



## DISCOVERY SERIES – THREE

### The Structure of Justification

The term noetic structure stands for the entire set of propositions that a person believes together with the various epistemological relations that obtain those beliefs. There are two recognized normative theories about how a noetic structure ought to be framed such that the beliefs in that structure are justified for the person possessing that structure.

1. **FOUNDATIONALISM:** All knowledge rests on foundations. All beliefs are either basic or non-basic. All basic beliefs are immediately justified and non-basic beliefs are mediately justified in some way by the relationship they sustain to the basic belief.

For example, the belief that  $13 \times 12 = 156$  is nonbasic and justified by other beliefs (e.g.  $2 \times 3 = 6$ ) that are basic and immediately justified. The metaphor of a pyramid helps here with basic beliefs forming the base of the pyramid and non-basic resting on the basic beliefs as the pyramid rises up.

- A. According to classical foundationalism, only sensory beliefs or beliefs about the truths of reason should be allowed in the foundations.
- B. Other foundationalists allow that certain virtues or morals should be allowed.
- C. All strong foundationalists agree that for a belief to qualify as foundational it must be strongly justified as it can possibly be. It must be immune to correction and incapable of being doubted reasonably.

In summary, foundationalists assert that if we can pay attention to the way our consciousness actually works and to the way beliefs are justified, then it becomes evident that sensory experience and perceptual beliefs have the right for epistemic status.

2. **Coherentism** – There are no asymmetries between basic and non-basic beliefs. All belief is on par with each other.

- A. The doxastic (belief) assumption says that the sole factor that justifies a belief for a person is the other beliefs that the person holds. If a pyramid is a good metaphor for a foundationalist, a raft is a good metaphor for a coherentist.
- B. Coherentism leaves no room for experience to play any role in justification since beliefs and beliefs alone are relevant to justification. Any belief that coherentism holds will have the same justification even if sensory experiences or subjects outside the believing subject change drastically. This poses a possible weakness in the position.