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REPLY TO BONJOUR¹

Recent rumors of the death of epistemology, Professor BonJour and I agree, are greatly exaggerated. Epistemological questions, BonJour and I agree, are both legitimate and important. But I am not sure he and I agree, entirely, about what is involved in showing what is wrong with recent attempts to undermine the legitimacy of epistemology. This indeed requires what BonJour describes as “dirty work”, satisfying to have done, though not to do, but it also requires something else: one cannot fully assuage those doubts about the legitimacy of epistemology without overcoming the false presuppositions and dichotomies which have encouraged them.

That is why what is needed is not a simple return to epistemological business-as-usual, but a re-thinking of, *inter alia*, our attitude to the “skeptical challenge” with which so much recent epistemology has been obsessed, and of the familiar dichotomies of deductivism/inductivism, holism/atomism, internalism/externalism, foundationalism/coherentism, etc.

I am of course glad that BonJour now concedes that coherentism won't do, and for the reason I stressed in (Haack 1993): it can't allow the relevance of experience to empirical justification. I am a bit surprised that he finds my critique of his earlier defense of coherentism not as perspicuous as it might be (BonJour 1997, p. 14) – there were some complications, but as I recall they were all *his* complications! But, anyway, the main point is very simple. BonJour's claim that his coherentist theory *could* acknowledge the relevance of experience rested on his Observation Requirement; but that requirement, that a system of beliefs “must contain laws attributing . . . reliability to . . . cognitively spontaneous beliefs” (BonJour 1986, p. 141) was ambiguous. Interpreted as requiring only that the subject's belief system include beliefs to the effect that some of his beliefs are experiential in origin, it is coherentist all right, but does not guarantee observational input; interpreted as requiring that the subject's belief system include beliefs which really are experiential in origin, it guarantees observational input all right, but, since it no longer takes justification to be exclusively a relation among beliefs, is no longer coherentist. This is in effect the argu-

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ment BonJour himself now acknowledges as showing that coherentism won't do (BonJour 1997, pp. 14–15).

I am of course also glad that BonJour thinks that, though coherentism won't do, nevertheless “the correct view will contain a major coherentist element”, and that he appears to concede that no standard foundationalist approach will work. But I am surprised, in view of this, that he still wonders whether the correct account won't be, after all, a non-standard kind of foundationalism – a kind he had earlier described as no more, perhaps less, plausible than more familiar kinds, susceptible to “the most fundamental and far-reaching objection to foundationalism – that there is no way for an empirical belief to have *any* degree of warrant which does not depend on the justification of other empirical beliefs” (BonJour 1986, p. 29). BonJour now recognizes that no form of coherentism can accommodate the relevance of experience, which foundherentism requires and (some forms of) foundationalism allow. What he seems to have lost hold of is that no form of foundationalism can accommodate the mutual interpenetration, the quasi-holism, of beliefs, which is the real insight of coherentism; for if one takes this coherentist insight seriously, one realizes that no distinction of basic and derived beliefs, such as all forms of foundationalism require, is viable. Foundationalism is no less mistaken than coherentism. More bells and whistles, as BonJour puts it – ellipses, I might say – will no more save foundationalism than they will coherentism.

BonJour's presentation of my arguments against foundationalism suggests that he missed my repeated observations (Haack 1993, pp. 11, 21) that it is often a matter of judgment whether an argument or an objection is decisive, and (Haack 1993, p. 33) that the purpose of chapter 1 was to make a *prima facie* case to be reinforced, in later chapters, by detailed case-studies of specific foundationalist and coherentist theories and by detailed articulation of a foundherentist account. BonJour seems not to realize that my book does not have the structure of a linear argument, but is more like a series of transparent overlays, each modifying and refining the picture earlier presented.

That said, however, BonJour is correct, in a way, to suggest that there is a position in the logical space between the most modified form of foundationalism considered in chapter 1 of (Haack 1993) and foundherentism, which I did not identify or discuss specifically; only in a way”, however, because, as we shall see below, the position really makes no sense.

