PHENOMENAL CONSERVATISM, REFLECTION AND SELF-DEFEAT

Julien BEILLARD

ABSTRACT: Huemer defends phenomenal conservatism (PC) and also the further claim that belief in any rival theory is self-defeating (SD). Here I construct a dilemma for his position: either PC and SD are incompatible, or belief in PC is itself self-defeating. I take these considerations to suggest a better self-defeat argument for (belief in) PC and a strong form of internalism.

KEYWORDS: epistemology, phenomenal conservatism, self-defeat, appearances, internalism, externalism

1. Introduction

Michael Huemer defends phenomenal conservatism:

(PC) If it appears to S that p then, in the absence of defeaters, S has justification for believing that p.[1]

And a striking further claim, which he takes to encourage belief in PC:

(SD) If PC is inconsistent with t, the belief that t is self-defeating.

Here I argue that Huemer's position generates a dilemma: either PC is incompatible with SD or belief in PC is itself self-defeating. I take these considerations to suggest a better self-defeat argument for (belief in) PC and a strong form of internalism.

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[1] Huemer typically identifies PC with the weaker principle that appearances in the absence of defeaters provide "some degree of justification" ("Compassionate Phenomenal Conservatism," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 74 (2007): 30). He wants to avoid the implausible implication that a "weak and wavering appearance" might confer "full justification" ("Phenomenal Conservatism and the Internalist Intuition," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 43 (2006): 157 n5). Another way to avoid it would be to treat these special properties of appearances as defeaters. In any case, the appearances discussed here need not have any of these properties. And when I say that a belief is "justified" I mean that it is *fully* justified.

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2. SD and Strong Internalism

A few words about how PC and SD are to be understood. Appearances are conscious states with propositional contents (or objects of such states) that produce inclinations to belief. Defeaters are things that deprive beliefs of justification.[2] For now, I simply note that Huemer takes defeaters to be "grounds for doubting that one knows."[3] And, for now, I will assume a strong form of internalism:

> S has grounds for attitude A with respect to *p* only if it appears to S that something makes A rational for S with respect to *p*.

So, on this interpretation, PC suggests an intuitively appealing account of justified belief and it may enable us to counter arguments for skepticism.[4]

These considerations impose a very strong condition on self-defeating belief:

> S's belief that *p* is self-defeating only if, (at least partly) in virtue of S's belief that *p*, it appears to S that something makes it rational for S to doubt that S knows that *p*.

On this interpretation, then, SD implies that it appears to Huemer's opponents that they have reasons for doubting that their own beliefs about justification count as knowledge. Not surprisingly, his argument for SD does not establish this false claim. But it is worth considering why exactly the argument fails (on this interpretation). The core of the self-defeat argument runs as follows:

> (P1) Beliefs are based only on appearances.
>
> (P2) Justified beliefs are based on their justifiers.
>
> (C/SD) If PC is inconsistent with *t*, the belief that *t* is self-defeating.

And Huemer takes this argument to encourage belief in PC.

Now it does seem that there is a problem in this vicinity for Huemer's opponents. Rival theories imply that appearances alone can never justify beliefs.

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[2] Of course, if there is nothing more to say about the nature of defeat, PC threatens to collapse into the empty claim that beliefs are justified if nothing makes them unjustified. (And it does collapse if S believes that *p* only if it appears to S that *p*.)

[3] Michael Huemer, "Phenomenal Conservatism and Self-Defeat: A Reply to DePoe," *Philosophical Studies* 156 (2011): 9.

[4] The implication depends on two assumptions: (1) if it appears to S that *p* and S believes that *p* on that basis then, in the absence of defeaters, the fact that it appears to S that *p* is what justifies S's belief that *p*, and (2) a belief is justified if the subject bases the belief on something that justifies the belief. I accept (1) and (2) throughout this discussion.

Plausibly, though, all relevant beliefs – any that, intuitively, might count as justified beliefs – are based only on appearances. Only some set of appearances could act as the conscious cause of any belief.[5] So P$_1$ is the claim that any relevant beliefs are (relevantly) based only on appearances. And P$_2$ is the claim that the basis of a justified belief is what justifies it. This too seems plausible. Granting these claims, we may infer that belief in a rival theory is based on something that justifies the belief only if the theory is not true.

