

## Chapter Eleven

# Is Infinitism the Solution to the Regress Problem?

According to Peter Klein, the regress problem “concerns the ability of reasoning to increase the rational credibility of a questioned proposition.” A non-evident proposition is one about which there could be credible disagreement. Such propositions seem to be lacking in something important. How might we, through reasoning, supply some of what is lacking? Peter Klein argues that only infinitism provides a solution to this problem. A chain of reasons that can supply what’s lacking must be neither circular nor arbitrary. The result is that an appropriate chain of reasons must be non-repeating and infinite. This is infinitism. Carl Ginet argues that infinitism faces intuitive counterexamples involving simple perceptual and a priori beliefs, which seem acceptable in the absence of a non-repeating infinite chain of reasons. Such examples include the belief that there is a blue streak on the wall, and the belief that  $2+2=4$ . Ginet argues that infinitism entails skepticism about the justification, at least when it comes to humans’ beliefs. Ginet also argues that infinitism is conceptually problematic, on the grounds that it entails that inference alone can generate justification.

## Infinitism Is the Solution to the Regress Problem

*Peter Klein*

### **The Regress Problem**

The *locus classicus* of the regress problem is to be found in Sextus Empiricus’s *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*:

The later Skeptics hand down Five Modes leading to suspension, namely these: the first based on discrepancy, the second on the regress *ad infinitum*, the third on relativity, the

fourth on hypothesis, the fifth on circular reasoning. That based on discrepancy leads us to find that with regard to the object presented there has arisen both amongst ordinary people and amongst the philosophers an interminable conflict because of which we are unable either to choose a thing or reject it, and so fall back on suspension. The Mode based upon regress *ad infinitum* is that whereby we assert that the thing adduced as a proof of the matter proposed needs a further proof, and this again another, and so on *ad infinitum*, so that the consequence is suspension [of assent], as we possess no starting-point for our argument. The Mode based upon relativity ... is that whereby the object has such or such an appearance in relation to the subject judging and to the concomitant percepts, but as to its real nature we suspend judgment. We have the Mode based upon hypothesis when the Dogmatists, being forced to recede *ad infinitum*, take as their starting-point something which they do not establish but claim to assume as granted simply and without demonstration. The Mode of circular reasoning is the form used when the proof itself which ought to establish the matter of inquiry requires confirmation derived from the matter; in this case, being unable to assume either in order to establish the other, we suspend judgment about both.<sup>1</sup>

Although the three alternative strategies for solving the regress will be the focus of this essay, a brief discussion of the two other modes will be useful in understanding what initiates the regress.

The Modes were recipes for avoiding *dogmatism*, that is, the disposition to assent to non-evident propositions when it is not settled whether they are true. One could locate such a non-evident proposition either by noting that there was credible disagreement about it or by merely recognizing that there could be credible disagreement. For in order to avoid epistemic hubris, the recognition that our epistemic peers could sincerely disagree with us about the truth of some proposition forces us to regard it as requiring reasons in order to rise to the desired level of credibility.

*The Regress Problem* can be put as follows: Which type of series of reasons and the account of warrant associated with it, if any, can increase the credibility of a non-evident proposition? Can a series with repeating propositions do so? Can one with a last member do so? Can one that is non-repeating and has no last member do so?

Foundationalists and coherentists typically address the trilemma in two steps. First, they cavalierly reject the infinitist option by alluding to our “finite mental capacity.” Second, they argue for one of the remaining options by disjunctive elimination.<sup>2</sup> We will consider the “finite mind” objection in due course. My point here is only that infinitism has been given a short shrift, if any shrift, by epistemologists.

The argument in this paper has three essential steps: *first*, I will argue that neither foundationalism nor coherentism can solve the regress problem; *second*, I will present an infinitist account of warrant and explain how reasoning in accord with it can solve the regress problem; *third*, I will argue that the best objections to infinitism fail.<sup>3</sup>

## **Step 1: Neither Foundationalism nor Coherentism Can Solve the Regress Problem**

The regress problem concerns the ability of reasoning to increase the rational credibility of a questioned proposition. It is not crucial what degree of credibility is at stake. The task is to produce an account of warrant, where “warrant” refers to the property possessed

by propositions or beliefs such that (i) true beliefs with that property are known<sup>4</sup> and (ii) reasoning in accordance with the dictates of that account increases our rational confidence in non-evident propositions.

My claim will be that neither foundationalism nor coherentism provides such an account of warrant. I will *not* be arguing that either account of warrant is incorrect. I will be arguing that neither account of warrant can provide a solution to the regress problem because neither account can be employed by a self-conscious practitioner to increase the rational credibility of a questioned proposition and, thus, a primary reason for adopting either foundationalism or coherentism has been eliminated.

Foundationalists and coherentists differ about the way in which warrant originates and is transferred. Varieties of foundationalism can be demarcated (i) by the features of basic propositions in which warrant arises, (ii) by the degree of warrant that arises initially, and (iii) by the rules of inference that transfer warrant. But all foundationalists think of warrant as arising autonomously in so-called basic propositions and being transferred to other propositions through permissible forms of inference.

Coherentists *could* think of warrant as transferring from one proposition to another. This form of coherentism, what I will call the “warrant-transfer” variety, holds that some proposition, *p*, transfers its warrant to another proposition which can, in turn, pass it to another proposition. Eventually the warrant is transferred back to *p*. This view endorses circular reasoning. Now, I don’t think any epistemologist explicitly advocated this view – although the critics of coherentism occasionally characterize it in this way, as did the Pyrrhonians and Aristotle.<sup>5</sup>

The second variety of coherentism – the form that *has* been advocated – is what I will call the “warrant-emergent” form. Warrant emerges from the structure of the mutually supporting propositions.<sup>6</sup> Warrant is *not* a property of a particular proposition except in the trivial sense that a proposition is warranted iff it is a member of such a set of mutually supporting propositions. As the set of propositions becomes increasingly comprehensive and the mutual support intensifies, the degree of warrant for each increases. This view eschews incestuous circular reasoning in which warrant is transferred from some ancestor proposition to its descendants and then back again to the ancestor.

Our question is whether the account of warrant underlying foundationalism or either of the two forms of coherentism provides a basis for a solution to the regress problem. Let us begin with foundationalism and imagine a dialogue between Fred, the Foundationalist, and Doris, the *Doubter*. (Fred/Doris could be subpersona if we are envisioning a Cartesian-style, *sotto voce* meditation). Fred asserts some proposition, say *p*. Doris says something – who knows what – that prompts Fred to believe that he had better have reason(s) for *p* in order to supply some missing credibility. So, Fred gives his reason, *r*<sub>1</sub>, for *p*. (*r*<sub>1</sub> could be a conjunction.) Now, Doris asks why *r*<sub>1</sub> is true. Fred gives another reason, *r*<sub>2</sub>. This goes on for a while until Fred (being a practicing foundationalist) arrives at what he takes to be a basic proposition, say *b*.