But matters are confused by the mixture of BonJour's and my terminologies. What I call “impure foundationalism” allows mutual support among derived beliefs. What I call “weak foundationalism” allows that basic beliefs are less than fully justified by experience. BonJour, however,

appears to use “weak foundationalism” to refer to a style of theory which is both weak and impure in my sense, and, additionally, (i) allows mutual support among basic beliefs and this is the key point (ii) allows basic beliefs to get support from derived beliefs.²

BonJour describes this as “the more or less standard conception of weak foundationalism”; but actually it is a question whether it is properly construed as a form of foundationalism at all; in the characterization I gave in (Haack 1993), as in many others’ (e.g., Alston’s, Sosa’s, etc.³), foundationalism allows support relations to go only from basic to derived, never the other way round. But for now I shall agree to call the view in question “foundationalist”, but will dub it “feeble foundationalism”, to keep it distinct from weak foundationalism in my sense.

Another problem, this time much more than terminological, is that there is a significant gap in BonJour’s classification. What BonJour calls “weak” foundationalism is what I am calling “feeble foundationalism”; what he calls “modest strong foundationalism” corresponds to my category of weak-and-pure foundationalism. But there is no category in his scheme corresponding to my category of weak-and-impure foundationalism. This is particularly unfortunate, because *most recent variations of foundationalism fall into the very category that is missing from BonJour’s scheme* – indeed, that was one of a number of reasons which led me to propose my new classification when I introduced foundherentism (Haack 1982/3). This gap in BonJour’s classification has encouraged commentators to misclassify weak-and-impure versions of foundationalism as forms of feeble foundationalism, and even, in some instances, to compound the confusion by running together first weak-and-impure with feeble foundationalism, and then feeble foundationalism with foundherentism.

In (Haack 1993) I offered considerations against impure foundationalism (it is arbitrary to allow mutual support among derived beliefs but at the same time insist on a class of beliefs, the basic ones, immune from support by other beliefs), against weak foundationalism (once it is conceded that a basic belief may be less than fully justified by experience, there is no reason to deny that it might be more, or less, justified in virtue of its relations to other beliefs), and so, by implication, against weak-and-impure foundationalism (it is doubly arbitrary); but I offered no considerations specifically against feeble foundationalism.

Most recent variations of foundationalism, to repeat, fall into the category missing from BonJour’s scheme, weak-and-impure, and are vulnerable to the considerations urged against this style of foundationalism in (Haack 1993). Thinking about it now, I find it hardly surprising that feeble foundationalism has never, so far as I am aware, been seriously developed (except

for a few lines in which Firth sketches, but does not endorse, something vaguely like this alongside a possible weedy form of coherentism, and half a page where Russell suggests something of the kind):⁴ it really makes no sense.

Why not? Unlike weak, or impure, or even weak-and-impure foundationalism, feeble foundationalism can't characterize basic beliefs as those which support, but are not supported by, other beliefs. In allowing that there is no class of beliefs to the justification of which other beliefs are irrelevant, the feeble foundationalist has granted the interdependence of beliefs on which the coherentist, and the foundherentist, insist; yet at the same time he wants to distinguish a class of beliefs justified to some degree independently of any other beliefs. Perhaps our feeble foundationalist will say that basic beliefs are those which are initially justified by experience. But why allow "derived" beliefs to support "basic" beliefs, but not to contribute to their "initial" justification? Somehow, apparently, one is supposed to blot out other beliefs, even though they are admitted to be relevant, when considering the "initial" justification of beliefs of a certain class, but then let those other beliefs be used for further justification.

