

Foundations and Justification: A Response to Klein's Objections to Foundationalism as a Solution to the Epistemic Regress Problem

Joshua Jose R. Ocon

San Carlos Seminary | oconjr@scs.edu.ph

Abstract: Since the resurgence of infinitism in contemporary epistemology, Peter Klein has been consistent in providing arguments against the three other possible solutions (i.e., foundationalism, coherentism, skepticism) to the Regress Problem, which in turn is a key aspect of the justification condition for the traditional account of knowledge as justified true belief. Klein's successful effort in reviving the often-dismissed solution and further advancing it as the sole solution to the Regress Problem cannot be ignored as he finds it necessary to not only raise problems for the viability of the three contenders but, more so, definitively invalidate them as equally possible solutions. This paper responds to Klein's objection to foundationalism, the crucial reasons for which he offers in several of his works concerning infinitism and the Regress Problem: i) that foundationalism inevitably leads either to arbitrariness or to the continuation of the regress of reasons; ii) that a proposition continuously enhanced by reasons has more epistemic warrant than a proposition supported by a chain of reasons which ends at basic beliefs, and; iii) that basic beliefs are not tantamount to fully justified beliefs. For each, certain problems can be raised by employing foundationalist arguments in order to arrive at the conclusion that in spite of his astute reasoning, Klein's objection is insufficient to rule out foundationalism as a possible solution to the Regress Problem.

Keywords: *epistemic justification, regress problem, foundationalism, infinitism*

The Regress Problem (RP)

The traditional account for knowledge holds that the tripartite conditions – belief, truth, and justification – must obtain knowledge.¹ Introduced by no less than Plato,² this account is still widely accepted by many despite some issues raised against it by contemporary epistemology.³ Among these three, the justification condition holds the place of criticality since much of the

¹ Robert Shope, "Conditions and Analyses of Knowing," in *The Oxford Handbook to Epistemology*, ed. Paul K. Moser. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 27.

² Cf. *Theaetetus*, 201, c-d – "Knowledge is true belief based on argument."

³ Perhaps the foremost issue that can be cited as reference is Edmund Gettier's infamous "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" in *Analysis*, 23, 1 (1966).

recent epistemological works focus on justification as a necessary condition for knowledge.⁴ Regardless of the breadth of its scope, the justification condition for the traditional JTB⁵ account of knowledge can be explained as follows: Suppose a person P holds a belief *e* that P also believes to be true, P must provide a reason *b*, and then reason *c* for *b*, and so on, in order for P to *know e*.

Hence, justification is simply providing reasons for a true belief to constitute knowledge. As modest as it may seem, the problem does not necessarily lie in the process of justification but in assuming that the belief is justified. The question “what makes a belief justified?” then arises. When another person Q asks P his reason for believing *e*, P would simply bring up *b*; the query, however, does not end here. P would also be asked concerning the grounds by which he accepts that *b* justifies *e*, to which P may raise *c* as a response. From here, the series of queries would go on *ad nauseam*.

Such a scenario reasonably raises the question: “Why can’t a single reason provide enough justification for a belief?” Justification necessitates inference as it follows the Principle of Inferential Justification (PIJ). It states that for P to be justified in believing *e* based on *b*, P must have more than one reason in support of *b* where it is inferred from, and then a further reason for, say, *d*, and so on.⁶ This is problematic for two reasons:⁷ First, if at any point in the process of justification, P admits that one or more of the reasons that he provides to support *e* is/are not justified, then the whole chain of reasons becomes invalid, leaving *e* unjustified and knowledge unattained. Second, if P continues to provide reasons for *e* and its supporting reasons through inference, then there is the threat of regression of reasons *ad infinitum* known as the Regress Problem.⁸

This epistemological problem gives way to the development of at least four theories posing as its solutions: i) Foundationalism, claiming that there must be a belief that is non-inferential or justified *per se*, which will terminate the regress of reasons for a belief; ii) coherentism, suggesting that justification can only be achieved if the belief in question and its reasons are mutually justified because of their coherence; iii) skepticism, claiming that no beliefs are justified, hence, no regress of reasons, and; iv) infinitism, proposing that an infinite series of reasons be provided for the justification of a belief in question.

The first two, belonging to the internalist theory of justification, have been considered the foremost solutions. In coherentism, the justification of a belief depends entirely on its connection with

⁴ Noah Lemos, *An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 13.

⁵ i.e., Justified True Belief.

⁶ Richard Fumerton, “Theories of Justification,” in *The Oxford Handbook to Epistemology*, ed. Paul K. Moser. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 211.

