Alan,

You gave a good talk the other day. It's always a little hard to listen to these things when you already know most of what the speaker is saying, but I think it was a good introduction for those students. I think you thought you were saying things that would provoke me©©the scientist©©into radical disagreement. But you didn't. Remember that I'm also a philosopher of science (of biology, at least), and you didn't really say much that the philosopher part of me could disagree with. When you said before that you were going to speak about foundationism, I just didn't know what you meant. But now that I hear you, I must generally agree: there are no foundations for any kind of bedrock certainty. Human knowledge just isn't that kind of thing; I think the desire for some kind of absolute certainty or absolute truth in contemporary people is basically an immaturity, an inability to accept the world as it is.

I have thought for a long time that Toulmin has the right end of the stick in much that he's written, and I'm glad you discussed some of his ideas. I was surprised, though, that you didn't mention the idea of laws needing to have nomic status before they are acceptable. I think this is an important aspect of modern scientific thought; and I'm concerned about the question of biological laws having nomic necessity. The statement "All crows are black" appears to have no such status; there is no biological theory that explains why ”Corvus• ”corax• should have any particular color. However, we accept Mendel's laws of inheritance because there is a biological theory that makes these laws understandable and deducible from more basic premises about the structure of sexually reproducing organisms.

The major place where we part company is on the question of cultural relativism. I haven't worked out my own views carefully©©I've got other problems to think about©©but I really believe there must be a basis for a

scientific description of the world that is independent of particular cultural viewpoints. However, I'm not in a position to argue with you yet about this.

Best wishes,

Burt Guttman