Doris will, of course, ask Fred for his reason for *b*. But Fred, being a self-conscious, circumspect foundationalist will tell Doris that *b* doesn’t need a reason in order to possess the autonomous bit of warrant. He will say that her question “Why do you believe that *x*?” though appropriate up to this point is no longer appropriate when “*b*” is substituted for “*x*” because *b* is basic. There is no reason that supplies the *autonomous* warrant that *b* has.<sup>7</sup>

Grant that foundationalism is true; b has some autonomous bit of warrant that arises because b has some foundational property, F, such that any proposition having F is autonomously warranted, and every non-basic proposition that depends upon b for its warrant would lose some of its warrant were b not autonomously warranted.

Doris should say to Fred, "I grant that b has autonomous warrant. But what I want to know is whether autonomously warranted propositions are, in virtue of that fact, somewhat likely to be true." Her worry becomes a "meta" worry. But she went meta, so to speak, because Fred went meta first.<sup>8</sup>

Given that with regard to any proposition, once we consider whether it is true, we must hold it, deny it, or withhold it (i.e., neither hold nor deny it), Fred is now faced with a trilemma:<sup>9</sup>

- 1 He can hold that autonomously warranted propositions are somewhat likely to be true in virtue of the fact that they are autonomously warranted.
- 2 He can deny that autonomously warranted propositions are somewhat likely to be true in virtue of the fact that they are autonomously warranted.
- 3 He can withhold whether autonomously warranted propositions are somewhat likely to be true in virtue of the fact that they are autonomously warranted.

If he takes alternative 2, then using b as a reason for the first non-basic proposition in the series is arbitrary. Holding b is not arbitrary. Doris has granted that b is autonomously warranted and she could grant that it is not arbitrary to hold a proposition that has autonomous warrant. But if Fred believed that such propositions were not even somewhat likely to be true in virtue of being autonomously warranted, how could he think that b could provide a good reason for thinking that the penultimate proposition was likely to be true? Fred thinks that the warrant for all of his beliefs rests on basic propositions. If he thought that b's possession of F was not the least bit truth conducive, then why is he using b and all the other basic propositions on which the warrant for his non-basic beliefs rests?

The same applies to alternative 3. Doris has asked whether the fact that b is autonomously warranted makes it at all likely that b is true. Fred responds that he doesn't have an opinion one way or the other. Fred thinks b is true, but he neither has a reason for thinking it is true, nor does he think that basic propositions are somewhat likely to be true because they are autonomously warranted. So, from Fred's point of view and Doris's, Fred ought not to use b as the basis for further beliefs. The mere fact that he thinks b is true is not sufficient for him to use b as a reason, unless he thinks that his thinking that b is true somehow makes it likely that b is true.

If he takes alternative 1, then using b as his reason for the penultimate proposition is not arbitrary, *but that is because the regress has continued*. Fred has a very good reason for believing b, namely b has F and propositions with F are likely to be true. Fred, now, could be asked to produce his reasons for thinking that b has F and that basic propositions are somewhat likely to be true in virtue of possessing feature F.

*Therefore:* foundationalism cannot solve the regress problem, even if it were true. A practicing foundationalist cannot increase the rational credibility of a questioned proposition through reasoning.

Let us turn to coherentism. The first form, the warrant-transfer form, is easily seen to be unable to solve the regress problem because Carl, the Coherentist, cannot increase

the credibility of some proposition, *p*, by citing *p* in its own evidential ancestry. If the reasoning is to increase the credibility of the questioned proposition for Carl, then that credibility will not already be cathected to the proposition. For if it were, then it is pointless to begin reasoning in the first place. Presumably that is what is wrong with circular reasoning. It cannot increase the credibility of a questioned proposition.

Indeed, the difficulty facing *all* warrant-transfer accounts (foundationalism and this type of coherentism) is more serious than that credibility will not be *added* to the questioned proposition by reasoning. There is a danger that credibility will actually diminish as the warrant is transferred.<sup>10</sup> If all of the inferences employed in the reasoning were deductive and if an appropriate form of closure holds, it would seem that credibility would not be lost. It could even increase. But if during the transfer of warrant some credibility were lost, as it would be, if the inference links were non-deductive, then the longer the series or the larger the circle, the more credibility would be lost.

The only escape from this difficulty for a warrant-transfer theorist is to (i) limit the number of transfers allowed, or (ii) require that there are sufficiently strong coherence relations to make up for the lost warrant, or (iii) require that enough of the transfers are by way of deduction. Those stipulations seem entirely *ad hoc*.

The second form of coherentism, the warrant-emergent form, seems more promising because it eschews circular reasoning, and warrant for propositions could increase as the number of threads in the web of propositions increases and/or the web becomes more tightly woven. But there is one problem with this form of coherentism. As others have pointed out, it is nothing but a type of foundationalism – one-step foundationalism.<sup>11</sup> In this case, the foundational property, *F*, which all warranted propositions have, is that each is a member of a set of coherent propositions. The Carl–Doris discussion would follow the same general pattern as the Fred–Doris discussion where the foundational property, *F*, is simply the proposition’s membership in the set of coherent propositions.

Thus, Carl faces a trilemma similar to Fred’s, discussed above. If he says either “no” or “I withhold,” then vesting his credence in a coherent set of propositions is arbitrary. Why should he adopt a coherent set rather than an incoherent set? If he says that coherent propositions are likely to be true in virtue of the fact that they are coherent, then he faces the third horn.<sup>12</sup> For either the proposition “coherent sets are *ipso facto* likely to contain propositions that are true” is included in the initial coherent set or it isn’t. If it is, then he has fallen back to the warrant-transfer – that is, question-begging – form of coherentism. If it isn’t, then he has just added a new proposition to the coherent set and the regress has continued.

Now, coherentists might suggest that mere coherence is not sufficient to demarcate a set of warranted propositions. They could require, for example, that the set contain some propositions that have some further feature, namely that they are spontaneously endorsed or that their content has certain phenomenal properties (for example, see BonJour, 1985). But that is just another specification of the foundational *F*-property and the trilemma would reappear.

*Therefore:* coherentism cannot solve the regress problem, even if it were true. A practicing coherentist cannot increase the credibility of a questioned proposition through reasoning.

Perhaps there is no solution to the regress problem – that is, no way to add credibility to a proposition by reasoning. But before we come to that rather dismal conclusion, it would be appropriate to look at the third alternative.

## Step 2: Infinitism

What is infinitism? Infinitism is like the warrant-emergent form of coherentism because it holds that warrant for a questioned proposition emerges as the proposition becomes embedded in a set of propositions. Infinitism is like foundationalism because it holds that some propositions are epistemically prior to others. But some caution is needed if we are to be able to account for the coherentist intuition that (some) propositions are mutually supporting. For example, “all humans are mortal” is a reason for believing that “this human is mortal,” and the converse is true. Some have thought that the universal generalization is always epistemically prior to the particular, and others have thought that the particular is always epistemically prior to the generalization. Each view runs afoul of our reasoning practice. Sometimes we offer the generalization as a reason for the particular – when the particular is what is questioned. Sometimes we offer the particular as a reason for the generalization – when the generalization is questioned. But we cannot use the generalization as a reason for the particular and the particular as a reason for the generalization *in the course of one reasoning session*. That would be to fall into circular, question-begging reasoning.