⁷ Michael Huemer, “Foundations and Coherence,” in *A Companion to Epistemology*, 2nd edition, ed. Jonathan Dancy, Ernest Sosa, and Matthias Steup. (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2010), 22.

⁸ With this in mind, it is fitting to discuss the historically important argument closely linked to this problem – the regress argument. Lest one be confused between the Regress Problem and the Regress Argument, the latter is that which is often brought up as a solution to the former. Traces of the Regress Argument, or at least, reasoning similar to what the Regress Argument holds, can be observed in the ideas of some philosophers (e.g., Democritus’ indivisible *atomos*, Plato’s hierarchy of being, Thomas Aquinas’ *quinque viae*, Charles Taylor’s transcendental arguments, and in a way, Ludwig Wittgenstein’s form of life), but it must be noted that this argument is widely attributed to Aristotle in *Posterior Analytics*. From here onwards (except for section headers and footnotes), the ‘Regress Problem’ will be referred to as RP.

other beliefs in a mutually coherent set of beliefs.⁹ Usually discussed in contrast with foundationalism, coherentism is also considered as its alternative. Foundationalism, meanwhile, is tied with two interrelated concepts, namely, regress and basic beliefs.¹⁰ In foundationalism, reasons raised for the justification of a belief are ultimately inferred by regression from a belief/s which is/are said to be non-inferential or justified *per se*, hence, foundational. These beliefs are characteristically basic and are considered the ultimate foundations of knowledge.

Least held among the four possible solutions, skepticism claims that there are no justified beliefs. With the Pyrrhonian Sextus Empiricus as its notable representative, the reasons for such a stance are fundamentally the avoidance of arbitrariness and dogmatism, and the suspension of judgment on the justification of beliefs. Those who tried to provide solutions to RP have dismissed it,¹¹ and so will I as it does not seek to ‘solve’ the question at hand. Finally, infinitism is the theory that claims that an infinite regress is possible in solving RP, contrary to what is commonly held by epistemologists. As there are sound arguments in support of infinitism, it stands as a viable solution to RP.

Since skepticism has been disregarded, there are now three possible ways of solving the RP. One of these must be correct¹² and this is precisely the point of contention: which among these three provides an adequate solution to RP?

Klein on Infinitism and Infinite Regress

Peter Klein, the foremost proponent of infinitism, employs the following to ascertain infinitism for RP: i) arguments against the unviability of foundationalism and coherentism for RP, and ii) rebuttals to the objections raised against infinitism. Such a method can be seen in almost all of his writings which concern either infinitism or RP. Infinitism, however, has been given little to almost no consideration by epistemologists,¹³ for many of them have taken foundationalism as foremost among the solutions, albeit others consider coherentism as the better alternative. Justification formerly appeared to be attainable only through either foundationalism or coherentism. The revitalization of an often-dismissed solution is Klein’s contribution to contemporary epistemology, and this did cause significant repercussions to the structure of justification.

Infinitism is committed to increasing the warrant of a questioned proposition through an infinite series of reasons in solving RP. Infinitists believe that the series of reasons should be infinite

⁹ John Greco, “Virtues in Epistemology,” in *The Oxford Handbook to Epistemology*, ed. Paul K. Moser. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 241.

¹⁰ One should not be confused regarding the concept of regress as something exclusive to foundationalism as some forms of coherentism also exhibit the need for such. Klein describes the warrant-emergent form of coherentism as a one-step foundationalism. In his notes, he clarifies that the claim that some of its forms are actually foundationalism is not original to him. (“Infinitism Is the Solution to the Regress Problem,” in *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, ed. Matthias Steup and Ernest Sosa, Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005, 135).

¹¹ Cf. Peter Klein’s “Infinitism Is the Solution to the Regress Problem” in *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology* (2005), Carl Ginet’s “Infinitism Is not the Solution to the Regress Problem” in *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology* (2005), John Turri’s “On the regress argument for infinitism,” *Synthese* (2009), and Laurence Bonjour’s *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* (1985), to name a few.

¹² Huemer, *Foundations and Coherence*, 22.

¹³ Klein, *Infinitism is the Solution to the Regress Problem*, 132.

and that it is possible to enhance each reason with a further reason, and so on. Infitism, therefore, shuns foundationalism for its reliance on non-inferential beliefs.