These considerations may seem to support SD and, given some further assumptions, they may also seem to support the further conclusion that belief in PC is justified.[6] But this cannot be right. Imagine that I believe a simple reliabilist theory:

(R) A belief is justified if and only if it was reliably caused.[7]

Does the self-defeat argument succeed against my belief in R? No. At most, P$_1$ and P$_2$ imply that *if* R is true my belief in R is unjustified (and perhaps self-defeating). But SD implies that my belief *is* unjustified. Suppose, however, that PC is true rather than R. Then my belief might be justified. I might believe R because it appears to me that R is true, and it might not appear to me that anything makes it doubtful that I know R. For example, it might not appear to me that there is any reason to doubt that my belief is reliably caused. Many of Huemer's opponents must be in this kind of epistemic situation. So in the actual world, at least, PC and SD are incompatible. PC implies that certain (token) beliefs about justification are justified, whereas SD implies that these same beliefs are *not* justified, in virtue of defeating themselves.

Suppose instead that R is true. Would my belief in R be self-defeating in that case? Maybe, but the self-defeat argument gives no support to that conclusion. R and P$_2$ are incompatible, since R implies that justified beliefs need

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[5] So P$_1$ does not imply that beliefs have no other causes. It is also worth noting that, on this interpretation, P$_1$ does not imply that the subject *consciously bases* her belief on some set of appearances – that she is conscious *of* taking the belief to be justified in virtue of a conscious state that causes the belief.

[6] These further assumptions are that (1) a belief that is (or would be) unjustified if it is (or were) true is unjustified, (2) there is some theory of justification such that we can be justified in believing that theory and (3) belief in PC is not self-defeating. I will later challenge both (1) and (3).

[7] So as to ensure that R and PC are inconsistent, we may stipulate that reliably caused beliefs need not always be beliefs appropriately based on appearances in the absence of defeaters. Perhaps a reliably caused belief is a belief caused by a mental faculty with a strong tendency to produce true beliefs. But it makes no difference to my argument how exactly reliability should be understood.

not be *based* on anything (in the relevant sense). Indeed, P2 seems to be flatly incoherent, if R is true. How could any belief be 'based' on the fact that it was reliably caused? Moreover, R implies that beliefs are *un*justified only if they are *not* reliably caused, but P1 and P2 say nothing about the causes of any belief. At most, they imply that, if R were true, my belief in R would fail to meet a merely possible condition on justified beliefs. So on the present interpretation Huemer's self-defeat argument is badly defective.

3. Strong Internalism or Weak Internalism?

My main conclusion in the last section was that Huemer's self-defeat argument is unsound under PC and strong internalism. Thus, if the argument is meant to establish that belief in PC *and* strong internalism is rational, or more rational than belief in any rival theory, it seems that the argument fails on its own terms.[8] Then again, the terms are unclear. Huemer often seems to endorse strong internalism. For example, it may be implied by the "central internalist intuition about justification" that he takes to support PC, for example:

> There cannot be a pair of cases in which everything seems to a subject to be the same in all epistemically relevant respects, and yet the subject ought, rationally, to take different doxastic attitudes in the two cases.[9]

Notice a scope ambiguity in this passage, though. Cases C and C* might be taken to "seem the same" to subject S if and only if they meet a strong internalist condition:

> For any property P such that P *appears to S to be* an epistemic property, it appears to S that C and C* are identical with respect to P.

Or a weaker internalist condition:

> For any property P such that P *is* an epistemic property, it appears to S that C and C* are identical with respect to P.

If PC encodes the weaker form of internalism, and an associated conception of defeat, there could be defeaters for a belief when it appears to the subject that she knows its content. Then the objection to the self-defeat argument urged in the last section fails.

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[8] Of course, under PC and strong internalism, people might be justified in believing that the self-defeat argument justifies them in believing PC and strong internalism. But presumably Huemer does not take his own belief that the argument justifies his belief in PC to depend on his own confusion or ignorance!

[9] Huemer, "Phenomenal Conservatism and the Internalist Intuition," 151.

It is just not clear how Huemer intends to characterize defeaters. He rejects externalism because he takes it to imply that a person could correctly report on a rational attitude by means of an absurd speech:

> I believe that *p* for no apparent reason.[10]

Presumably we are meant to infer that strong internalism holds for justifiers. And the internalist intuition implies that one of these two forms of internalism must hold for any conditions that determine rational attitudes. But Huemer also appeals to a weak internalist conception of defeat, at times:

> The believer's merely *thinking* that the belief that P coheres with rest of his system of beliefs and appearances would not prevent his belief that P from being defeated, provided that the principle governing when a belief's justification is defeated adverts to *actual* coherence relations (or lack thereof).[11]

And yet, if actual incoherence alone defeats beliefs, an equally absurd (Moore-paradoxical) speech could be a correct report of a rational attitude:

> I believe that my belief that *q* is justified, but my belief that *q* is not justified.

