

# Announcements and Such

- One Song — *Billy Joel*
  - “Captain Jack,” from *Piano Man*
- Make sure you get your first essays back (GSIs)
- Second essay will be assigned on March 20th. The due date will actually be April 5 (more next week).
- Today: Part III of three parts on the Architecture of Knowledge (*very* serious theoretical epistemology)
- Next time, we’ll move on to *The Analysis of Knowledge* (that’s a *four*-part series)
- I need to stop 10-15 minutes early today ... (someone please remind me to do this!)

## The Architecture of Knowledge III Coherence, Incoherence & Indefeasibility I

- Before we ask whether *coherence* can *contribute* to justification, we should concede that *incoherence* can *defeat* justification — even *basic* justification.
- *E.g.*, the incoherence of a perceptual belief with other firmly held beliefs may give one reason to believe that one is *hallucinating*. This could serve to *defeat* the (justified) perceptual belief.
- All this shows is that our justified beliefs — even those arising from *foundational sources* — are *defeasible*, and that incoherence can be a *defeater*.
  - *Rebutting* defeater of *p*
    - Gives reason to believe that *p* is *false*.
  - *Undercutting* defeater of *p*
    - Gives reason to doubt *justificatory ground* of *p*

## The Architecture of Knowledge III Coherence, Incoherence & Indefeasibility II

- In the example above, the defeater may be (merely) *undercutting*. That is, it may only defeat the *justificatory ground* for the perceptual belief.
- In such a case, incoherence is not giving us reason to believe that *p* is *false*. As a result, this sort of example does *not* give us reason to think that *coherence* can provide reason to believe *p* is *true*.
  - If *E* provides reason to believe *p* is *false*, then  $\sim E$  provides reason to believe that *p* is *true*.
  - But, if *E* (sufficient incoherence of *p* with the rest of our beliefs) merely provides reason to *doubt the reliability* of the process generating our belief that *p*, this does *not* imply that  $\sim E$  (coherence) provides reason to believe that *p* is *true*.
- Can incoherence be a *rebutting* defeater?

## The Architecture of Knowledge III Positive vs Negative Epistemic Dependence

- What these considerations show is that the justification of beliefs (even of epistemically basic beliefs) can *negatively depend on incoherence*.
- This does *not* imply that justification *positively depends on coherence*. Here’s Audi’s analogy:
  - If my well is my source of water, I (positively) depend on it. The possibility that people could poison it does not make their *nonmalevolence* part of my source of water, or imply a (*positive*) dependence on them, such as I have on the rainfall. Moreover, it is the rainfall that explains both my having the water and its level.
- Foundationalists can concede that justification of beliefs (even of foundational beliefs) depends negatively on their incoherence, without saying that justification depends positively on coherence.
- Moderate foundationalists can grant even more...

### The Architecture of Knowledge III Coherence and Second-Order Justification

- When *S* is asked to *show* or *demonstrate* that *S*'s belief that *p* is justified, *S* may need to articulate propositions (also believed by *S*) that *cohere* with *p*.
- But, this does *not* imply that there must *be* other beliefs *S* has that *do* cohere *p* in order for *S* to *be* justified (situationally) in believing that *p*.
- We must distinguish the *process* of “providing a justification” (or argument in favor of) *p* with the *state of being* (situationally) *justified in* believing *p*.
  - Analogy: one can *be* virtuous *even if* one does not know how to *defend* one's good character against attack or even show that one *has* good character.
- When we *articulate* “justifications” of our beliefs, we often form *second-order beliefs* (e.g., that my belief that *p* is justified). But, this is not necessary.

### The Architecture of Knowledge III Beliefs, dispositions to believe, and grounds of belief

- If one asks me to “justify” my belief that there is a green field before me, I may be able to *offer* a “justification”, such as “I see it”. But, this needn't be a claim *involving* justification at all.
  - Even a child could say “I see it” without even having *grasped* the concept of *justification*
- Moreover, in such a case, I can offer a *justifier* of my belief that does *not* appeal to *coherence* at all.
- Rather, I can “justify” such a belief merely by appealing to its *basic source*, such as perception
- Conversely, say someone asks me in clear daylight what justifies me in believing there is a green field before me. And, say I am simply *dumbfounded*.
- It does *not* follow that I am *not* justified.

### The Architecture of Knowledge III Justification, knowledge & artificially created coherence

- It seems that the *reason* we seek *justified* beliefs is that we think justification is conducive to *truth*.
  - Knowledge requires truth, and justification is (or so we hope!) a step *toward knowledge*.
- But, if we could increase the degree of justification of our beliefs just by increasing their coherence, this seems to sever the connection to their *truth*.
- Perhaps a coherentist could try to sever knowledge and justification, by retreating to a *purely internal* conception of justification. But, this seems odd.
- Moreover, this leads to a bifurcated, disunified epistemology, where justification gets a completely different (independent) account from knowledge.
- Surely, coherentists (e.g., Bonjour) don't want *that*.