Evolution of Klein's Objections to Foundationalism

Klein's earliest objection to foundationalism appears in his response to Richard Fumerton's argument against infinitism. For Klein, one of Fumerton's reasons for supporting foundationalism is infinitism's failure to solve RP.¹⁴ It follows that once Klein has refuted the problems raised by Fumerton against infinitism, Fumerton's argument that foundationalism should be supported on account of infinitism's inadequacy would be invalidated. Fumerton's argument, Klein believes, can only be understood in relation to his account of inferential justification.¹⁵

Fumerton provides three arguments against infinitism. First, according to the "finite mind" objection, the infinitely long chain of reasoning endorsed by infinitism is impossible for humans, given that a person P must be justified in believing a proposition e that serves as a basis. The underlying statement here is that not all justification is inferential. Second, if we accept that an infinitely long chain of reasons is impossible for a finite mind, it would be even more challenging to consider the possibility of an infinite number of these infinite chains of reasons. Third, Fumerton recognizes the difficulty of appealing to even more beliefs to justify a single belief.

The first two reasons share a common appeal to what Klein refers to as the 'completion requirement.'¹⁶ He acknowledges that even the infinitist could not accept this principle, leading to the rejection of infinitism itself. However, he claims that foundationalism suffers under the same fate because such a requirement inevitably leads to the ruling out of most justified beliefs. Fumerton recognizes the necessity of an appropriate causal relation between non-inferential beliefs and the propositions that are to be made probable. Although he acknowledges the possibility of requiring apt causation in justification, Klein rejects it because of Fumerton's lack of arguments against the possibility of having an "infinite, non-repeating set of beliefs that serve as reasons for and causes of the succeeding beliefs" in a chain.¹⁷ He also demonstrates that even when this possibility is granted, and infinitism's identification of what is required for beliefs to have the "appropriate normative pedigree,"¹⁸ right, a trilemma still arises: i) the revision of sound reasoning's normative structure concept; ii) the adoption of a form of Pyrrhonism, and; iii) the acceptance of a contradiction between two generally accepted philosophical principles.

Klein's objection to Fumerton's second argument is more related to foundationalism, for the justification of the propositions with the form similar to the statement " e makes probable [proposition] p " should be non-inferential. For instance, a person P's belief that something τ appears to be a tree makes it probable that τ is a tree. The truth of this statement depends on something that is "true in

¹⁴ Peter Klein, "Foundationalism and the Infinite Regress of Reasons," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 58, 4 (1998), 919.

¹⁵ "To be justified in believing one proposition p on the basis of another proposition e , one must be: (1) justified in believing that e and (2) justified in believing that e makes probable p ." Klein, "Foundationalism and the Infinite Regress of Reasons," 919.

¹⁶ Completion Requirement – "In order for a belief to be justified for someone, that person must have actually completed the process of reasoning to the belief" Klein, "Foundationalism and the Infinite Regress of Reasons," 919.

¹⁷ Klein, "Foundationalism and the Infinite Regress of Reasons," 922.

¹⁸ Klein, "Foundationalism and the Infinite Regress of Reasons," 922.

general about how things appear and how they are.”¹⁹ That truth which is ‘general’ serves as a reason for thinking the truth of that which is instantiated. Klein rejects this because he considers such propositions as inferential beliefs, following that such affirmations still appeal to reasons prior to them, to reasons that are ‘general truths.’ Another objection that he raises is the requirement that “in order for P to be justified in believing a proposition p based on another proposition e , it should be true that e makes p likely to be true,” is just too much for anyone since it would require one also to justify the beliefs which make propositions likely to be true. Only P’s being justified in believing e should be necessary.

Lastly, Klein believes that to appeal to more beliefs in order to justify a single one is not difficult, contrary to what Fumerton claims. He provides an argument that echoes the Pyrrhonic objection to foundationalism. He repeatedly brings up in his succeeding writings: If a proposition should be given the status of being foundational φ , then either φ has something that makes it likely to be true or it does not. If something makes φ likely to be true, then it should be offered as a reason for φ , therefore continuing the regress. If there is none, then it becomes arbitrary to hold it as φ .²⁰

Not long after, Klein formally introduces infinitism as that which “can provide an acceptable account of rational beliefs...held on the basis of adequate reasons,”²¹ something that neither foundationalism nor coherentism can do. Directly addressing foundationalism, he claims that it could not avoid a regress by “appealing to a meta-claim that a belief having some property [i.e., foundational] is likely to be true.”²² Foundationalists appeal to this ‘meta-justification’ to avoid arbitrariness and show how the supposed foundational beliefs are likely to be true.²³ Klein, likewise, proposes a dilemma for foundationalism similar to the one mentioned above. If meta-justification provides a reason for the foundational belief to become likely to be true, then the regress continues just the same. On the other hand, if it does not provide any reason, then the foundationalist becomes arbitrary in holding a belief as foundational, even without supporting reasons.

