

Does Empirical Knowledge have a foundation?

Empirical Knowledge is knowledge that is gained by a vast number of ordinary people through direct experience or the testimonial of others. For example “all things fall down” would be an empirical proposition. In that it talks about the theory of gravity. Knowledge about gravity for most people is an empirically based since everything usually falls down when it is thrown up. Most people from experience know that things fall down once thrown. Foundationalism on the other hand believes that each piece of knowledge lies on a pyramid. The nodes of such a pyramid must serve jointly as a base that supports the node, they must be a proposition that “S is justified in believing at T,” each brand of an epistemic pyramid must terminate. Empirical knowledge thus does have a foundation.

When talking about whether empirical knowledge does have foundation one must consider that foundationalism as a concept, says certain beliefs or truths or bits of knowledge are specially privileged starting points for any further development of our knowledge. These pieces of knowledge that are starting points are ones that empirically gained. All knowledge that man acquires has been perceived through the senses and then gone on and further proved by other means mainly scientific. Foundationalism as has already been stated is a belief system that decides to lay these in the form of a pyramid with foundations below and at the top the belief that needs to be justified. In Ernest Sosa’s, “The Raft and The Pyramid,” he gives an example of a empirical proposition that has a foundation. He states that a belief that, “Driving will be dangerous tonight,” is the belief at the top which will then need to be justified by other nodes that tell why someone may believe that driving will be dangerous tonight. Some of the justifications he gave in his pyramid were the road will be icy or snowy, driving on snow or ice is dangerous and so on. The justifications will go on and on. The point he was making was about the infinite regress argument. Whether empirical knowledge has a foundation or not face sits biggest challenge from the infinite regress argument. Since one claims that empirical knowledge does have a foundation then one must also believe that when one makes an empirical proposition it will end somewhere. The justification or the node will end and not go on forever and ever. The regress argument is first of all not possible since most people who argue these points won’t be able to go on for ever. Most people would in the end come around to some number of beliefs that are finite. For if they are infinite then how would they know?

In empirical knowledge there are foundations, every concept that we make is based on perceived senses that then need to be justified as has already been said. You may try to make doxastic ascent arguments, yet they too ultimately fail to make the case that empirical knowledge has a foundation. Many people assert that there may be something wrong with your memory or maybe other factors are clouding your memory. From the point of formal foundationalism none of these theories serve to be correct since what makes a belief foundational is its having a property that is non-epistemic and does not involve inference from other beliefs but guarantees via a necessary principle, that the belief in question is justified.