1. The Structure of Justification

*Foundationalism* and *coherentism* are competing views about the structure of justification—that is, about how our body of beliefs is structured.

- **D**istinction: mediate justification and immediate justification.
- **M**ediately justified beliefs: beliefs that depend for their justification on other beliefs that are themselves justified.
- **I**mmediately justified beliefs: beliefs that do not depend for their justification on other beliefs; basic beliefs.

*Foundationalism*: (1) not all justified beliefs are mediate justified; (2) there are immediately justified beliefs.

*Coherentism*: (1’) every justified belief is mediate justified; (2’) there are no immediately justified beliefs.

Two types of foundationalism:

- **S**imple foundationalism: a belief can be immediately justified without the subject having to be aware of this fact. This is an externalist version of foundationalism.
- **I**terative foundationalism: the subject of an immediately justified belief must be immediately justified in believing that he is immediately justified. This is an internalist version of foundationalism.

2. An Argument Against Iterative Foundationalism: The Second-Level Argument

According to Alston, there is a definitive argument against iterative foundationalism.

1. Justification is an evaluative property.
2. Evaluative properties depend on more fundamental properties.
3. If a property P depends on more fundamental properties Q, then S is justified in believing that something x is P only if S is justified in believing that x has Q and that whatever Q has P.
4. S is justified in believing that S is justified in believing that p only if S is justified in believing that the belief that p has Q and that whatever has Q is justified.
5. Therefore, S’s belief to the effect that S is justified in believing that p cannot be immediately justified.

If immediate object-level justification calls for higher-level justification (as iterative foundationalism claims) and if higher-level justification is necessarily mediate (as the second-level argument maintains), then immediate justification is a fiction.

3. An Argument for Simple Foundationalism: The Regress Argument

1. Either there are justified basic beliefs or each justified belief has an evidential chain that either:
   - (a) terminates in an unjustified belief;
   - (b) is an infinite regress of beliefs;
   - (c) is circular.
2. Beliefs based on unjustified beliefs are not themselves justified, so no justified belief could have an evidential chain that terminates in an unjustified belief (i.e., not (a)).
3. No person could have an infinite series of beliefs, so no justified belief could have an evidential chain that is an infinite regress of beliefs (i.e., not (b)).
4. No belief could be justified by itself, so no justified belief could have an evidential chain that is circular (i.e., not (c)).
5. Therefore, there are justified basic beliefs (from 1-4).

1, (b) is an important issue—something that both foundationalists and coherentists typically want to avoid. Both foundationalists and coherentists argue that we can avoid a regress—foundationalists, by accepting justified basic beliefs and coherentists, by rejecting a crucial premise of the argument.

4. An Objection to Simple Foundationalism: The Charge of Dogmatism

Simple foundationalism rests the structure of mediately justified belief upon immediately justified foundations; but the simple foundationalist does not provide reasons for regarding these foundations as acceptable. If you claim knowledge but refuse to attempt to explain how you have it, then you are being dogmatic.

Two options:

(a) Embrace dogmatism: maintain that there is a difference between knowing something and being able to explain how one knows it.

Does this option fix the problem?

(b) Explain away the charge of dogmatism: claim that although simple foundationalism does not require the bearer of an immediately justified belief that $p$ to have reasons for thinking that he is immediately justified in believing that $p$, it doesn’t prevent him from having such reasons.

The charge of dogmatism would only hold if simple foundationalism forced us to accept foundational beliefs without argument.

Does this fix the problem?