Or perhaps our feeble foundationalist will say that basic beliefs are those which are "directly" supported, in part, by experience, while derived beliefs are directly supported only by other beliefs. I am not convinced that there are any derived beliefs, in this sense – given that experiential evidence includes dim memory traces of what one earlier saw, read, etc. But even if there were, this maneuver would identify no plausible *kind* of belief as basic. The idea that it would probably depends on the notion that one could categorize beliefs by level of generality. But this is misguided: think of the belief that this is green, when the subject is playing a novel version of Kim's game in which, now blindfolded, he is trying to recall the color of a soft, round object from the collection he earlier saw; of an American's belief that there's a dog in the yard, and then of his belief that there's a wombat; or the scientist prompted by what he sees in the bubble chamber to draw the conclusion that electrons are composed thus and so (cf. Haack 1993, p. 111).⁵

Feeble foundationalism seems to acknowledge that more familiar forms rest on a completely artificial picture of our cognitive condition, seems to acknowledge that our beliefs form a nexus, a mesh, not a chain – but then withdraws the acknowledgment, and falls back on a still essentially one-directional model. Foundherentism permits a consistent acknowledgement that one couldn't have – that it makes no sense to imagine someone's having – *just* the belief that there's a dog in the room, say, with no other beliefs about dogs, about where one is, about one's ability to recognize a

familiar animal at a distance of three yards, etc. Feeble foundationalism, by contrast, is doubly, and incoherently, *ad hoc*. First it says those other beliefs are irrelevant to the initial justification of the belief that there's a dog in the room; then it says they are relevant, after all, for further justification. Foundherentism permits a straightforward acknowledgment that any empirical belief; however theoretical, might be prompted – against the background of one's other beliefs by one's experience. Feeble foundationalism, by contrast, needs some *ad hoc* means of preventing such beliefs qualifying as basic.

But now I am less surprised that BonJour does not seem quite to grasp *what the coherentist insight is* that we must preserve despite acknowledging that coherentism won't do. For his coherentism was always, in one respect, too foundationalist; as I should have realized, since in (BonJour 1986) he twice mentioned (pp. 146–7, 232–3) an affinity between his position and feeble foundationalism. Even as he developed his coherentist theory, he relied on a distinction of a curiously foundationalist cast, between beliefs inferential in origin and beliefs non-inferential in origin. But this is just the distinction against which I have been arguing, and which I avoid by talking of the “nexus” of a belief; of the “vector of forces” resulting in *A*'s believing that *p*, and by replacing the model of a mathematical proof by the analogy of a crossword puzzle.

However, BonJour is right to suggest that it is not so clear that the more modified forms of foundationalism and coherentism are better than the unmodified forms. In one way they are better: modifying coherentism to allow differential weighting of beliefs is a gesture towards recognizing the relevance of experience, and modifying foundationalism to allow some element of mutual support, a gesture towards recognizing the interdependence of beliefs. But in another way the modified forms are worse: for, unlike stronger or purer forms, the modified versions both of coherentism and of foundationalism open themselves to arguments that, having gone so far, they can no longer motivate resisting further steps that would leave them no longer really coherentist, or no longer really foundationalist. They lean in the right direction; but the leaning destabilizes them.

This instability was, in fact, already implicit in my characterization of weak foundationalism (Haack 1993, p. 16; allowing defeasibly justified “basic” beliefs already threatens the tenability of one-directionality, and hence of the basic/derived distinction). No doubt, also, this instability explains why the recent history of coherentism and, more strikingly, foundationalism, is such a nightmare of *ad hoc* shorings-up (e.g., Audi's “moderate foundationalism”, in which the degree of justification of a basic belief may be lowered, but not raised, by other beliefs, and the degree

of justification of a derived belief may be raised by coherence with other beliefs, but only if it is already justified enough for knowledge by a one-directional, linear chain of support from basic beliefs).

Now for Bonjour's concerns about the double-aspect character of my theory. Whether, or to what degree, a person is justified in believing something depends not only on what he believes, but on why he believes it. If two people believe the same thing, one on strong evidence, the other on weak, the former is more justified than the latter. If one person believes the same thing at different times, earlier on weaker evidence, later on stronger, he is more justified at the later time than at the earlier. And the fact that a person's experiences can stand in causal relations to his belief-states, but not in logical relations to propositions, points to the same conclusion: a theory acknowledging the relevance of experience to empirical justification (i.e., Bonjour and I agree, any adequate theory) must combine causal and quasi-logical elements.