What we seek is an account of warrant that is not a warrant-transfer view and is not warrant-emergent finite coherentism. There is only one option remaining. What we need is warrant-emergent infinitism. Such a view leads neither to the arbitrary employment of a so-called basic propositions nor to the endorsement of circular reasoning. It can solve the regress problem because it endorses a warrant-emergent form of reasoning in which warrant increases as the series of reasons lengthens.

Infinitism results from adopting the following two principles:<sup>13</sup>

*Principle of Avoiding Circularity* (PAC): for all propositions,  $x$ , if  $x$  is warranted for a person,  $S$ , at  $t$ , then for all  $y$ , if  $y$  is in the reason-ancestry of  $x$  for  $S$  at  $t$ , then  $x$  is not in the reason-ancestry of  $y$  for  $S$  at  $t$ .

*Principle of Avoiding Arbitrariness* (PAA): for all propositions,  $x$ , if  $x$  is warranted for a person,  $S$ , at  $t$ , then there is some reason,  $r_1$ , available to  $S$  for  $x$  at  $t$ ; and there is some reason,  $r_2$ , available to  $S$  for  $r_1$  at  $t$ , etc., and there is no last reason in the series.

PAC is readily understandable and requires no discussion. It simply recognizes that a warrant-transfer view cannot solve the regress problem by endorsing circular reasoning. PAA, on the other hand, introduces the notion of “available reasons” and some account of that is required.

There are two conditions that must be met in order for a proposition to be *available* to  $S$  as a *reason* for  $x$  at  $t$ . First, the proposition must be *available* to  $S$  at  $t$ ; that is, it must be appropriately “hooked up” to  $S$ ’s beliefs and other mental contents at  $t$ . In order for a proposition to be available in this sense it need not be occurrently believed or endorsed by  $S$  at  $t$ . For example, the proposition “ $352 + 226 = 578$ ” is available even though it might never be consciously entertained. Whether this is best understood as (a) a disposition to believe that  $352 + 226 = 578$  or (b) a second order disposition to form a disposition to believe that  $352 + 226 = 578$  is a matter of detail that can be put aside.

The second condition is that the proposition must be a *reason* for  $S$  at  $t$ . Now, what makes a proposition a reason need not be fleshed out here. That’s a good thing because the issue is a difficult one and there are many alternative accounts that could be

employed by the infinitist. It is here that infinitism can (but need not) make room for externalist accounts of justification and for a supervenience requirement in which the supervenience base is limited to non-normative facts.<sup>14</sup> For example, some proposition, say *p*, could be held to be a reason for *q* iff

- 1 *p* is true and it renders *q* probable; or
- 2 *p* would be accepted as a reason for *q* in the long run by the appropriate epistemic community; or
- 3 *p* would be offered as a reason for *q* by an epistemically virtuous individual; or
- 4 there is cognitive process available to *S* which reliably takes true beliefs that *p* into true beliefs that *q*.

There are other possible accounts. The point is that whatever the proper account of reasons is, coherentists, foundationalists, and infinitists will have to employ it because each view holds that there are reasons for at least some of our beliefs. So, this thorny issue can be set aside for the purposes of this essay.

Nevertheless, these two conditions make clear what infinitism is committed to, and, more importantly, what it is *not* committed to. For example, the mere existence of an infinite set of propositions, each of which entails the next in the series, is not sufficient for there to be the appropriate series of reasons available which could provide the missing credibility. As has been pointed out by others, there will be an infinite series of propositions each entailed by a previous one in the series for *every* proposition. The point is that not just *any* infinite series of propositions will do. The propositions must be available and they must be reasons.<sup>15</sup>

### **Step 3: Replies to the Best Objections to Infinitism**

It is now time to examine what I think are the two best objections to infinitism, beginning with the oldest. Recall what Sextus said:

The Mode based upon regress *ad infinitum* is that whereby we assert that the thing adduced as a proof of the matter proposed needs a further proof, and this again another, and so on *ad infinitum*, so that the consequence is suspension [of assent], as we possess no starting-point for our argument.

Now, if efficacious reasoning required that warrant originate in and be transferred from a basic proposition, this criticism would be just. But for the reasons given above, infinitism eschews such a view. The “starting point” of reasoning is, as Peirce says: doubt. A proposition becomes questionable and, consequently, it lacks the desired rational credibility. Reasoning scratches the itch. The infinitist holds that finding a reason for the questioned proposition, and then another for that reason, and so on, places it at the beginning of a series of propositions each of which gains warrant and rational credibility by being part of the series. Warrant increases not because we are getting closer to a basic proposition but rather because we are getting further from the questioned proposition. But the Pyrrhonist is correct that the infinitist’s conception of reasoning precludes assenting to a non-evident proposition. Dogmatism is incompatible

with practicing infinitism. Warrant, and with it rational credibility, increases as the series lengthens; but the matter is never completely settled.

In conclusion let me turn to the finite mind objection. Here is what John Williams says:

The [proposed] regress of justification of S's belief that p would certainly require that he holds an infinite number of beliefs. This is psychologically, if not logically, impossible. If a man can believe an infinite number of things, then there seems to be no reason why he cannot know an infinite number of things. Both possibilities contradict the common intuition that the human mind is finite. Only God could entertain an infinite number of beliefs. But surely God is not the only justified believer. (Williams, 1981, p. 85)

I hope that it is clear how to answer that objection. Infinitism does not require that we "hold" an infinite number of beliefs – if that means that there is some time at which an infinite number of beliefs are occurrent. Infinitism does require that there be an infinite non-repeating set of propositions each of which is an available reason for a preceding one.

But some philosophers have suggested that such a set cannot be available. Audi, for example, writes:

Let me suggest one reason to doubt that human beings are even capable of having infinite sets of beliefs. Consider the claim that we can have an infinite set of arithmetical beliefs say the 2 is twice 1, the 4 is twice 2, etc. Surely for a finite mind there will be some point or other at which the relevant proposition cannot be grasped ... and what we cannot grasp we cannot believe. I doubt that any other lines of argument show that we can have infinite sets of beliefs; nor, if we can, is it clear how infinite epistemic chains could account for any of our knowledge. (Audi, 1993, pp. 127–128)

Let us grant that such a set is not available to us. Of course, it does not follow that there could not be an infinite set of propositions available whose members do not increase in complexity. In fact, contra Audi, I think there is a simple argument to show that there is such a set.

Suppose we have a very limited set of concepts or vocabulary: {x is F, red, indexical "that"}. In other words, we can believe of an object: that is red. Now imagine that there are an infinite number of red objects. We could believe of each object that it is red. Those are different beliefs because the truth conditions of the propositions affirmed in the beliefs are distinct.

Are there an infinite number of red objects? I don't know. But that is not necessary for my argument. All I need to show is that a finite mind *can* have access to an infinite number of beliefs. And I have shown that.

Audi also claims that even if there were an infinite series of propositions each of which is available, it is not "clear how infinite epistemic chains could account for any of our knowledge." Now, if knowledge required actually completing the series, knowledge would not be possible. But why suppose that knowledge requires the highest possible degree of warrant or absolutely credible belief? As the series lengthens, warrant and credibility increase. Nothing prevents it increasing to the degree required for knowledge.