### The Architecture of Knowledge III Moderate Foundationalism

- Foundationalism faces two main problems:
  - First, that of providing *source conditions* (for justification and knowledge) for each of the epistemically basic/foundational sources of belief
    - This is what the first few chapters were about.
  - Second, that of explaining how justification/knowledge can be *extended* (even without *explicit inferences*) *via being grounded in* other beliefs (and, ultimately, in the *foundational* beliefs).
    - This is what chapter 6 was about.
- These are non-trivial challenges, but *moderate* foundationalism is actually quite a liberal view, consistent with much of what coherentists want.
- It allows coherence to *contribute to* justification...

### The Architecture of Knowledge III

#### The role of coherence in moderate foundationalism I

- Old-fashioned foundationalism would have trouble giving a (serious) epistemic role to *coherence*.
- But, moderate foundationalism (MF) is different:
  - MF takes justification — even of *foundational* beliefs — to be (at least typically) *defeasible*.
  - MF is *not deductivist*. It does *not* demand that principles governing the inferential transmission of knowledge or justification be *deductive*.
  - MF does not require that inferentially justified beliefs derive *all* their justification from foundational ones, but only that they derive *enough* justification from foundational beliefs so that they could *remain* justified *even if* their *non-foundational* justification were *eliminated*.
- This is how MF allows coherence to be *significant*.

### The Architecture of Knowledge III

#### The role of coherence in moderate foundationalism II

- First, as we have seen, MF allows for a strong *negative* epistemic role for (*in*)coherence.
- But, MF also allows for a non-trivial *positive* role for coherence — but not for (*mere*) coherence *alone*.
  - **The Independence Principle.** The larger the number of *independent* and mutually coherent propositions one believes to support (or to constitute evidence for) the truth of a proposition, the better one's justification for believing it — *other things being equal*.
- The key here is the “other things being equal” (*ceteris paribus*) clause.
- The main “other thing” that has to be assumed is that the independent propositions have some degree of justification or reliability *to start with*.

### The Architecture of Knowledge III

#### The role of coherence in moderate foundationalism III

- Example: say there are 10 eyewitnesses who *independently* report on a baseball game.
- *Ceteris paribus*, the *more coherent* their reports are (*i.e.*, the better they hang together), the more strongly they *jointly* support any particular claim.
- For instance, if they *all* say that the Yankees won the game, this provides *better* evidence for the Yankees having won than if only 6/10 had said so.
- But, if all of the eyewitnesses are known to be *completely unreliable on such matters*, then the additional coherence doesn't really add anything.
- In other words, *if* the reports have some degree of *reliability (to begin with)*, *and* they are *independent*, *then* their *coherence* can contribute to the amount of *joint support* they can provide for a given claim.

### The Architecture of Knowledge III

#### The role of coherence in moderate foundationalism IV

- For more on the role of coherence in *boosting* confirmation provided by *independent* sources with *some* degree of initial reliability, see:
  - “Probability and Coherence Justification” by Michael Huemer, which is available from:
    - <http://home.sprynet.com/~owl1/bonjour.htm>
- MF is also consistent with other possible positive roles for coherence in epistemology.
  - *E.g.*, it is consistent with explanatory connections or other forms of coherence contributing to justification or support of beliefs.
- The only thing MF is *inconsistent* with is the claim that coherence is the *sine qua non* of justification (which seems to be an implausible claim anyhow).

### The Architecture of Knowledge III

#### Moderate foundationalism and the charge of dogmatism I

- *Strong* foundationalism has the following features:
  - SF is *Deductivist* about inferential transmission of justification/knowledge
  - SF takes foundational beliefs to be *indefeasibly* justified
  - SF allows coherence at most a very minimal role [*e.g.*, coherence does *not* super-add to the already additive support provided by independent sources]
- The easiest way to be a SF-ist is to take the *skeptical* view (to be discussed later) that our *only* justified beliefs are either *a priori* or *introspective*.
- Generally, SF-ists are *dogmatic* about various beliefs (many of which are *not* self-evident).
- MF allows one to avoid such dogmatism.

### The Architecture of Knowledge III

#### Moderate foundationalism and the charge of dogmatism II

- MF-ists do *not* claim that any of our beliefs are beyond revision. In this sense, it is a view with a fair amount of epistemic *humility* (more than SF!).
- Beliefs that are (epistemically) foundational at one time (or for one person) may not be foundational at another time (or for another person).
- MF is consistent with it being very difficult (or impossible) to *know* (or be justified in believing) that one is *justified* in believing *p* (or one *knows p*).
- MF allows for error to occur even in contexts where one might *think* error is impossible. This is because MF treats *all* sources of J/K/B as *fallible* — *even reason*, and even in very simple cases.
  - MF is committed to *unmoved* movers; it is *not* committed to *unmovable* movers. Moreover, MF leaves open what knowledge *is*, and whether there *is any...*