Bonjour's reversion to talk of experience's having "a justificatory, and not merely a causal, role" (Bonjour 1997, p. 22), however, suggests that he hasn't fully grasped what is wrong with the Irrelevance of Causation argument, nor, therefore, the motivation for a double-aspect approach. And apparently confusing implication with inference, equating the idea that justification is a logical matter with the idea that it involves "something like reasoning or inference" (Bonjour 1997, p. 17), he seems to have missed the crucial point that the double-aspect character of my theory is emphatically NOT a matter of the justification of some beliefs being causal, and of others quasi-logical; it is *double-aspect across the board*. The role of the causal part of the theory is to identify *A*'s *S*-evidence with respect to *p*, on the basis of which *A*'s *C*-evidence with respect to *p* will be constructed.

Within *A*'s *S*-evidence with respect to *p*, his *S*-reasons (certain other *S*-beliefs of his) are distinguished from his experiential *S*-evidence (certain perceptual, introspective and memory states of his); within *A*'s *C*-evidence, correspondingly, his *C*-reasons are distinguished from his experiential *C*-evidence. *A*'s *C*-reasons with respect to *p* are the contents of his *S*-reasons; i.e., they are propositions *A* believes. *A*'s experiential *C*-evidence, however, consists of propositions which are true of *A* – he *is* in the kind of perceptual, etc., state they say he is – but which *A* need not believe. Here Bonjour has misunderstood me badly: I do not say, as he several times suggests (Bonjour 1997, pp. 18–20; careful readers will note that the thesis he attributes to me is not to be found on the pages of (Haack 1993) to which he refers), either that *A*'s experiential *C*-evidence consists of propositions which "reflect the contents" of the perceptual, etc., states, that

constitute *A*'s experiential *S*-evidence, or that it consists of propositions which *A* must believe. (Nor, for that matter, do I say that perceptual, etc., states have propositional contents.)

BonJour's misunderstanding here feeds, and is fed by, another: that I am really an internalist like himself, though for some reason that escapes him I am too obstinate to admit it! True, I reject reliabilism, and comment that a person's evidence should be something of which he is aware. But BonJour has not noticed that this comment is transmuted, as my articulation proceeds, into a thesis specifically about *A*'s *S*-evidence (Haack 1993, p. 141). Nor, *a fortiori*, does he realize that this is part of the reason I can't get along with the internalism/externalism distinction. The restriction to *S*-evidence in no way betrays the intuition to which I appealed: to accommodate that, all that is needed is that *A*'s experiential *S*-evidence consist of (conscious) states of *A*. Part of what justifies *A* in believing that there's a dog in the room, for example, is *its looking to him as if there is*. (Prompted by BonJour's comments, I have assured myself, I hope to his relief as well as mine, that nothing in my critique of reliabilism depends on the assumption that *A*'s experiential *C*-evidence must consist of propositions believed by *A*.)

BonJour's worry that I settle on my specification of *A*'s experiential *C*-evidence "by fiat", reveals that he hasn't grasped that the aim in the project of explication is to articulate explicitly the standards implicit in our judgments of how justified someone is in believing something; and that what motivates the style of specification suggested is that our judgments of justification rely on a conception of the evidence of the senses which both takes into account how things look (etc.) to the subject, and takes for granted that what we perceive, normally, is things and events around us. Our pre-theoretical conception of the evidence of the senses has both "internal" and "external" elements built into it; so I try to build both into my explication. This is why the reasons I give for my suggestions about how to specify *A*'s experiential evidence – yes, I do give reasons! (Haack 1993, p. 80) – are not theoretical but descriptive, focussed on how we talk about the evidence of the senses. What justifies me in thinking there's a woodpecker in the tree? I can see it; it's daylight; the tree is only ten feet away; but the bird is against the light/too far away for me to see the markings/I don't have my contacts in, so it looks blurry, . . . , etc. We talk about "how things look to *A*", not in that mythical sense-datum language, but in terms of *what A sees* and *the circumstances of his seeing it*.