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## Notes

- 1 Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, I, 166–9.
- 2 For a foundationalist employing this strategy, see Audi (1993, pp. 127–128); for a (former) coherentist employing it, see BonJour (1985, pp. 18–24).
- 3 Some of these objections, as well as others, are treated in more detail in Klein (1999, 2003, 2004a).
- 4 For this use of “warrant,” see Plantinga (1993, p. 3).
- 5 Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, 73a1–5.
- 6 For a defense of warrant-emergent coherentism, see BonJour (1985).
- 7 Reasons might supply additional warrant, but these are or ultimately depend upon other basic propositions for their warrant. Doris could ask what reason(s) he has for believing the conjunction of the basic propositions. Fred’s reply will be the same, “there is no reason for believing that conjunction other than each conjunct.”
- 8 For a similar argument, see BonJour (1985, pp. 9–14). I have discussed this elsewhere (see Klein, 1999).
- 9 Ernest Sosa discusses a similar issue in his 1994 (p. 107) and in “Two False Dichotomies” (2004), published in a volume of conference proceedings honoring Robert Fogelin, edited by Walter Sinnott-Armstrong. I have discussed Sosa’s views in Klein (2004b).
- 10 Thus, infinitism cannot endorse a warrant-transfer view. This potential problem for infinitism was originally suggested to me by Troy Cross.
- 11 I do not think the expressions “warrant-transfer coherentism” or “warrant-emergent coherentism” are original with me. But I do not recall where I first ran across those terms. Laurence BonJour (1985) distinguishes the two types of coherentism, as does Ernest Sosa (1980). Sosa also points out that warrant-emergent coherentism is a form of what he calls “formal foundationalism.” Thus, the claim that some forms of coherentism are actually forms of foundationalism is not original with me.
- 12 Ernest Sosa (1997) advocates seizing this horn of the trilemma. I have discussed this in Klein (forthcoming).
- 13 Note that PAC and PAA are necessary conditions for warrant. They are not intended to be jointly sufficient. At least a “non-overrider” clause and a “non-defeasibility” clause would need to be added in order to have a sufficient set of conditions. For discussions of those issues see Klein (1971, 1981, 2003).
- 14 This is important because it provides the basis for an answer to the objection that infinitism cannot account for the supervenience of the normative on the non-normative discussed in Goldman (1979), Sosa (1980), and Van Cleve (1992, especially pp. 350–351 and 356–567).
- 15 This objection to infinitism was developed in Post (1980, especially p. 34–35), and in Post (1987, pp. 84–92). For my reply, see Klein (1999, p. 312).

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# Infinitism Is Not the Solution to the Regress Problem

*Carl Ginet*

Many of our beliefs are justified beliefs: they are such that epistemic rationality would not forbid our holding them. And often what justifies a belief is the fact that the believer has (or has “available”: more on this later) other justified beliefs from which the belief in question can be properly inferred. That is to say, the justification of many

a justified belief is by inference from one or more other beliefs: it is *inferential justification*. For example, from my belief (based on observation) that our car is not in the driveway and my belief that my wife is the only one besides me who has a key to our car, I infer that my wife is not at home.

The premise beliefs must, of course, themselves be justified, if belief in what is inferred from them is to be thereby justified; and their justifications may be by inference from still other beliefs; and the justifications of those further beliefs may be inferential; and so on. Can this go on without end? If not, how can it end? Those questions are the regress problem.

I think that it cannot go on without end, that any ramifying structure of inferential justifications must end in justifications that are not inferential. Not so long ago I thought this truth so obvious as to need no argument. But Peter Klein has made me realize that it is not *that* obvious. (Besides his contribution to the present debate, see especially Klein, 1999. My page references will be to this latter paper.)

Klein holds that inferential justifications not only can ramify without end but *must* do so for any belief that is truly justified. He holds that every justification must be inferential: no other kind of justification is possible. (He also holds, and with this we must all agree, that no inferential justification can be circular, can be such that a belief is inferred ultimately from itself.) This is Klein's *infinetism*.

I, on the other hand, insist that inferential justification cannot ramify without end (or, rather, beginning), and that if justification is possible then non-inferential justification must be possible. Klein calls this view *foundationalism*. It might also be called *finitism*.

## Examples of Non-inferential Justification

One reason I think that non-inferential justification is possible is that I think we can give clear examples of it. Let me give two, one a priori and one a posteriori.

### A priori

Consider the following sentence:

A: Anything that lasts exactly one hour lasts exactly 60 minutes.

Someone who does not accept that what sentence A says is true – who doubts or denies that, or is uncertain whether, what it says is true – must be counted as one who does not understand what sentence A says (provided he has no specific reason to suspect that what it says, together with other equally evident-seeming propositions, entails a contradiction; this proviso is a complication I will hereafter usually omit to mention, as it is, for sentence A, always satisfied in actual cases).

Someone who does understand what sentence A says, and therefore believes it, is justified in believing it. The fact which constitutes his being justified in believing it is simply the fact that he understands what the sentence says. That he understands what it says entails that he believes what it says. So it cannot be that epistemic rationality requires that he ought not to believe it *even though* he understands it. Nor, surely, can it require that he ought not to understand what it says. If, as far as epistemic rationality

is concerned, he cannot be criticized for understanding it, then he cannot be criticized for what his understanding it requires, his believing it. Therefore, given that he understands what it says, he is justified in believing it.

The fact that he understands it *is* his justification for believing it, because that fact entails his believing it. This sort of justification does not appear to involve any sort of inferential justification: it does not entail any (available) belief in any premise such that what the sentence says is properly inferable from that premise. Therefore, one who understands, hence believes, what sentence A says is one who has a non-inferentially justified belief.

This belief and a similarly non-inferentially justified belief that

B: Anything that lasts 60 minutes lasts longer than anything that lasts just 55 minutes.

might provide the ultimate premises for an inferential justification for believing (what A and B obviously entail) that

C: Anything that lasts one hour lasts longer than anything that lasts just 55 minutes.

In such a case the subject's justification for believing C originates in her understanding, hence believing, A and B: the regress ends there.

## A posteriori

Suppose that my visual system is working properly and I see a blue smear on a white surface in good light a few feet in front of me. Suppose further that I believe that I see a blue smear on a white surface in good light a few feet in front of me and I am not aware of any reason to think that in this instance things may not be what they seem, to think that my visual system may not be working properly or that external circumstances may be conspiring to produce a visual illusion. Then I am justified in that belief.

What justifies my belief? The following two facts are sufficient: (1) my visual experience is as if (my visual experience represents that) I see a blue smear on a white surface in good light a few feet in front of me and (2) I am not aware of any reason to think that in this instance things may not be what they visually seem to me to be. Given those facts, there is no basis for faulting me for holding the belief. No good reason could be given for saying that, despite those facts, I ought not, I am unreasonable, to believe that I see a blue smear on a white surface.

