

To the charges commonly made by “anti-foundationalist,” or relativist, philosophers, one can reasonably reply:

1. Finding necessary truths, as metaphysics seeks to do, is in no way a matter of “escaping from time and history.” The necessary, eternal, absolute, ultimate can only be the most abstract aspect of becoming and cosmic history. Consequently, one in no way escapes from becoming and history in seeking it; one simply analyzes out their own utterly abstract essential structure.

2. Our human knowledge of the ultimate is not itself ultimate in the same sense. There is an important difference between “the [logical] necessity of the proposition” and “the [epistemological] certainty of our knowledge of it.” Mistakes can be made even in arithmetic, all the more so in metaphysics; and so knowledge of necessary truths is every bit as fallible as knowledge of contingent truths. There is also the problem of expressing necessary truths in language that primarily evolved and is primarily used for formulating contingent truths. “Language is only relatively reliable; we must always be ready to reconsider formulæ, and this rule does not cease to apply merely because one is not dealing with an empirical matter. Premises are to be judged by consequences as well as consequences by premises, and this is so whether the means of judging is empirical observation or the attempt to become conscious of a priori necessity or of what is presupposed by any experience or any thought whatever” (*Creativity in American Philosophy*: 43 f.).

3. Since it is a logical truism that contingent truths cannot be deduced solely from necessary ones, metaphysics as the search for the necessary truths cannot be “foundational” in that sense. Discussion of necessary truths is simply one part of the general discussion, and success in this part in no way guarantees, or even could guarantee, success in other parts.