It is built into our concept of the evidence of the senses, and therefore into my explication, that what we perceive is, normally, things and events in the world around us.⁶ So, if there were an evil demon, our standards of

justification would break down – they would not be, as we hope and believe they are, indicative of the truth of our beliefs. But then, if there were an evil demon, *no* truth-indication would be possible for us. That is why, when, in hopes of giving criteria of justification that would work even if there were an evil demon, Goldman modified his reliabilism with the “normal worlds” clause, the result was not a better theory of justification but an empty form of words (Haack 1993, pp. 149–150). Complaining (BonJour 1997, p. 21) that my approach “short-circuits” the skeptical challenge, BonJour reveals that he has completely misunderstood my attitude to hyperbolic skepticism: it is an epistemically idle hypothesis an unhealthy fascination with which is encouraged by impoverished conceptions of the evidence of the senses.

BonJour worries about a subject who is in the kind of perceptual state a normal observer would be in when looking at a rabbit three feet away in good light, but who lacks the concept of rabbithood. But this is no problem, since such a subject won’t have the belief that there is a rabbit before him. What is really bothering BonJour, I suspect, is whether the evaluative part of my theory will give *A* the wrong degree of justification if his experiential *C*-evidence is specified in the wrong way.

As the causal part of my theory is informed by the idea of a quasi-holism of beliefs expressed in the metaphors of the causal nexus of a belief and of the vector of forces resulting in *A*’s believing that *p*, so the evaluative part is informed by the idea of a quasi-holism of evidential strength expressed in the analogy of a crossword puzzle. Whether or to what degree *A* is justified in believing that *p* depends on how favorable his *C*-evidence with respect to *p* is, how secure his *C*-reasons with respect to *p* are, independently of his belief that *p*, and how comprehensive his *C*-evidence is. *All three clauses together* are necessary to determine degree of justification (Haack 1993, pp. 84, 87).

This enables me to articulate something else wrong with foundationalism: its assimilation of justification and support – an assimilation to which BonJour reveals he is not immune when he writes (BonJour 1997, p. 17, and cf. the first complete paragraph on his p. 21) that I argue, following Lewis, “that beliefs get no support from each other by virtue of coherence alone”. Not so; I follow Lewis, rather, in holding that empirical beliefs cannot be justified in virtue of mutual support alone.

Now I can return to my *lapins*. There is more than one way to approach the specification of experiential evidence. Foundationalists seem obliged to specify a canonical form, since according to them the degree of justification of basic beliefs (or in the case of the feeble foundationalist, the degree of “initial” justification of “basic” beliefs) depends only on the subject’s experience, so everything depends on how that experience is specified.

In my account, however, degree of justification depends on all three factors – supportiveness, independent security, and comprehensiveness; and there is a complex interplay among them. And so I can allow some flexibility rather than requiring one canonical specification of *A*'s experiential *C*-evidence with respect to *p*.

Part of what I have in mind is that, even if one specifies what *A* sees in “too much” detail, the suggested reference to a normal observer will mean that the supportiveness of *A*'s *C*-evidence, and so, *ceteris paribus*, his degree of justification, will fall. Suppose that *A* believes there is a female day-old chick in front of him, and that he is in the kind of perceptual state a normal observer would be in when looking at a female day-old chick at two feet in good light. Since normal observers can't tell the sex of day-old chicks, the idea is, the explanatory integration of his evidence and his belief is weakened, lowering the degree of supportiveness of his evidence.