If these facts do constitute a justification for that belief, that justification is obviously not inferential. It involves no further beliefs at all. Fact (1) is just the fact that I have a certain specific sort of visual experience, a fact which does not include or entail any particular belief on my part. My having this experience does not in itself include my believing that I have it (whether or not it is impossible for me to fail to believe that I have it if I do), nor does the visual experience include (or entail) my believing that what the experience represents as being there before me actually is there before me, that there is a blue smear on a white surface in good light a few feet in front of me. Fact (2) is completely negative. It is just the *absence* of any (available) belief that would be reason for me to suspect that, in this instance, things may not be what they visually seem to be; and this absence does not entail the *presence* of any particular (available) beliefs at all.

This non-inferentially justified belief, that I see a blue smear on a white surface, might be an ultimate premise of an (no doubt complex and extended, but finite) inferential justification for believing that my grandson was recently in the room with blue fingerprint on his hands. Among the other ultimate premises in this justification would be memory beliefs non-inferentially justified in parallel fashion, by a combination of my seeming to remember that I came to know the propositions believed and my lacking any reason to think that in this instance my memory is not to be trusted.

## Objections to These Examples

One objection is suggested in Klein's comments on his Principle of Avoiding Arbitrariness – which is the principle that “For all  $x$ , if a person,  $S$ , has a justification for  $x$ , then there is some reason,  $r_1$ , available to  $S$  for  $x$ ; and there is some reason,  $r_2$ , available to  $S$  for  $r_1$ ; etc.” Klein (1999, p. 299) says:

Note that there are two features of this principle. The first is that it is reasons (as opposed to something else like appropriate causal conditions responsible for a belief) that are required whenever there is a justification for a belief. The second is that the chain of reasons cannot end with an arbitrary reason – one for which there is no further reason. [Both features] are needed to capture the well-founded intuition that *arbitrary beliefs*, beliefs for which no reason is available, should be avoided.

These remarks suggest that the facts cited in my alleged non-inferential justifications do not justify the beliefs in question because they do not entail that the believer has a *reason* for the belief. The argument seems to be this:

- 1 One's belief is unjustified if one lacks a good reason for it.
  - 2 Having a good reason for a belief *just means* having another belief from which the belief in question can be properly inferred – that is, having an inferential justification for it.
- ∴ To have a justification for a belief is to have an inferential justification for it.

It must be granted (it is a tautology) that one's belief is unjustified if one lacks a reason for it in the sense of *some sort of justification* for it. But it should not be granted, and it does not follow, that one's belief is unjustified if one lacks a reason for it in the sense of an *inferential justification* for it. If premises 1 and 2 seem intuitively acceptable to us when we read them, this can only be because we shift from one sense of “having a reason” to the other in going from one premise to the other.

I find it quite intelligible to say that my *reason* for believing that I saw a blue smear on a white surface was the fact that my visual experience was as if that were so, together with the fact that I was aware of no reason to think that in this instance things were not as they visually seemed to be. Hence I am inclined to allow that “having a reason” can be broadly used to cover non-inferential justifications and, sticking with that broad sense throughout the argument above, to accept premise 1 and reject premise 2. But the crucial point is that, if premise 2 is urged on the basis of the ordinary use of “having a reason,” then premise 1 cannot be taken as clear on the basis

of ordinary usage; it needs to be argued that being justified in a belief requires having a reason in the (supposedly ordinary) sense of having an inferential justification.

Specifically, it needs to be shown why any putative example of non-inferential justification (such as the ones I have given) cannot really be such. Klein considers the suggestion that a belief might be justified by some property P it has that does not entail the believer's having an inferential justification for it and responds as follows:

Pick your favorite account of the property, P. ... Why is having P truth-conducive? Now, either there is an answer available to that question or there isn't. ... If there is an answer, then the regress continues – at least one more step. ... If there isn't an answer, the [belief] ... is arbitrary. (Klein, 1999, p. 303)

... arguing that such beliefs are likely to be true because they possess a certain property, P, will not avoid the problem faced by foundationalism. Either [this] ... justification provides a reason for thinking the [believed] ... proposition is true (and hence the regress does not end) or it does not (hence, accepting the base proposition is arbitrary). (Klein, 1999, p. 304)

These remarks suggest the following counter to my claim that the facts cited in each of my examples do provide non-inferential justification for the belief in question: those facts are relevant to justifying the belief only if the believer has (available), as a reason for the belief, a further belief that when such facts obtain the belief is likely to be true; they cannot all by themselves justify the belief but can provide only a part of an inferential justification for it.

Thus, with respect to my putative example of a non-inferential a priori justification, Klein would seem to want to say the following: you propose that the belief in question (that anything that lasts exactly one hour lasts exactly sixty minutes) is justified by its having the property of being such that (a) the subject understands the proposition believed and (b) that proposition is such that believing it is a requisite of understanding it; but the subject is not justified in that belief unless it is also the case that he has (available), as inferential support for it, the further belief that the belief's having that property makes it likely to be true. And with respect to my putative example of a non-inferential a posteriori justification, he would seem to want to say: you propose that the belief in question (that I see a blue smear on a white surface in good light a few feet in front of me) is justified by its having the property of being accompanied by its visually seeming to me as if I see a blue smear on a white surface in good light a few feet in front of me and by my lacking awareness of any reason to think that in this instance things may not be what they visually seem to be; but you are not justified in that belief unless it is also true that you have (available), as inferential support for it, the further belief that the belief's having that property makes it likely to be true.

I will discuss just this second response, concerning my claim about the a posteriori justification of the perceptual belief (and leave it as an exercise for the reader to infer what I would say about the first response, to my claim concerning the a priori justification). We should note first that plenty of people who are justified in such a perceptual belief when they satisfy the sort of condition I specified do not in fact have any such further belief (that the perceptual belief's being accompanied by the perceptual experience, etc., makes it likely to be true) – perhaps because they have never entertained any such proposition, perhaps they even lack the concepts (e.g., of subjective visual experience or of probability) needed to entertain it.

In response to this Klein will point out that he is not requiring the subject actually to have the further belief but only that it be *available* to him, in the sense that, if the subject were to have the concepts needed to entertain the proposition in question and were to entertain it, he would accept it. (That Klein is prepared in this way to count as available to a subject a belief in a proposition that the subject does not yet possess the concepts to entertain is clear from his response (1999, pp. 308–309) to the challenge “to show that there can be an infinite number of reasons given a finite vocabulary each of which can be entertained by a human being.”)

Moreover, Klein might argue, this potential further belief is a *reason* for the perceptual belief in these circumstances because it would be unreasonable of the subject in these circumstances not to accept this further proposition (were he to entertain it) while continuing to hold the perceptual belief; and insofar as the believer acquires his perceptual belief because of the visual experience, he *acts as if* he had the further belief (that the perceptual belief’s being accompanied by the perceptual experience, etc., makes it likely to be true), he acts as one would who was motivated by such a further belief.

Perhaps so, I say, but only if he actually is motivated by this potential further belief can it be counted among his reasons for acquiring the perceptual belief. That a potential belief is *available* in Klein’s sense makes it perhaps a potential reason, but it is not enough to make it among the believer’s actual reasons. And only if it is among his actual reasons is it part of his actual justification. It is true that the subject must, if his perceptual belief is justified in these circumstances, have available (in Klein’s weak sense) this other belief. But this is only because his just having that perceptual belief in these circumstances entails that he has available (in Klein’s sense) that other belief; and from this it does not follow that its availability is any part of his actual justification. And the issue we are debating, I take it, is whether the *actual* justification for some beliefs can be non-inferential.

