The Structure of Knowledge and Justification: Foundationalism

1. Like a building: a **foundation** and a **superstructure**

2. Beliefs belonging to the foundation are **basic**. Beliefs belonging to the superstructure are **nonbasic**

3. **two problems**: (1) by virtue of exactly what, are basic beliefs justified? (2) how do basic beliefs justify nonbasic beliefs?

4. **Doxastic Basicality** (DB)
   
   S's justified belief that \( p \) is basic if and only if S's belief that \( p \) is justified without owing its justification to any of S's other beliefs.

5. Someone's **hat example**: you believe
   
   (B) It appears to me that that hat is blue - is an example of a justified belief.

6. **Privilege Foundationalism**: epistemic privilege such as infallibility, indubitability, or incorrigibility.

7. (B) is an **introspective belief** about a perceptual experience. (B) is not a belief about the hat. Rather, it's a belief about how the hat appears to you.

8. A subject's basic beliefs are made up of introspective beliefs about the subject's own **mental states**, of which perceptual experiences make up one **subset**.

9. **Other mental states**: having a headache, being tired, feeling pleasure, or having a desire for a cup of coffee – could be also examples of basic beliefs.

10. **Beliefs about external objects** do not and indeed cannot qualify as basic for they lack epistemic privilege

11. **Experiential foundationalism**: (B) and (E) are distinct mental states. The idea is that what justifies (B) is (E). Since (E) is an experience, not a belief of yours.

12. **Difference between two versions**: Privilege foundationalism restricts basic beliefs to beliefs about one's own mental states. According to experiential foundationalism beliefs about external objects can be basic as well.

13. Suppose instead of (B), you believe

   (H) That hat is blue.

   Unlike (B), (H) is about the hat itself, and not the way the hat appears to you. Such a belief is not one about which we are infallible or otherwise epistemically privileged.

14. **Experiential Foundationalism**, then, combines to two crucial ideas: (i) when a justified belief is basic, its justification is not owed to any other belief; (ii) what in fact justifies basic beliefs are experiences.

15. Privilege foundationalism would, therefore, classify (H) as nonbasic. It is, however, quite plausible to think that (E) justifies not only (B) but (H) as well. If (E) is indeed
what justifies (H), and (H) does not receive any additional justification from any further beliefs of yours, then (H) qualifies, according to DB, as basic.

16. **Epistemic Basicality (EB)**
   
   $S$'s justified belief that $p$ is basic if and only if $S$'s justification for believing that $p$ does not depend on any justification $S$ possesses for believing a further proposition, $q$.

17. EB makes it more difficult for a belief to be basic than DB does. To see why, we turn to the ‘J-question’ that advocates of experiential foundationalism face:

18. **The J-Question:** Why are perceptual experiences a source of justification?

19. One way of answering the J-question can be viewed as a *compromise position*: founda-coherentism

20. **Coherentists’ answer to the J-question:** Perceptual experiences are a source of justification because we are justified in believing them to be reliable.

21. **Criticism: inclusion of memory and more and more related demanding factors**

22. According to the kind of coherentism we considered above, if your perceptual experiences are a source of justification for you, it must be the case that you have considered the matter and *believe* them to be reliable.

23. According to the compromise position, (E) justifies (H) only if (E) is accompanied by track-record memories (M) that give you justification for attributing reliability to your visual experiences.

24. It follows that an experiential foundationalist who wishes to classify beliefs such as (H) as basic cannot adopt the compromise position. Such a foundationalist would have to say that (E) by itself is sufficient for making (H) a justified belief.

25. One option for EB-foundationalists would be to *endorse externalism*. If they do, they could say that perceptual experiences are a source of justification if, and only if, they are of types that are reliably associated with true resulting beliefs.

26. On that view, it would be the fact of reliability, not evidence of reliability that makes perceptual experiences a source of justification.

27. Another *internalist option* would be to say that perceptual experiences are a source of justification because it couldn't be otherwise: it's a *necessary truth* that certain perceptual experiences can justify certain perceptual beliefs. This would be an internalist answer to the J-question because perceptual experiences would be a source of justification whether or not they are reliable.

28. The *justificatory relation* between basic and nonbasic beliefs could be *deductive or non-deductive*.

29. If we take the relation to be deductive, each of one's nonbasic beliefs would have to be such that it can be deduced from one's basic beliefs. This seems excessively demanding. If we consider a random selection of typical beliefs we hold, it is not easy to see from which basic beliefs they could be deduced.
30. Foundationalists, therefore, typically conceive of the link between the foundation and the superstructure in non-deductive terms. They would say that, for a basic belief, B, to justify a nonbasic belief, B*, it isn’t necessary that B entails B*. Rather, it is sufficient that, given B, it is likely that B* is true.

31. Is infinitism the correct solution to the regress problem?

32. The regress problem and various regress argument. The regress problem is that of explaining how justification is possible given that it generates a seemingly infinite regress of justification. A regress argument is meant to support a particular solution to the regress problem on the basis of rejecting the competing solutions. Thus the regress argument for foundationalism rejects coherentism and infinitism as viable options.

33. Is circularity ‘really’ void? Whether such circularity is as unacceptable as a p-therefore-p inference is an open question. Moreover, the avoidance of circularity does not come cheap.

34. Dependence Coherentism? Or, Independence foundationalism? The regress argument, if it were sound, would merely show that there must be doxastic basicity. Dependence coherentism, however, allows for doxastic basicity. So the regress argument merely defends experiential foundationalism against doxastic coherentism. It does not tell us why we should prefer independence foundationalism to dependence coherentism.

35. Why foundationalism itself should be better positioned than coherentism when contact with reality is the issue. What is meant by "ensuring" contact with reality? If foundationalists expect a logical guarantee of such contact, basic beliefs must be infallible. That would make contact with reality a rather expensive commodity.

36. Given its price, foundationalists might want to lower their expectations. According to an alternative construal, we expect merely the likelihood of contact with reality. But if coherentists account for the importance of perception in one way or another, they can meet that expectation as well as foundationalists.