Another part of what I have in mind concerns the interaction of the three determinants of justification. Suppose *A* believes there is a female corgi named “Trixie” belonging to the Queen Mother in the room; and suppose that he is in the kind of perceptual state a normal observer would be in when looking at a female corgi named “Trixie” belonging to the Queen Mother at a distance of ten feet in good light. Does it follow that *A* is justified to a high degree in believing that there is a female corgi named “Trixie” belonging to the Queen Mother in the room? No. If part of *A*'s *C*-evidence is his (probably implicit) belief that he can recognize female corgis named “Trixie” belonging to the Queen Mother at this distance, then the degree to which he is justified in believing that there is a female corgi, etc., in the room will be lower, the less justified he is in believing this (i.e., the independent security clause will prevent the theory's giving too high a degree of justification); and if not, then the degree to which he is justified in believing that there is a female corgi, etc., in the room will be lower because of this lack (i.e., the comprehensiveness clause will prevent the theory's giving too high a degree of justification).

I certainly don't claim to have anticipated and solved every possible problem about experiential evidence. But I believe I have suggested an approach to the evidence of the senses which has the merit precisely of avoiding those old puzzles about sense-data, about whether experience has a propositional content, etc. To my mind, BonJour's discussion illustrates rather clearly why one will get nowhere if one starts from there. Which, I might add, is one of the important epistemological lessons to be learned from the old pragmatists, who saw long ago that the classical empiricist “way of ideas” had bequeathed us an impoverished conception of experience and a hopeless obsession with skepticism.

NOTES

¹ I would like to thank Howard Burdick for helpful comments on a draft.

² BonJour offers several characterizations of (what he calls) “weak”, i.e., feeble, foundationalism; all are somewhat vague, and it is not clear that all are equivalent.

Thus from “Can Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?” (BonJour 1978), p. 100: “Weak foundationism accepts the central idea of foundationism – viz., that certain empirical beliefs possess a degree of independent epistemic justification or warrant which does not derive from inference or coherence relations. But the weak foundationist holds that these foundational beliefs have only a quite low degree of warrant, much lower than that attributed to them by the modest strong foundationist, and insufficient by itself to satisfy the justification condition for knowledge or to qualify them as acceptable justifying premisses for other beliefs. Thus this independent warrant must somehow be augmented if knowledge is to be achieved, and the usual appeal here is to coherence with other such minimally warranted beliefs. By combining such beliefs into larger and larger coherent systems, it is held, their initial, minimal degree of warrant can gradually be enhanced until knowledge is finally achieved. Thus [*sic*] weak foundationism . . . abandons the linear conception of justification”.

From (BonJour 1986, p. 28): “Weak foundationism is a version of foundationism because it holds that there are basic beliefs having some degree, although a relatively low one, of noninferential epistemic justification. [But the weak foundationalist attempts] to augment the justification of both basic and nonbasic beliefs by appealing to the concept of coherence”.

From (BonJour 1997, pp. 4–5): “The more or less standard conception of weak foundationalism . . . is one in which basic beliefs have some relatively weak initial degree of justification, which is then enhanced by something like coherence to a level sufficient for knowledge. Though the logic of the ‘enhancement’ process is admittedly more than a little obscure, it seems clear that any interesting notion of coherence would involve other beliefs in addition to the basic ones”.

³ Alston: “foundationalism is a view concerning the *structure* of the system of justified beliefs possessed by a given individual. Such a system is divided into ‘foundation’ and ‘superstructure’, *so related that beliefs in the latter depend on the former for their justification but not vice versa*” (Alston 1992, p. 144, second italics mine). Sosa: according to foundationalism “every piece of knowledge stands at the apex of a pyramid that rests on stable and secure foundations *whose stability and security does not derive from the upper stories*” (Sosa 1980, pp. 23–24, my italics).

⁴ Russell 1948, pp. 193–194; Firth 1964, pp. 552–553.

⁵ In the half-page development of feeble foundationalism referred to in note 7, Russell relies on the analogy of a bridge with piers, the piers partly supported by girders. He says only that “animal beliefs” are the analogue of the piers, and gives no indication at all of what kind of belief is supposed to be the analogue of the girders.

⁶ BonJour has it wrong when (BonJour 1997, pp. 6–7), he describes my account of experiential *C*-evidence as couched in terms of “the object or situation that the experience would normally *be taken to be* a perception of”.)

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