It is a trivial and uninteresting truth that, for any belief, the believer has a *potential* inferential justification. Consider a young child who has acquired enough understanding of elementary arithmetic to believe that  $2 + 3 = 5$ .

The proposition that

(\*) The smallest even prime added to the cube root of 27 equals the square root of 25.

is such that, were the child to understand and entertain it, it would be unreasonable of him not to accept it while continuing to believe that  $2 + 3 = 5$ ; so that in believing that  $2 + 3 = 5$  he acts as would one who believed the proposition (\*). Yet it is clear that the child’s potential belief in (\*) is not among his reasons for believing that  $2 + 3 = 5$  and not part of the story as to why his so believing is justified.

For any proposition P that any subject believes, there is another proposition such that, were he to entertain it, it would be unreasonable of him not to accept it while continuing to believe P (and thus he acts as would one who believed this further proposition), namely, a proposition of the form “ $P \vee (Q \wedge \neg Q)$ ” (where Q is any other proposition). It is clear that the subject’s potential belief in this proposition is not among his reasons for believing P and not part of the story as to why he is justified in this belief (if he is).

If I tell you that in his present circumstances S would accept the following proposition were he to entertain it:

- (L) It is likely to be true that one sees a blue smear on a white surface when one's visual experience is as if one were seeing a blue smear on a white surface.

I indirectly indicate to you what justifies S in believing that he sees a blue smear on a white surface – namely, the fact that his visual experience is as if he were seeing a blue smear on a white surface (and he is unaware of any reason to think that in this instance things are not what they visually seem): you can infer that he is disposed to believe (L) because his visual experience is of that sort. But of course reporting that fact about his potential belief in order to indirectly indicate his justification is not the same as reporting that that fact *is* (part of) his justification.

The notion of an available reason for a belief might be strengthened in such a way as to make it plausible that, if the belief that (L) is, in that stronger way, available to S as a reason for believing that he sees a blue smear, then it is a reason of his for so believing. An additional requirement that might do the trick is this: (L) is available to S as a reason for so believing only if S is disposed, upon entertaining and accepting (L), to believe that the fact that (L) was among his reasons for so believing. It would then, perhaps, be right to say that, if the belief that (L) is available to S as a reason in that stronger sense, then it is part of S's actual justification for believing that he sees a blue smear on a white surface that the belief that (L) is available to him. His *tacit* belief that (L), we might say, was a tacit reason of his for believing that he sees a blue smear on a white surface.

But of course it does not follow from this concession that the facts I cited earlier, of his having a certain sort of visual experience and lacking any reason to think that in this instance things are not what they seem, do not all by themselves provide S with a non-inferential justification. It does not follow, and I see no reason to concede, that if those facts obtained but the belief that (L) was *not* available to S in that stronger sense – surely a possible case – then S would not be justified in believing that he sees a blue smear on a white surface. We would still have no argument that a belief cannot be justified unless the believer has available (in the stronger sense) an inferential justification for it.

## **Two Problems for Infitism**

### **First problem**

Let us suppose that the notion of availability is strengthened in some such way as I have suggested, so as to make it plausible that a belief B2 that is available as a reason for a belief B1 is, not merely a potential reason, but among the believer's actual reasons for B1. Given that stronger (less easily satisfied) notion of availability, infinitism – the doctrine that a belief is justified only if the believer has available an inferential justification for it – would face the following question.

What reason can be given for thinking that any of our beliefs is such that the believer *has available in that stronger sense* an infinitely ramifying structure of inferential justifications, for thinking that infinitism has not laid on justification of belief a requirement that is never (or seldom) actually met? With regard to many people who acquire a basic perceptual belief when they have appropriate perceptual experience, it may be plausible



to suppose that, if they entertained the general proposition to the effect that when one has such experience the perceptual belief is likely to be true, they would not only believe it but also take this tacit general belief to be part of their reason for their perceptual belief. But is it equally plausible to suppose that they have available in that same strong sense still another belief which is their tacit reason for holding that tacit general belief? What would it be? And what would be their tacit reason for *that* tacit belief?

To argue that it is *in principle possible* for a human being to have available (in the stronger sense) an infinite number of beliefs would not be enough. To make it plausible that there actually occur justifications having the endlessly ramifying structure that infinitism says all justifications must have, the infinitist must provide representative examples of particular such structures possessed by cognitively normal human subjects – examples about which it would be credible that cases essentially like them actually occur. This would be none too easy to do.

It would, of course, be out of the question to specify individually all of the links in an endless chain. One can specify an infinite series only by providing a general way of (an algorithm for) finding a new member of the series no matter how (finitely) far the series has already been extended. Such an algorithm would have to tell us, with respect to a sort of belief we are sure is well justified – for example, my belief as I look out the window at my driveway that there is a car there – how to construct an endless inferentially linked chain of specific premise beliefs, which is such that it is plausible to think that, in the ordinary sort of circumstance in which (as we think) such a belief is justified, that infinite series of beliefs is available (in the stronger sense) to the holder of the belief. Specifying such an algorithm would be a formidable task. In fact, I am at a loss to see how it could be done.

## Second problem

A more important, deeper problem for infinitism is this: Inference cannot *originate* justification, it can only *transfer* it from premises to conclusion. And so it cannot be that, if there actually occurs justification, it is all inferential.

Inferential justification is analogous to instrumental value in this respect. Things have value as means to other things only if ultimately some things have value in themselves and not just as means to other things. The relation *x-is-a-means-to-y* can only transfer to *x* whatever value *y* has; it cannot *create* any value. But there can be no value to be transferred unless ultimately something else, something other than the means–end relation, does create value. Analogously, the relation *p-can-be-properly-inferred-from-q* can only transfer to *p* whatever justification *q* has; it cannot create any justification. But there can be no justification to be transferred unless ultimately something else, something other than the inferential relation, does create justification.

Jonathan Dancy (1985, p. 55) puts the point this way:

Justification by inference is conditional justification only; [when A is inferred from B and C] A's justification is conditional upon the justification of B and C. But if all justification is conditional in this sense, then nothing can be shown to be actually non-conditionally justified.

Klein (1999, p. 313) replies to Dancy's remarks as follows: "The answer is simply that although every proposition is only provisionally justified, that is good enough if one

does not insist that reasoning settle matters once and for all.” But this reply misses the point. From the denial that reason (or justification) can ever settle matters once and for all it follows only that every justification is provisional in the sense of *defeasible* – where a justification is defeasible if it is compatible with the facts F1 constituting the justification that there be other facts F2 that defeat the justification, that is, F2 and F1 combined would *not* justify what F1 alone does justify, so that facts F1 justify only provided that, only so long as, no defeating facts F2 turn up. That a justification is provisional in this sense does not entail that it is inferential. By conditional justification Dancy means not provisional, but inferential justification, where the fact that the premise beliefs are justified and have the inferential relation to the conclusion explains why the conclusion belief is justified. And the point of the objection is that an endless chain of inferential justifications can never ultimately explain why any link in the chain is justified.