In another work,²⁴ Klein argues that even if foundationalism is true, it still does not solve RP. He recalls the problem of arbitrariness in the foundationalist claim that there are reasons for which no further reasons can be given. This is not the only thing that he points out as he eventually grants that foundationalism is valid for the sake of argument. He permits that some beliefs possess a property that makes a belief incapable of proof by further reasons, and this he refers to as ‘autonomous warrant.’ The problem now for foundationalism is that even though it halts the regress, it still does not offer a basis for believing the proposition in question. Klein’s point here is that reasons are being given so that the proposition in question may become believable; a discontinued regress of reasons does not seem practical and worthwhile in achieving this epistemic goal.

Klein provides a trilemma for the foundationalist to consider through an imaginable scenario. Think of Fred (the foundationalist) as being asked whether or not he thinks that autonomously

¹⁹ Klein, “Foundationalism and the Infinite Regress of Reasons,” 922.

²⁰ Klein, “Foundationalism and the Infinite Regress of Reasons,” 922.

²¹ Peter Klein, “Human Knowledge and the Infinite Regress of Reasons,” *Philosophical Perspectives, Epistemology* 13 (1999), 297.

²² Klein, “Human Knowledge and the Infinite Regress of Reasons.” 304.

²³ ‘Meta-justification’ refers to the characteristic that makes an allegedly foundational belief likely to be true.

²⁴ Cf. “What IS Wrong with Foundationalism is that it Cannot Solve the Epistemic Regress Problem.”

Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 68, 1 (2004).

warranted beliefs are likely to be true.²⁵ Fred may respond with either a “yes,” a “no,” or an “I don’t know.” Choosing either “no” or “I don’t know” makes Fred’s reasoning incapable of providing any basis for believing the proposition in question. He is then left with the sole option of answering “yes,” but this suggests the continuation of the regress since Fred has to provide a reason for thinking that the autonomously warranted belief is likely to be true.

Klein enhances this trilemma in a later essay which focuses on his proposal that infinitism alone solves RP. Firstly, he demonstrates that neither foundationalism nor coherentism’s two forms, warrant-transfer and warrant-emergent, can solve RP. This claim stems from the assumption that RP is concerned with “increasing the rational credibility of a questioned proposition.”²⁶ Neither way provides this demand towards justification.

In arguing against foundationalism, he imagines a dialogue between Fred the foundationalist and Doris. Doris asks Fred regarding his reason for the belief that proposition p is basic β . Klein grants the truth of foundationalism’s claim on the existence of basic propositions that possess an autonomous warrant and are warranted *prima facie*. However, he questions whether these autonomously warranted beliefs are likely to be true. In response, a foundationalist may choose from the following: i) accept that these propositions are likely to be true; ii) deny such, or; iii) withhold judgment. Among these three, only the first option is possible for the foundationalist without being arbitrary,²⁷ but choosing it, according to Klein, will only continue the regress, given the foundationalist’s supposed reason for granting an autonomous warrant. His rejection of foundationalism for RP is rooted in its incapability to “increase the rational credibility of a questioned proposition through reasoning” without being arbitrary.²⁸

Concerning the infinite progress of reasoning, Klein describes the foundationalist view of justification as truth-conducive albeit without guaranteeing truth. Foundationalism holds that inferences only transmit truth from the basic belief to non-basic beliefs. Following this premise, Klein questions the truth-conduciveness of the autonomous warrant for a belief, and then proceeds to pose two problems, first, for the foundationalist view of propositional justification, and second, for the foundationalist view of doxastic justification. Regarding the former, his concern is that truth may be diminished as it is being transferred by way of inference. “Many inferences are not completely truth preserving” – the further the inference goes along the path of justification, the “less likely it is to be true.”²⁹ He shuns the foundationalist’s possibility of using other epistemic properties such as coherence so that the amount of propositional justification may be restored. Second, Klein raises the argument that foundationalism can lead to skepticism because of the unapparent paths of good inference from beliefs that are said to be foundational to the propositions that are believed to be within our knowledge. Although he admits the prevalence of foundationalism in justification, he

²⁵ Klein, *What IS Wrong with Foundationalism*, 170.

²⁶ Peter Klein, “Infinitism Is the Solution to the Regress Problem,” in *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, ed. Matthias Steup and Ernest Sosa. (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 132.

²⁷ Choosing options ii) and iii) will make a foundationalist face the Principle of Avoiding Arbitrariness (PAA), given that if he denies that the autonomously warranted propositions are likely to be true, then he could not use it as the basis for all the other beliefs; if he withholds judgment, then he is simply clinging to his supposition that autonomously warranted beliefs do not need any reasons.