In dealing with some objections to the self-defeat argument, at any rate, Huemer appeals to the weaker form of internalism. DePaul worries that even under PC beliefs are not based on their justifiers: we do not believe things on the basis of appearances and the absence of defeaters.[12] Huemer replies that their absence is a mere "requirement" on justified beliefs under PC whereas, under rival theories, things over and above appearances figure in the purported "sources" of justification.[13] Obviously, though, it might not *appear* to the proponent of R that reliable causation is a justifier rather than a mere requirement.

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[10] Huemer, "Phenomenal Conservatism and the Internalist Intuition," 150, Huemer, "Reply to DePoe," 11.

[11] Huemer, "Compassionate Phenomenal Conservatism," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 74 (2007): 156.

[12] Michael DePaul, "Phenomenal Conservatism and Self-Defeat", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 78 (2009): 206.

[13] Michael Huemer, "Apology of a Modest Intuitionist," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 78 (2009): 228. As further evidence for my interpretation of Huemer's strategy, consider the following passage:

> The alternative epistemological *theories* against which I argue cannot escape self-defeat in this way. Reliabilism, for example, *holds* that the reliability of one's belief-forming mechanism is responsible for one's having justification for a given proposition; this reliability *is not* the mere absence of a condition that would interfere with one's having justification (Huemer, "Apology of a Modest Intuitionist," 228, italics mine).

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Mizrahi constructs rival self-defeat arguments and asks why we should not accept one of these others rather than Huemer's argument for belief in PC.[14] Huemer claims that any rival argument has a "false and implausible" premise, for instance the premise that beliefs are based on externalist evidence. Consider "some reasonable candidate for justified belief, say the belief that 2 + 1 = 3," and "you are just going to find it plausible that it is based on the appearance that 2 + 1 = 3".[15] But it would be absurd for Huemer to claim that, when Mizrahi was writing his paper, it *already* appeared to him that every other theory about the basis of belief was false and implausible, or less plausible than P$_1$. (He is not accusing all of his opponents of bad faith, I assume.)

In these replies, Huemer appears to be appealing to claims about how things would appear to an otherwise fully rational thinker who believed some rival theory: *she* would have grounds for doubting that she knew the theory, even if it does not appear to some actual proponents of rival theories that there is any reason for doubt. And he takes these considerations to imply SD. In the next section, I consider a self-defeat argument along these lines. I conclude that it may succeed, but only if the same kind of argument makes it self-defeating to believe PC (or to believe that the self-defeat argument is a reason for believing PC).

4. SD and Weak Internalism

Consider a weak internalist condition on grounds:

> S has grounds for attitude A with respect to *p* only if it appears to S that *q* and its appearing to S that *q* makes A rational for S with respect to *p*.

And a corresponding condition on self-defeating belief:

> S's belief that *p* is self-defeating only if (at least partly) in virtue of S's belief that *p*, it appears to S that *q* and its appearing to S that *q* makes it doubtful that S knows that *p*.

These conditions invoke objective rational relations that may not make any difference to how things appear to a given subject. We might think of these relations in terms of the attitudes of an ideal thinker. Suppose that it appears to an

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These do not seem to be claims about what *reliabilists* hold, or how things actually appear to them. Instead, they seem to be claims about conceptual or metaphysical facts that might make no difference to the phenomenology of his opponents.

[14] Moti Mizrahi, "Phenomenal Conservatism, Justification and Self-Defeat," *Logos & Episteme* 5 (214): 103-110.

[15] Michael Huemer, "Alternative Self-Defeat Arguments: A Reply to Mizrahi," *Logos & Episteme* 5 (2014): 227.

actual subject that *q*. Then its appearing to S that *q* will (objectively) make it doubtful that S knows that *p* if and only if, for some otherwise fully rational thinker T in a situation relevantly similar to the situation of S, it appears to T that its appearing that *q* makes it doubtful that T knows that *p*.

Needless to say, this is just a sketch of a kind of internalism about justification. But I hope that the basic idea is clear enough for our purposes. The idea is that the subject may not be fully (consciously) aware of the epistemic significance of the facts about how things appear to her. Some appearance or group of appearances that figures in her phenomenology may in fact make it doubtful that some belief of hers is knowledge even though it does not appear to her that she has any reason for doubt. This is still an internalist position, insofar as the facts about justified belief or rational attitudes more generally are always supervenient on appearances.

