J. Greco & E. Sosa (Eds.), *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology, op. cit.*, pp. 223–242.

58 Cf. J. Barnes, *Evidentials in the Tuyuca Verb, op. cit.*, pp. 255–271.

59 Cf. W. Chafe & J. Nichols (Eds.), *Evidentiality, op. cit.*; T. Willett, *A Cross-linguistic Survey…, op. cit*, pp. 51–97; A.Y. Aikhenvald & R.M.W. Dixon (Eds.), *Studies in Evidentiality, op. cit.*

a grammatically correct sentence. What is more, visual (or direct) evidentials very often have modal epistemic extensions implicating the speaker's certainty as to the truthfulness of the assertion; they are used to mark self-evident truths and knowledge which is certain. Without going into the discussion of whether visual evidentials e n c o d e certainty or i m p l i c a t e it only, one can safely assume that a sentence with a propositional content equivalent to English: *There is a cup on the table*, expressed in a language with obligatory evidentiality will necessarily involve an additional belief about one's perception (marked by the evidential) and, in many cases, also a belief about the truthfulness of what is asserted (the epistemic extension of the evidential). Therefore, such a sentence will no longer express a basic belief as the concept is interpreted by modest foundationalism. Thus, the idea of perceptual basic beliefs is untenable from the perspective of languages with obligatory grammatical evidentiality.

What about basic beliefs justified by introspection (i.e., beliefs about one's mental states and sensations)? Could we claim that basic beliefs based on introspection, such as *I am perceiving a cup on the table*, are compatible with obligatory grammatical evidentiality? The answer might appear positive, initially at least. Introspective beliefs about my perception will naturally encode the source of information; i.e., that I can see, hear or feel something, etc. Thus, some affinity might be postulated between introspective beliefs and marking the source of information by the direct, or other sensory, evidential. However, the point is that the content: *I am perceiving a cup on the table*, as formulated in English, is a proposition about my mental state (of perceiving something), whereas what is important about grammatical evidentiality is that "evidentials are not themselves the main predication of the clause, but are rather a specification added to a factual claim ABOUT SOMETHING ELSE", as pointed out in Anderson's definition quoted in section 2. Therefore, a sentence equivalent to English: *There is a cup on the table* translated into an evidential language and provided with a visual (or firsthand/direct) evidential marker will not be equivalent to the introspective belief *I am perceiving a cup on the table*. It will be a sentence about a cup on the table, provided with an obligatory marker of information source, and formulated according to the relevant grammar rules of that language. (Whatever else those grammar rules might require, for example mirativity, modality or mood markers, will also be included in that sentence.)

Is it possible to argue that this feature of evidentials (i.e., being "added" to the propositional content of a clause which is about something else) can save the basic status of a perceptual belief with the content *There is a cup on the table*? One could argue that since evidentials are not themselves the main

predication of the relevant clause, but are added to a clause which is about something else, then they are "outside" the propositional content of the assertion expressed, and we need not be bothered by them. The basic belief we are discussing is about *a cup being on the table*, and this propositional content does not include any additional beliefs. An evidential – the visual or any other of direct type – is simply outside that propositional content. Naturally, in that case, we are discussing a basic belief which exists on the level of conceptual representation only, not a basic belief expressed in its linguistic form. In languages with obligatory grammatical evidentiality, an assertion without marking the information-source is grammatically impossible, not to mention the fact that evidential markers are often inseparably fused with other morphemes (of tense, person) in *portmanteau* morphs. However, one could argue, it is not a problem for a belief to exist on the conceptual level, where one need not bother about the intricacies of local grammars – provided the belief has a propositional content *p* and it is clear w h a t is believed. Probably all of our explicit occurrent beliefs exist for a very short moment of time on the level of conceptual representation only – before they are expressed in their linguistic form. It is beyond the scope of the present work to discuss the complex issue of the relation between conceptual and semantic representations[60]; for now, I will assume, rather safely, that the two levels can be treated as distinct though closely related. If the two levels were regarded as equivalent, then the counterargument we are discussing could not even be formulated in a reasonable way.

I do not think, however, that the status of basic beliefs could be saved this way. Even if we assumed three things; namely, that our supposedly basic belief *There is a cup on the tabl*e can exist on the conceptual level only, next, that on this conceptual level it can be separated from the relevant evidential marker, and third, that it is a properly justified belief, there would still remain the question of how such a belief could function as a foundational basic belief. How could a belief be properly *basic* and serve as justification for other beliefs (and knowledge) if it is to remain on the level of conceptual representation only, because when expressed in an evidential language the belief must be formulated with another accompanying belief (i.e., a meta-belief) expressed by an evidential marker? If unexpressed, how could this belief, existing on a purely conceptual-level, confer justification on other beliefs? The answer to the above questions is clear: what is a basic belief must be expressible in a linguistic form, and when expressed in that form, it must

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[60] Cf. E. Łukasiewicz, *Husserl's Lebenswelt and the Problem of Spatial Cognition – in Search of Universals*, "Polish Journal of Philosophy", 2010, IV, No.1, pp. 23–43.

be capable of retaining its "basic" status (i.e., it must be independent of other beliefs). Otherwise, it is not a basic belief in the foundational sense.

What are the implications of obligatory evidential marking for our discussion on basic beliefs? The moral seems obvious: the concept of basic beliefs is even more difficult to defend. If evidentials are defined as markers specifying the speaker's information source, which are "added" to a predication which is about s o m e t h i n g   e l s e (this defining feature of evidentials is widely accepted), and in many languages they are obligatory in a clause, then evidentials function as additional meta-beliefs obligatorily attached to our candidates for basic beliefs. Thus, the task of isolating those foundational basic beliefs is impossible; we cannot say that basic beliefs are j u s t i f i e d without other beliefs in a situation when they cannot be f o r m u l a t e d without other beliefs.   ∿

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