²⁸ Klein, *Infinitism is the Solution to the Regress Problem*, 134.

²⁹ Peter Klein, “Human Knowledge and the Infinite Progress of Reasoning.” *Philosophical Studies* 134 (2007), 7.

claims that “if it cannot provide the basis for solving the epistemic RP, the primary reason for its dominance will have been eliminated.”³⁰

On the other hand, doxastic justification considers a person’s epistemic responsibility in holding a specific belief. It is concerned with one’s being justified in believing a particular proposition. Klein rejects the foundationalist view that doxastic justification can be obtained through a basic belief that a person considers causally based on doxastic states. This requirement of causality from doxastic evidence might lead the beliefs not having the “required type of causal history.”³¹

Klein’s more salient objection to foundationalism presents the regress argument based on his understanding of both its traditional and contemporary accounts:³²

- 1) Only three structures are possible for reasoning – i) finite with a beginning point, ii) circular, or iii) infinite;
- 2) circular reasoning is unacceptable, for no belief found in its own evidential ancestry could serve as a reason for another belief in the same ancestry, and;
- 3) an infinite chain of reasons is impossible for finite minds.
- 4) Thus, if reasoning leads to knowledge, it must be finite, and;
- 5) the beginning points of which must be known by the person.
- 6) Therefore, if reasoning leads to knowledge, there should be “beliefs that are known by some other than reasoning.

For him, foundationalism claims that just as there is knowledge as a result of reasoning, there should be knowledge not arrived at by reasoning. Klein then considers the Inheritance Principle³³ the core of the foundationalist solution to RP. It renders infinitism incapable of explaining how the justification for beliefs arises as justification is only inherited from a belief prior to it in an infinite chain of reasons.³⁴ Klein points out that if this principle is true, then what seems to be an argument for foundationalism promotes skepticism if it is granted that “contextually basic propositions do not, thereby, gain full epistemic justification.”³⁵

Klein mentions an objection that recalls that of the Pyrrhonians, demonstrating an example wherein there is a belief e that appropriately ends regress, given its foundational property φ . A person P holding e may ask why e properly stops regress. If P has no reason for e ’s termination of regress, then holding e is arbitrary. If P cites φ as that which makes e an appropriate terminus, then P also has to ask if φ makes e likely to be true. Klein’s problem with foundationalists is that they pick truth-

³⁰ Klein, “Human Knowledge and the Infinite Progress of Reasoning,” 9.

³¹ Klein, “Human Knowledge and the Infinite Progress of Reasoning,” 9.

³² Cf. “Infinitism and the Epistemic Regress Problem” in *Conceptions of Knowledge*, ed. Stefan Tolksdorf (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG, 2012), 492.

³³ Klein describes the Inheritance Principle as that wherein “reasoning cannot originate any form of justification but merely transmits justification from one belief to another” (*Infinitism and the Epistemic Regress Problem*, 493).

³⁴ Klein cites Carl Ginet and Jonathan Dancy to show how foundationalism employs this principle. The former claims that: “inference cannot originate justification, it can only transfer [justification] from premises to conclusion,” while the latter says that: “Justification by inference is conditional justification only; [belief] A’s justification is conditional upon the justification of [beliefs] B and C.” (Klein, *Infinitism and the Epistemic Regress Problem*, 494).

³⁵ Klein, *Infinitism and the Epistemic Regress Problem*, 494

conducive φ 's from which arguments can be formulated. He claims that foundationalists acknowledge that the regress does not end at e and that e is not founded on φ .

Having discussed Klein's arguments against foundationalism as a solution to RP, the common reasons regarding such an objection can be summed up as follows:

- i) Foundationalism inevitably leads either to arbitrariness or to the continuation of regress;
- ii) a proposition continuously enhanced by reasons has more epistemic warrant than a proposition supported by a chain of reasons which ends at basic beliefs, and;
- iii) basic beliefs are not tantamount to fully justified beliefs.

I argue that specific problems can be raised against each objection which, if adequate, refutes Klein's conclusion that foundationalism is not a capable solution to RP.

Reply to Klein's Objections

Let us first consider that foundationalism comes mainly in two forms: classical and modest. The former states that the foundational belief is justified *per se*, possessing indubitability, incorrigibility, and infallibility.³⁶ The latter, especially the version introduced by William Alston,³⁷ may respond to Klein's first reason for rejecting foundationalism. In Klein's works discussed previously, no consideration has been given to this account of foundationalism, implying that he might not have thought of its possible implications for infinitism. Since the basic beliefs in this account need not be indubitable, incorrigible, or infallible, the charge of arbitrariness can be avoided by appealing to a possible modification of modest foundationalism, that is, with fortification by general principles.