Imagine an ideally rational proponent of R: she is as rational as anyone who believed R could be. Belief in R is self-defeating under weak internalism if it would appear to her that something made it doubtful that her belief in R was an item of knowledge. The first phase of the self-defeat argument might then be taken to represent grounds for doubt that the ideal thinker would acquire, on reflection. Her reasoning might be represented roughly as follows:

(P$_1$*) It appears to her that beliefs are based only on appearances.

(P$_2$*) It appears to her that justified beliefs are based on their justifiers.

(SD*) It appears to her that, if R is true, her belief in R is unjustified.

SD* might well imply SD, and the final conclusion that belief in PC is justified. The self-defeat argument has some force on this interpretation.

P$_1$* is plausible. Perhaps it appears to me that I base some belief on a memory. But will it not appear to me, on further reflection, that my belief is really based on various appearances? It appears to me that I remember, that my memories are probably veridical, and so on. Even if I take my belief to be based on acquaintance, I should allow that acquaintance serves as a basis only when it is (or causes) some relevant kind of appearance.[16] An ideal thinker might well accept this line of thought, anyway. P$_2$* is also plausible. Perhaps some of my unreflective beliefs are justified though it does not appear to me that anything justifies them. (Because it does not appear to me that I have these beliefs or it does not occur to

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[16] Here my point is that acquaintance does not ensure that the subject knows anything about the object of her awareness, unless the object is a mere appearance. Huemer says similar things about acquaintance ("Reply to DePoe," 1-13).

me to consider their epistemic status.[17]) Plausibly, though, any justified *reflective* belief of mine appears to me to be justified. It appears to me that there is a reason for my belief, and that I *have* a reason – and, therefore, that I base my belief on its justifier.

An ideal thinker might infer (from P₁) that her belief in R is based only on appearances and (from R) that reliable causation justifies any justified belief. Then she might infer that her belief is not based on its justifier and (from P₂) that her belief in R cannot be both true and justified. In other words, *her* reason for believing R, consisting merely in some set of appearances, could not appear to her to be *the* reason, given her belief in R. She would then have to give up her belief, on pain of having to make an absurd (Moore-paradoxical) speech:

> I believe R for a *merely* apparent reason.

Since she would now have grounds for doubting that she knows R, generated in part by her belief in R, her belief in R turns out to be self-defeating. If the rational attitude of any proponent of R is hers, belief in R is always self-defeating. Generalizing, it does seem that an argument along these lines supports SD.

But the argument is not decisive. Why must an ideal proponent of R believe that reliable causation justifies her belief? Perhaps she takes it to be a mere requirement on justification: she thinks that mere appearances are justifiers, but only when those appearances (or beliefs based on them) are reliably caused. Perhaps it appears to her that R is true, and that she bases her belief in R on that appearance, and it also appears to her that the faculties or processes that make it appear to her that R is true are reliable, and that the faculties that make it appear to her that those faculties are reliable are themselves reliable, and so on. She does not seem to be under any rational pressure to doubt that her belief could be both true and justified.

But this second scenario generates a different problem. Notice that the nature of an apparent reason – or its apparent nature – depends on the reflective state of the ideal thinker. When she initially reflects, it may appear to her that there is a reason for her belief in R given merely that it appears to her that some appearance justifies it. But when she reflects further, in light of her belief that

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[17] I agree with Huemer that a statement such as 'I believe that *p* for no apparent reason' could not be a correct report of a rational state of mind. But although the report is irrational, what is reported need not be. If the subject is not even aware of having a certain belief, or if she is aware of having it but fails to reflect on its epistemic status, she need not be aware of anything that appears to her to justify the belief. (And in that case she is not in a position to report on her epistemic situation with respect to that belief.)

reliable causation *enables* some appearances to act as justifiers, it appears to her that there is a reason for her belief in R only if it also appears to her that the enabling condition holds.

DePaul was right to claim that people do not always base their justified beliefs on appearances and the absence of defeaters. Still, a rational thinker who believes that there are enabling conditions (or other 'mere requirements' on justified belief) will base *some* of her reflective beliefs in part on the *apparent* absence of defeaters – the apparent presence of any enabling conditions, for example. If an ideal thinker believes that her belief in R is justified, she believes that some set of appearances is enabled to act as a justifier for that belief. And she believes this only if she believes

(FR) Some of my faculties are reliable.

How could she believe FR, though?