Consider another analogy, between acceptable inference and justification on the one hand and deductively valid inference and truth on the other. Deductively valid inference preserves, but does not create, truth. If a set of premises are true then the property of truth will be “transferred” to any conclusion validly deducible from them. But, given a chain of propositions that are linked by the deductive relation, there is nothing in that relation itself that contributes to making any of those propositions true, no matter how extended the chain might be.

Analogously, acceptable inference preserves justification: if one has justification for believing the premises then one has justification for believing anything one recognizes as acceptably inferable from them. But, given a chain of beliefs linked by acceptable inference, there is nothing in the inferential relation itself that contributes to making any of those beliefs justified, nothing that explains why any of them is justified; and this is so no matter how extended the chain might be.

## References

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# Reply to Ginet

*Peter Klein*

Let me begin by thanking Carl Ginet. He has helped me to see more clearly where infinitism and finitism can agree, and where and why they diverge.

First, I will list the areas where finitists and infinitists can agree. Second, I will list an area where I believe agreement can be reached. Third, I will discuss some remaining areas of disagreement and attempt to defend infinitism. Finally, I will conclude with a brief remark about the basic difference between the two views.

## Areas of Agreement between the Innitist and the Finitist

- A1 A belief is justified for S when epistemic rationality “would not forbid ... holding” it (Ginet, p. 283).<sup>1</sup>
- A2 There are some beliefs that require having reasons in order to be *actually justified* for S. Those reasons must be available to S, and at least some of the those reasons must “motivate” the belief (Ginet, p. 288).
- A3 The process of giving reasons for a belief comes to an end in actual circumstances, and what’s more, the canons of epistemic rationality do not require that further reasons motivate the belief in order for it to be at least partially actually justified.
- A4 In a slightly extended use of “reason” such things as perceptual states, memories, or understanding the meaning of an expression are reasons that can make a belief at least partially justified. In the case discussed by Ginet, “no good reason could be given for saying that ... I am unreasonable to believe that I see a blue smear on a white surface” (Ginet, p. 285).

## An Area of Potential Agreement

Terms like “reasonable” or “justified” are comparative. It might be more reasonable for S\* to believe that p than it is for S to believe that p. Thus, in granting (in A4) that S is not unreasonable in believing p, it does not follow that S\* could not be more reasonable in believing that p. For example, if S has reasons for believing that p and S\* has those reasons plus some additional ones, then S\* is more reasonable in believing that p than S is in believing that p.

## Areas of Disagreement

Primary areas of disagreement concern the ability of finitism to solve the regress problem and the manner in which warrant originates and is transferred. The finitist holds that some belief, say the belief that there is a blue smear on a white surface, is autonomously warranted for me in virtue of (1) the visual experience of it being as if there is a blue smear on a white surface in good light a few feet in front of me and (2) the absence of any reason for believing that the visual experience is not veridical. The warrant that arises in such a fashion is transmitted to other beliefs by inference.

An innitist should point out that even if warrant or justification could arise in that fashion and subsequently could be transferred by inference, such an account of warrant will not provide a basis for addressing the regress problem, i.e. to correctly describe how reasoning can increase the warrant for a proposition, say p. Why is p held to be true? A reason, say b, is provided. Simplifying matters, suppose b were autonomously warranted. The finitist claims that no further reason for b is required in order for S to be epistemically rational in holding p. The innitist should respond in two ways:

- 1 The innitist is *not* denying that b is actually justified to some degree or that p is justified by b to some degree. The innitist *is* claiming that S would be better justified in believing p on the basis of believing b, if S also had a further reason for

holding b. Such a reason is that b-type propositions are likely to be true in virtue of, say, general truths about the causal history of beliefs with b-type contents.

- 2 If it is agreed that S is better off epistemically when S has a reason for believing that b-type propositions are likely to be true, then the infinitist will point out that the regress of warrant-producing reasons does not stop at b. Infinitism can explain how the warrant of b-type propositions, and hence p-type propositions, can be increased in ways that cannot be explained by the finitist. Further, were the finitist to concede that warrant can be augmented for “basic” propositions by further reasoning, then on what basis can the finitist deny that reasoning can produce warrant in the first place?

The finitist will probably demur here for two reasons. First, it will be claimed that for *any* proposition, p, there will always be another proposition such that if S failed to believe it and S\* did believe it, S\* would be better warranted than S in believing that p (Ginet, p. 288). Thus, it is too easy to increase the warrant of a belief. Second, there comes a point in our reasoning where we cannot imagine what the next reason in the chain of beliefs could be (Ginet, p. 290).

There is some tension between these two claims for if one can give a general recipe for constructing a further reason in every case, then it is easily imaginable how the chain could continue. Nevertheless, the infinitist should reject both claims.

The first claim rests on providing a general recipe for constructing a further reason for any proposition, say p. I have discussed similar objections elsewhere and pointed out that it is not sufficient that there be such a proposition that can serve as a reason for p; it must also be “available” to S (see Klein, 1999, pp. 311–312). But Ginet’s objection is not so easily handled. He asks us to consider any proposition, p, and correctly points out that there will be another proposition available (in the sense that it is appropriately hooked up with S’s beliefs) that is such that if S were not to believe it, S would not be as well justified as S\* would be were S\* to believe it. That proposition is  $[p \vee (q \ \& \ \sim q)]$ . But it should be recalled that according to infinitism there are at least two necessary conditions of justification: (i) the Principle of Avoiding Arbitrariness (PAA), which generates an infinite series of propositions; and (ii) the Principle of Avoiding Circularity (PAC), which blocks circular reasoning. PAC was not the primary concern of Ginet’s response, because he grants that coherentism is not the correct view of warrant. Nevertheless, it is that second principle which is of use here. PAC is: for all propositions, x, if x is warranted for a person, S, at t, then for all y, if y is in the reason-ancestry of x for S at t, then x is not in the reason-ancestry of y for S at t. Now, since  $[p \vee (q \ \& \ \sim q)]$  is equivalent to p, a chain which included the former as an ancestor of the latter would violate PAC. Hence, S is not better justified in believing p were S also to believe that  $[p \vee (q \ \& \ \sim q)]$ ; but were S not to believe  $[p \vee (q \ \& \ \sim q)]$ , then S would not be as well justified in believing that p. In other words, not believing an equivalent proposition can lower the degree of justification, but believing it cannot increase the justification.

Now to the second claim. Ginet suggests that there is a point in the reason giving process such that no further reasons could be given.

With regard to many people who acquire a basic perceptual belief when they have appropriate perceptual experience, it may be plausible to suppose that, if they entertained the general proposition to the effect that when one has such experience the perceptual

belief is likely to be true, they would not only believe it but also take this tacit general belief to be part of their reason for their perceptual belief. But is it equally plausible to suppose that they have available in that same strong sense still another belief which is their tacit reason for holding that tacit general belief? What would it be? And what would be their tacit reason for *that* tacit reason? (Ginet, p. 290)

Recall the *types* of tacit reasons that have been adduced for holding the tacit general belief. Descartes was faced with just this problem in the *Meditations*, namely: Do we have any reasons for thinking that our perceptual equipment typically yields the truth? We know his type of answer: there are a priori reasons available that show that the equipment is reliable. The currently more fashionable type of answer is based upon a posteriori reasoning involving mechanisms posited by evolutionary biology. Thus, I suggest it is easy to imagine how the reasoning could continue because we have good examples of such reasoning. Will reasoning in support of *that* tacit reason ultimately beg the question? I don't believe it need do so and have argued for that elsewhere (see Klein, 2004).