Concerning the knowledge of such principles, Bertrand Russell posited that:

There is a common impression that everything that we believe ought to be capable of proof, or at least of being shown to be highly probable. It is felt by many that a belief for which no reason can be given is an unreasonable belief. Almost all our common beliefs are either inferred, or capable of being inferred, from other beliefs which may be regarded as giving the reason for them.³⁸

Russell's words capture two crucial principles: The Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR), generally attributed to Leibniz, and the Principle of Inferential Justification (PIJ).³⁹ These two reasons prove to be thorns to the claims of foundationalism, since they both tarnish the foundationalist concepts of basic beliefs and non-inferential justification. Russell's seemingly distant and unconnected thought can enlighten the foundationalist concerning such a difficulty: "[In providing reasons], we

³⁶ Cf. William P. Alston, "Has Foundationalism Been Refuted?" (1975), and Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (2001). Classical foundationalism, as Plantinga considers it, is foundationalism; Descartes' foundationalism (Cf. *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditation II), falls under this form of foundationalism.

³⁷ Alston specifically calls this form of foundationalism as 'Minimal Foundationalism,' although at the same time, he refers to it as the "more modest and less vulnerable form" ("Has Foundationalism Been Refuted," *Philosophical Studies*, 29 (1976), 302-3.

³⁸ Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 64.

³⁹ The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy gives a simple formulation of this principle: "For every x , there is a y such that y is the sufficient reason for x " (Martin Lin & Yitzhak Y. Melamed, "Principle of Sufficient Reason." Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/sufficient-reason/>).

must sooner or later... be driven to point where we cannot find any further reason, and where it becomes almost certain that no further reason is even theoretically discoverable...to some general principle, or some instance.”⁴⁰

These general principles⁴¹ are “luminously evident,” incapable of “being deduced from anything more evident,” and beyond which “there seems to be no further regress.”⁴² They form part of our noetic structure, reminiscent of Aristotle’s “already existing knowledge.”⁴³ In addressing the foundationalist objections to infinitism, Klein himself acknowledges that there are “general truths” to which inferential beliefs appeal for reasoning.⁴⁴ For a foundationalist, these general principles serve as meta-justifications for basic propositions. Combined with classical foundationalism, these principles may stand as foundations themselves, basic beliefs from which other beliefs are inferable.

Consider this situation: Dan, an “insistent Socrates,”⁴⁵ asks Fon the foundationalist regarding his belief *e* that the puddle in front of them is water. Fon provides reasons for his belief: *r*₁ that the puddle is liquid in form; *r*₂ that liquid is clear; *r*₃ it has no odor reminiscent of any other transparent, liquid substances, and so on. Dan continually asks until Fon arrives at that reason *r*_{*n*} for which no further explanation can be given. On the other hand, employing modest foundationalism, let us take, for instance, that *r*_{*n*} is “water is wet” and that Fon believes that *r*_{*n*} is considerably basic. For the reason that this belief need not be indubitable, infallible, or incorrigible, a reason can still be provided for it in case Dan still finds *r*_{*n*} insufficient for belief in *e*.

This reason may come in the form of a general principle and in this case, the law of contradiction can be cited in support of *r*_{*n*}. The regress of reasons moves one step further but the general principle becomes its definitive end, following the problems raised for Klein above. This reason, nevertheless, may or may not be cited by Fon (in the spirit of classical foundationalism) as he may not recognize it as a justification for *r*_{*n*} since “its obviousness is so great that at first sight it seems almost trivial.”⁴⁶ This supports the possibility of maintaining the belief’s being basic notwithstanding the reason provided for it, thus avoiding both arbitrariness and the prospective continuation of regress.

On Klein’s second reason for his objection, a query can be particularly raised: “Is the process of justification tantamount to the raising of a belief’s epistemic warrant?” It must be reiterated that the end of solving RP is to obtain justification for any belief in question so that it may constitute knowledge, and that to justify any belief subjected to query is to simply make it likely to be true, thus, believable – Klein himself believes such to be the goal of “reason-giving.”⁴⁷ The problem essentially is that he seems to conflate the process of justification with the tedious endeavor of raising a belief’s

⁴⁰ Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, 64.

⁴¹ Three of these general principles, “for no very good reason,” have been referred to as the “Laws of Thought”: i) law of identity: “Whatever is, is;” ii) law of contradiction: “Nothing can both be and not be,” and; iii) law of excluded middle: “Everything must either be or not be” (Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, 40).