Perhaps it appears to her that FR is true, and that there is no defeater for her belief in FR. On reflection, she will have to believe that something enables this pair of appearances to justify her belief in FR. She might believe *that* because it appears to her that the pair is enabled, and that something enables *that* appearance, and so on ad infinitum. But why should she believe that any facts about how things appear to her are ever enabled to justify any belief of hers?

If the reason is dependent on a prior belief in FR itself, she relies on an inference that appears to her to be viciously circular (because it is). If she does not rely on a prior belief in FR, she relies on an inference that appears to her to be invalid (because it is). After all, R implies that the mere fact that it *appears* to her that some of her faculties of hers are reliable does not ensure the sheer objective fact that some of her faculties are reliable. And R implies that the first fact does not count rationally in favor of any belief, to any degree, in the absence of the second. So if she takes facts about how things appear to her to make FR certain or merely probable or plausible, without yet believing FR, she bases her belief in FR on facts that she herself is bound to regard as being simply irrelevant to the epistemic status of any belief.

The same problem arises if she takes herself to have some purely a priori reason for believing FR. She might believe that there is some epistemic norm to the effect that belief in FR is permissible or obligatory, for example, or that it would be self-defeating not to believe FR. But if she believes that such a belief justifies her belief in FR, she relies on an inference that appears to her to be viciously circular or invalid. Given her belief in P_1 this belief about her reason for believing FR rationally commits her to a further belief: the belief that the mere fact that some (apparently) true proposition *appears* to her to justify her belief in

FR really does justify that belief, regardless of any objective facts about causation. But given her belief in R, this further belief will appear to her to be unjustified, unless she already believes FR.

So an ideal thinker might well have grounds for doubting that she knew FR and, given her belief in R, these would also appear to her to be grounds for doubting that she knew R. Since these grounds would be generated in part by her belief in R, the belief would be self-defeating. If the rational attitude of any proponent of R is the attitude that she would have in his epistemic situation, belief in R is self-defeating. And it seems that all rival theories are similar to theory R in this respect. If they are, SD seems plausible under weak internalism.

There are ways to resist this argument, of course. I will not try to nail down its conclusion. In fact, I will argue shortly that proponents of PC should reject it. But I want to pause here to forestall a possible misunderstanding. It may be objected that the argument begs the question insofar as it depends on internalist intuitions about rational attitudes. In effect, the argument appeals to some ideal of reflective equilibrium. And yet, under R or some other forms of externalism, there seems to be no such constraint on the rational attitudes. Perhaps an ideally rational thinker is simply one whose cognitive faculties always produce true beliefs.

First of all, it seems fair to reply that it is precisely this implication (or seeming implication) that makes externalism so counter-intuitive. So the argument may be understood as an appeal to widely shared pre-theoretical intuitions or, for that matter, a shared understanding of rationality or justification. (If the very idea of justification is an internalist idea, any correct objection to externalism will 'beg the question' in some unobjectionable sense.) After all, the behavior of externalists suggests that they too accept that reflective equilibrium is a rational ideal. In arguing for externalism, they regularly appeal to considerations of coherence. Moreover, in *arguing* for externalism, or defending it against objections, they appear to take for granted that their own belief in externalism is subject to some kind of 'internalist' norm.[18]

In any case, I am mainly interested here in the question of whether those of us who are inclined to grant the internalist intuitions that Huemer cites in support

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[18] Imagine an externalist who reports that, although the self-defeat argument appears to her to prove that her own epistemological beliefs are unjustified, it appears to her that *that* fact makes no difference to the rational status of her belief in externalism. Perhaps she adds that the fact that the first fact appears to her to make no difference also appears to her to make no difference. Even most externalists will surely have to agree that this line of thought does not seem to be a rational response to the self-defeat argument.

of PC can rationally accept the self-defeat argument. Even if proponents of rival theories may legitimately charge that this version of the argument begs the question, this issue can be set aside. What I hope to establish here is not that belief in any rival theory is self-defeating, or that it is not, but instead that – given these basic internalist intuitions – it is self-defeating to *believe on the basis of that argument* that belief in any rival theory is self-defeating. The weak internalist self-defeat argument may be sound, but phenomenal conservatives cannot make use of this argument without self-defeat. In the next section I develop my argument for this conclusion, and suggest a better self-defeat argument for (belief in) PC and strong internalism.

