Phil. 270 3/5/19

Regress Argument (for skepticism; if you add a non-skepticism premise [You have some justified beliefs] and remove SER (1), it can function as an argument for foundationalism/properly basic beliefs):

1. SER: To be justified in believing that p, you must base that belief on a belief or beliefs in some proposition or propositions p2, p3, …., which provide sufficient evidence for your belief that p
2. If you’re justified in believing that p because you have based it on your belief that q, your belief that q must itself have been justified
3. No circuits of justification: (My favored way of doing this): No belief can be based on itself, directly or indirectly, and the basing relation is transitive
4. No infinitely long basing chains

Properly understood, these should together yield skepticism: You have no justified beliefs

Skepticism can be avoided by denying one or more of the principles used in the argument

One nice way of avoiding skepticism denies SER (yielding a form of foundationalism), but doesn’t just flat deny it, but replaces it with:

1′. GER: To be justified in believing that p, you must base that belief on sufficient evidence for p

GER does not specify that your evidence for p must be other beliefs. In cases where it is other beliefs that provide your evidence for p, the other principles of the argument force the conclusion that, if it is justified, your belief that p is based on some properly basic belief or beliefs – beliefs that are themselves justified, though they are not based on other beliefs. (If your belief that p is not based on other beliefs, but is justified nonetheless, then it is itself a properly basic belief.) This escape now has something to say about how the properly basic beliefs (those that defy our discarded SER) are justified: they, too, comply with GER, but the evidence for them is not comprised of beliefs, but of other items, perhaps sensory experiences. But don’t those experiences have to be justified to provide justification for beliefs? No, they’re experiences; they’re not the kinds of things that can be justified or unjustified.

Toward the end of class, we were discussing how the skeptical argument could be restored, while relying only on GER, instead of SER: 1′, 2, 3, 4, plus….

1. Propositionality of evidence: all your fundamental evidence is propositional
2. Propositions p2, p3, p4, …. can function as propositional evidence for your belief that p only by beliefs in those other propositions serving as bases for your belief that p

This skeptical argument can be converted into an anti-evidentialism argument:

Non-skepticism plus 2-6 yields the existence of justified beliefs that are not only properly basic, but are justified despite not only not being based on other beliefs, but also not being based on evidence at all