⁴² Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, 64.

⁴³ Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, 71a 1. *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 263.

⁴⁴ Klein, *Foundationalism and the Infinite Regress of Reasons*, 923.

⁴⁵ I borrow here Russell’s useful phrase; *The Problems of Philosophy*, 64.

⁴⁶ Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, 40.

⁴⁷ Klein, *What IS Wrong with Foundationalism*, 170.

warrant by implying the preferability of infinitism with its capability of continuously enhancing a belief with reasons. This simply cannot be the case if it is to be granted the strength of the notion that there are certain beliefs from which “there seems to be no further regress.” It dispels completely, the mere possibility of increasing the warrant of a belief that finds its roots in a foundational belief already held and accepted by a person.

If he indeed agrees that “every actually cited chain of reasons ends,”⁴⁸ then there is no reason to think that a certain belief capable of ending such a chain would be lacking truth-conduciveness and incapable of providing optimal warrant for a belief in question. What need is there for a continuous provision of reasons for a belief if the proposition in question is already believable, hence, justified, based on basic beliefs? In addition, Klein’s demand to increase the credibility of the questioned proposition by providing an “appropriate kind of epistemic warrant”⁴⁹ is met without difficulty by foundationalist justification, which aims, not merely to stop a regress *ad infinitum* but, more so, give warrant and assert truth-conduciveness. Nothing hinders a basic belief, or specifically, a general principle, from providing the warrant required for a questioned proposition. For Russell:

The principle itself is constantly used in our reasoning, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously... Their truth is evident to us, and we employ them in constructing demonstrations; but they themselves... are incapable of demonstration.⁵⁰

Now, suppose these general principles are used for reasoning and demonstrating certain beliefs, either consciously or unconsciously, then there should be no qualm on whether they can provide the “appropriate kind of epistemic warrant” for a questioned proposition.

Concerning Klein’s third reason for objection which is more salient than the other two, the crux is that knowledge, even in the foundationalist account, requires that beliefs be fully justified and that basic beliefs fail to obtain justification in their being immune to further interrogation.⁵¹ While to an infinitist, no reason “is immune to further legitimate challenge,”⁵² this is not the case to a foundationalist. A possible rapprochement settling this discord and dismissing Klein’s dichotomy that seems to invalidate the viability of foundationalism in its preference of basic beliefs over fully justified beliefs, lies in this distinction: a) foundationalism’s reliance on basic beliefs as the ultimate sources of justification, and; b) foundationalism’s reliance on warrant-sufficient reasons present along the process of justification. Concerning (a), it has to be clarified that in its modest form, foundationalism does not commit itself to any particular belief that is basic and incapable of being improved if the prospect of supporting it by reasons is attainable. In this regard, the foundational belief to which a foundationalist assents can be warranted further.

Another consideration arises if the primary aim of justification is highlighted, that is, to make a belief truth-conducive. The infinitist may be correct in that as long as reasons can be given continuously, one must do so, following the pretext that a belief that reasons can support is more fully

⁴⁸ John Turri and Peter Klein, *Ad Infinitum: New Essays on Epistemological Infinitism* (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2014), 2.

⁴⁹ Klein, *What IS Wrong with Foundationalism*, 170.

⁵⁰ Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, 64.

⁵¹ This follows the Pyrrhonian criticism of Aristotelian foundationalism. Klein, *Infinitism and the Epistemic Regress Problem*, 493.

⁵² Klein & Turri, *Ad Infinitum*, 2.

justified than that for which no more reasons can be provided.⁵³ Nevertheless, this does not change the fact that a belief initially considered foundational by a person has already made whatever questioned proposition he has believable, hence, conformable with the foundationalist dependence on basic beliefs. It is indeed good that if employing infinitism, beliefs can still be subjected to improvement by being reinforced by reasons.⁵⁴ Foundationalism does not need the limiting of justification to a finite series of reasons as it can integrate with the supposed infinite chain of reasoning in infinitism, especially if its modest form is taken into account wherein basic beliefs can be improved by reasons which may include non-doxastic evidence that has no truth value.