### **Basic Difference: Reasoning Can Originate Warrant**

For Ginet, and many epistemologists, the primary reason for rejecting infinitism is that it is committed to the view that all warrant originates by inference (see Klein, 1999, pp. 310–311).

A more important, deeper problem for infinitism is this: inference cannot originate justification, it can only transfer it from premises to conclusion. And so it cannot be that, if there actually occurs justification, it is all inferential. (Ginet, p. 290)

This objection would be conclusive if inferential justification were correctly construed (as Ginet suggests) as analogous to instrumental value. Just as there must be non-instrumentally valued objects, there must be non-inferentially justified beliefs.

But infinitism rejects (or ought to reject) this analogy.<sup>2</sup> Infinitism, like the plausible versions of coherentism, depicts justification as emerging when the set of propositions that are appropriately adduced as reasons expands. Of course, were the foundationalist to insist on thinking of warrant as originating in some propositions and then being transferred by inference to other propositions, he or she would be begging the question at hand. For it is that very concept of warrant that infinitism is challenging.

### **Acknowledgments**

I wish to thank Anne Ashbaugh, Alvin Goldman, and Ernest Sosa for their discussions about the issues in this essay.

### **Notes**

- 1 All references to Ginet refer to his "Infinitism Is Not the Solution to the Regress Problem," this volume.

- 2 Ginet rightly criticizes my response to Dancy's objection on this point. I did not see clearly at that stage in the development of infinitism that it must reject the analogy. I have tried to correct that in Klein (2004).

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# Reply to Klein

*Carl Giné*

## 1 Fred and Doris

In Klein's dialogue between Fred and Doris, foundationalist Fred doesn't do as well as I think he should. Let me revisit the scene and try to give him some help.

Let the proposition that Fred has asserted be

Little Benny has been in the living room with blue paint on his hands.

Doris asks Fred why he thinks this is so and Fred answers:

There's a blue smear on the wall.

And Doris asks Fred why he thinks that is so and Fred replies by asserting, among other things (such as that he has just come into the living room), the following:

(P) I see a blue smear on a white surface right in front of me.

If Doris has the temerity to ask Fred why he thinks *that* is so, Fred could with some justice reply, "What do you mean? Didn't you hear me? I said I see it right in front of me." But Fred is a parent, as well as an epistemologist, and has learned to be patient with insatiable askers of "Why?" So he instead says, "I have no reason for thinking that I see a blue smear on a white surface, in the sense of a premise from which I infer it, but it is eminently reasonable of me, as it would be of anyone, to think that I see such a thing when, as is the case, I am prompted to do so by the fact that

(C) My visual experience is as if I see such a thing and I am aware of no reason to think that my visual experience might in this case be misleading me.

Doris now asks Fred whether, if he is indeed being reasonable in believing P in circumstance C, isn't he also obliged to believe both of the following two propositions (should he entertain them)?

(R1) When C obtains, it is likely to be true that I see a blue smear on a white surface.

(R2) C does obtain.

And isn't it only because these beliefs are available to him as (good) reasons for believing P that he is justified in believing P?

I would advise Fred to reply as follows. I do believe R1 and R2 (now that I consider them) and I see that their truth provides reason to believe P. And it would be unreasonable of me not to do this, while still believing P and thinking my doing so to be justified. An equally good reason for believing P would be constituted by R2 together with

(R1\*) When C obtains, it is reasonable for me to believe that I see a blue smear on a white surface.

I am not persuaded, however, that the availability of either of these reasons for believing P constitutes my actual reason for believing P. But let that pass. Let us suppose, for the sake of this discussion, that the availability of justified belief in, say, R1\* and R2 was my reason for believing P and hence constituted (at least part of) my justification for believing it.

Doris now asks Fred whether, if he is justified in believing R1\* and R2, he must not have available further beliefs as reasons for those beliefs. If he were to listen to me, Fred would respond as follows.

No, I need no premise from which to infer R1\*. This is because R1\* is a basic a priori principle constitutive of the concept of justification for belief in a perceptual proposition like P: it is a principle such that understanding it requires accepting it.

Nor do I need a premise from which to infer R2. This is because the following is a basic a priori principle constitutive of the concept of justification for a conscious-state proposition like R2:

(R3) When C obtains and one is prompted by that fact to believe that C obtains, then that belief is justified.

It follows from this principle that, given that my belief that C obtains is prompted by the fact that C obtains, I am justified in that belief, whether or not I have available further beliefs that support it. It is clear that R3 could not serve as a premise in an inference justifying belief in R2 (that C obtains), because the other premise would have to be R2! R3 is not part of an inferential justification I have for believing that C obtains, but rather the basic principle of justification that entails that I am non-inferentially justified in believing that C obtains by the fact that my belief is prompted by C's obtaining.

So the lesson I draw from my version of the dialogue is that inferential justification of perceptual beliefs need not regress further than non-inferentially justified belief (or available belief) in conscious-state propositions like R2 and self-evident principles of justification like R1\*.

## **Inferentialism Drives Out Infinitism?**

In the last part of Klein's essay things take a startling turn. On p. 280 Klein says:

The infinitist holds that finding a reason for the questioned proposition, and then another for that reason, etc. places it at the beginning of a series of propositions each of which gains warrant and rational credibility by being part of the series. Warrant increases not because we are getting closer to a basic proposition but rather because we are getting further from the questioned proposition. ... Warrant, and with it rational credibility, increases as the series lengthens.

And in his last paragraph, in response to Audi's remark that even if there were an infinite series of propositions each of which is available, it is not "clear how infinite epistemic chains could account for any of our knowledge," Klein says:

Now, if knowledge required actually completing the series, knowledge would not be possible. But why suppose that knowledge requires the highest possible degree of warrant or absolutely credible belief? As the series lengthens, warrant and credibility increase. Nothing prevents it increasing to the degree required for knowledge.

In my essay I said that the (to my mind) most severe difficulty with Klein's infinitism is that it is committed to the thesis that inference alone can create justification. Here Klein seems to embrace this commitment wholeheartedly, holding that the longer the chain of inferential justification for a given belief the greater the justification created, and that, if the chain is long enough (but still finite), the justification can "increase to the degree required for knowledge." This seems to give us the result that knowledge does not require infinitely long chains of inferential justification after all: infinitism gives way to inferentialism. Worse yet, given Klein's thesis that inferential justification is the only sort of justification there can be, we seem to get the result that one could start with a belief (or set of beliefs) that is totally unjustified, because it lacks any inferential justification, and by spinning out a long enough chain of inference from it reach a belief that has the degree of justification required for knowledge.

These results are so counterintuitive that I hesitate to attribute them to Klein. But how else are we to interpret the quoted remarks?