

**CHISHOLM, RODERICK M.**, is a twentieth-century American philosopher who made major contributions in almost every area of philosophy but most notably epistemology and metaphysics. He was an undergraduate at Brown University from 1934 to 1938 and a graduate student at Harvard from 1938 to 1942. He served in the military from 1942 to 1946, and then, after briefly holding a teaching post with the Barnes Foundation and the University of Pennsylvania, he returned in 1947 to Brown University, where he remained until his death.

### **EPISTEMOLOGY**

In epistemology Chisholm was a defender of FOUNDATIONALISM [S]. He asserted that any proposition that it is justified for a person to believe gets at least part of its justification from basic propositions, which are themselves justified but not by anything else. Contingent propositions are basic insofar as they correspond to self-presenting states of the person, which for Chisholm are states such that whenever one is in the state and believes that one is in it, one's belief is maximally justified. There are two types of self-presenting states, intentional states (ways of thinking, hoping, fearing, desiring, wondering, intending, etc.) and sensory states (ways of being appeared to by the various senses). A noncontingent proposition is basic if understanding it is sufficient for understanding that it is true and also sufficient for making it justified. "2+3=5" and "If Jones is ill and Smith is away, then Jones is ill" are examples of such propositions, says Chisholm.

Self-presentation and understanding are among the basic sources of epistemic justification, but according to Chisholm there are other sources as well. The most important of these other sources are perception, memory, belief coupled with a lack of negative coherence (e.g., no inconsistencies among the propositions believed), and belief coupled with positive coherence (i.e., mutual support among the proposition believed). For each of these sources, Chisholm forwards an epistemic principle that describes the conditions under which the source generates justification.

Despite his thinking that there are many sources of epistemic justification, Chisholm is rightly regarded as a foundationalist because all the sources are such that they can produce justified beliefs only because some propositions are justified basically. For example, Chisholm's principles concerning perception and memory make reference to propositions that are justified because they correspond to self-presenting states. In the case of perception, the relevant states are sensings, and for memory the relevant states are beliefs, in particular, beliefs to the effect that one remembers something. In a similar spirit, Chisholm says that coherence relations among propositions are not capable of generating justification for propositions that have nothing else to recommend them; their role instead is to increase the degree of justification that propositions have by virtue of being supported by basic propositions.

Chisholm is also a proponent of INTERNALISM [S] in epistemology, in two senses of the term. First, he thinks that epistemic justification supervenes on our conscious states; thus, whether one's beliefs are justified is determined by one's own internal states rather than by conditions obtaining in one's external environment. Second, he thinks that the conditions, if any, that justify one's beliefs are accessible to one; thus, one is always able to determine if one reflects carefully enough, whether one's beliefs are justified.

Chisholm's epistemology is resolutely antiskeptical. Indeed, he says that the proper way to begin doing epistemology is by presupposing that some of our beliefs are justified and that indeed some constitute knowledge. Epistemology, so conceived, becomes primarily a search for the conditions that account for these beliefs being justified. A second task is to define the conditions that turn a true belief into knowledge. Chisholm's approach to this latter task is to defend a nondefeasibility account of knowledge. We know a proposition  $p$ , he says, whenever we believe  $p$ ,  $p$  is true, and  $p$  is nondefectively evident for us, where  $p$  is nondefectively evident for us (some details aside) just in case there is a set of basic propositions that justify  $p$  and that justify nothing false.

## METAPHYSICS

Chisholm also had well-worked-out views on almost every major issue in metaphysics, but his most influential views were concerned with thought and language, ontology, action and material bodies.

With respect to thought and language, Chisholm was a defender of the primacy of thought; the intentionality of language is to be understood in terms of the intentionality of thought, he says, rather than conversely. He develops this idea in his direct attribution theory of REFERENCE [S]. At the heart of the theory is a proposal that we are able to refer to things other than ourselves by directly attributing properties to them and that we indirectly attribute properties to them by directly attributing properties to ourselves. For example, if you are the only person in a room with me and you are wearing a blue sweater, then by directly attributing to myself the property of being a person  $X$  such that the only other person in the room with  $X$  is wearing a blue sweater, I indirectly attribute to you the property of wearing a blue sweater and thereby refer to you. Using these notions of direct and indirect attribution, Chisholm provides an account of various semantic notions including sense and reference.

In ontology, Chisholm's view is that there are only two kinds of entities, attributes and the individual things that have these attributes. Everything else, including propositions, states of affairs, possible worlds, and sets, can be understood in terms of these two categories. Attributes are possible objects of thought – more specifically, what we are able to attribute, either directly (to ourselves) or indirectly (both to ourselves and other things). Thus in ontology, Chisholm once again is a defender of the primacy of thought in that he uses the phenomenon of intentionality to identify and understand what kinds of entities there are.

His theory of action is an indeterministic one (*see* ACTION THEORY [S]). The fundamental notions are those of undertaking and causing, and with respect to the latter notion he carefully distinguishes among necessary causal conditions for an event, sufficient causal conditions and causal contributions. With these notions in hand, he opposes compatibilist attempts to understand what it is for a person to be free to undertake something, insisting that one has undertaken to do something freely only if there was no sufficient causal condition for one to undertake it (although there may have been extensive causal contributions to the undertaking).

Much of Chisholm's work on bodies is concerned with puzzles about the PERSISTENCE [S] of physical bodies through time, and most of these puzzles, in turn, are concerned with apparent violations of Leibniz's principle of the indiscernibility of

identicals. According to this principle, if  $X$  and  $Y$  are identical, then whatever is true of  $X$  is also true of  $Y$ . One famous puzzle, for example, is the ship of Theseus. Even if one plank of the ship is replaced at a time  $t$ , it is the same ship, namely Theseus's, that exists before  $t$  and after  $t$ , and yet the ship might appear to have different properties before  $t$  and after  $t$ . Chisholm attempts to solve this and other puzzles about the identity of physical bodies through time by using his fundamental ontological categories, attributes and individual things, to make precise the seventeenth-century distinction between substances and their modes.

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