The reason for (b) is akin to what has just been said. A person P's capacity to infer from what is already available in the mind, be it occurrent or dispositional,⁵⁵ can be considered. RP is about making a certain proposition believable. Practically, not everyone believes propositions in the same way. Person P may believe a proposition e at, for example, reason r_3 . In contrast, person Q, despite the sufficient warrant given by r_3 for e , may be capable of making more inferences, thus making e "more fully justified" before finally terminating the process at a reason r_8 . Klein's contention from an unnecessary contrast between basic beliefs and fully justified beliefs is dispelled by the RP criterion which he accepted: justification increases the epistemic warrant of the belief in question so that it may constitute knowledge. As in the case given, it can be said that although e is already sufficiently warranted by r_3 , hence making it foundational for P, nothing stops Q from giving more possible reasons for e , therefore making it "more fully justified," even though r_3 in itself is already fully justified as to account for the sufficient epistemic warrant of e . Such a scheme conforms adequately to modest foundationalism.

Conclusion: Foundationalism IS still a Viable Solution to RP

Klein, although unsuccessful, manages to challenge the epistemological enterprise of foundationalism by attacking its premises which rest on the concepts of regress and basic beliefs. Klein's contention throughout the years, accumulating within it both the objections to foundationalism and arguments for infinitism, is as follows: i) Foundationalism leads either to arbitrariness or to the continuation of the regress; ii) enhancement of reasons grants more warrant to a proposition than a chain of reasons that terminate at basic beliefs, and; iii) basic beliefs are not tantamount to fully justified beliefs. Drawing from the concept of general principles as offered by Russell, together with Alston's modest foundationalism, I argue that these three contentions fail to rule out foundationalism as a possible solution to RP, regardless of whether or not Klein's arguments for infinitism are successful.

In response to Klein's first contention, modest foundationalism may be employed wherein basic beliefs, not limited by indubitability, incorrigibility, and infallibility, can be improved by further reasons before finally arriving at the definitive general principles for which no other reasons can be given. These general principles, in addition, can also be acknowledged by classical foundationalists as

⁵³ Klein, *Infinitism and the Epistemic Regress Problem*, 495.

⁵⁴ John Turri employs this aspect of infinitism to affirm how foundationalism can be accommodated by it. Cf. "On the regress argument for infinitism," 157.

⁵⁵ The difference, simply put, is that an occurrent belief is that which a person actively entertains at any given moment, while a dispositional belief is that which is held in a person's memory or embedded in the noetic structure itself. Cf. Lemos, *An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, 8.

the foundations of knowledge themselves, possessing the three properties of basic beliefs as mentioned above. To the second contention, I argue that there is a distinction between justification and the warrant-raising of a belief. Infitism is more preferable for Klein on account of its supposed capability of continuous warrant-raising, but this is not necessarily the end of justification, as Klein himself holds. Citing general principles as beliefs from which there is “no further regress” and evident truths that are “incapable of demonstration” as present in our noetic structure, anyone who is capable of arriving at such principles already achieves the goal of justification, that is, making any belief likely to be true.

These general principles suffice for providing an “appropriate kind of epistemic warrant” enough to make a proposition in question believable. As this is achieved, infinitism, in this case, does not fare any better than foundationalism concerning justification. To the third contention, I propose a possible conciliation between the foundationalist’s reliance on basic beliefs and the infinitist’s requirement for full justification by continuously providing reasons through a distinction between basic beliefs and warrant-sufficient beliefs. The version of foundationalism adapted from Alston does not limit the process of justification at any belief that reasons cannot further support. Thus, warrant-sufficient beliefs effectively provide for justification. Even if basic beliefs are employed, modest foundationalism still allows further improvement if a questioner so requires. The truth-conduciveness of any belief in the chain of reasons for a proposition in question also addresses justification’s goal. Given the variety of noetic structures present in persons, full justification may be arrived at by a person differently from another. These responses are enough to refute Klein’s dismissal of foundationalism as a possible solution to RP.

Much can still be discussed about foundationalism and RP, especially Alston’s distinction between mediately justified beliefs and immediately justified beliefs, and the capability of non-doxastic states to serve as reasons for basic beliefs without necessarily continuing the regress and affecting the status of basic beliefs. Nevertheless, the primary goal of this paper is to respond to Klein’s rejection of foundationalism as a possible solution to RP on account of the reasons prevalent in his works on infinitism. This paper is not an attempt to invalidate infinitism as a possible solution, nor an attack against Klein’s claim that it is the only solution to RP. What is being suggested is that from the foundationalist purview, certain problems can be raised against Klein’s reasons for rejecting foundationalism as a possible solution to RP. These arguments cannot be applied to coherentism that Klein also rejects. Its defense is left to those who stand for it as a solution to RP. The arguments in this paper defend foundationalism from Klein’s objections, therefore reviving it. Claiming it as the best possible solution, or even the only solution to RP, is a different matter that requires a more rigorous argumentation. It is best to conclude that foundationalism is still a possible solution to RP.

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