5. A Better Self-Defeat Argument

Earlier I suggested that the weak internalist self-defeat argument against belief in theory R can be generalized. For under any rival theory, justification depends on something over and above all facts about how things appear to the subject – and, crucially, all facts about the apparent epistemic significance of those facts. Inevitably, an ideal proponent of any rival theory will find on reflection that any apparent reason for her belief in that theory is not the (or a) real or adequate reason, and this will appear to her to make it doubtful that she knows the theory.

Notice that, if this reasoning is sound, it holds not only for belief in any externalist theory but also for belief in any theory other than *strong internalist PC* (i.e., the conjunction of PC and the strong internalist condition on grounds). Thus, imagine an ideal proponent of PC and weak internalism. She wonders what justifies her belief in PC. Given her belief in weak internalism, she believes that her belief in PC is justified only if it would not appear to an ideal thinker in her epistemic situation that anything made it doubtful that her belief in PC was an item of knowledge. On reflection, her belief will appear to her to be based on a merely apparent reason: it will appear to her that, in holding the belief, she is at least rationally committed to an inference that is either viciously circular or invalid.

Perhaps it does not appear to her that she has any reason for doubting that her belief in PC is an item of knowledge, and it appears to her that she *is* an ideal thinker. But now, if she bases her belief in PC on these facts about how things appear to her – inferring that it would not appear to an ideal thinker that anything made it doubtful that her belief in PC was knowledge – without relying on a prior belief in PC, it will appear to her that the inference is invalid. (It obviously is invalid.) But if instead she does rely on some prior belief in PC, the inference will appear to her to be viciously circular.

Her belief that she is justified in believing PC is itself justified only if she is justified in believing

(IT) I am an ideal thinker.

And it seems that, under weak internalism, the epistemic situation of the ideal phenomenal conservative with respect to IT is no better than that of the ideal reliabilist with respect to FR. If she takes herself to believe IT simply because it appears to her that IT is true, or it appears to her that it appears to her that IT is true in the absence of defeaters, she bases her belief on something that she herself has no reason to regard as a *real* reason. And if she takes some such set of appearances to constitute a real reason for her belief in IT, such that her belief in PC appears to her even on epistemological reflection to be based on a real reason, she is rationally committed to PC and strong internalism. Since an ideal thinker would appreciate this problem, it seems that an ideal proponent of PC would have to accept strong internalism. But then she would also have to reject SD, and the weak internalist self-defeat argument sketched in the last section.

I take these considerations to suggest a better self-defeat argument for (belief in) strong internalist PC. Unlike Huemer's argument, mine does not aim to establish that belief in any rival theory is self-defeating but rather that such a belief will *become* self-defeating if the subject accepts certain intuitions and then reflects properly on the epistemic status of her own beliefs about justified belief. Once she reflects, she will have strong internalist grounds for doubting that her belief in the rival theory is an item of knowledge, generated in part by that same belief of hers, although she may be justified in holding that belief if she never reflects on its epistemic status (or if she reflects improperly). So in that respect my position is weaker than his. But, unlike his argument, mine aims to establish that belief in any rival theory *including* belief in a weak(er) internalist formulation of PC itself will become self-defeating in that case. So in that respect my position is stronger than his.

The argument may be stated roughly as follows:

(P1) Beliefs are based only on appearances.

(P2) Justified beliefs are based on their justifiers.

(SD*) If strong internalist PC is inconsistent with t, the belief that t becomes self-defeating when the subject reflects properly on the epistemic status of her belief (and believes that the apparent reasons for her own justified beliefs must be real reasons).

The argument is not open to the objections urged earlier against other versions of the self-defeat argument, and it seems to fit well with pre-theoretical

intuitions. It seems intuitively that many people are justified in believing propositions inconsistent with PC (or strong internalism or strong internalist PC). It seems that many externalists are justified in rejecting PC or strong internalist PC. Of course, it may be that these things seem intuitively to be true only to those of us who do accept these internalist intuitions. Again, I am not trying to argue that everyone must share these intuitions, or even that everyone will have to accept them on reflection, or that this version of the self-defeat argument should persuade externalists. Indeed, these kinds of claims are at odds with the permissive pre-theoretical intuitions that I am invoking. So in that respect also, my position is significantly weaker than Huemer's.

Instead, I claim that those of us who share the intuitions that make PC an appealing principle must reject his self-defeat argument, on pain of incoherence or self-defeat, but that we may accept a somewhat different argument that *we* may rationally take to count against belief in any theory other than strong internalist PC. We can coherently believe, on reflection, that our own beliefs about justification are themselves justified in just the way that, given those same beliefs, we take countless mundane beliefs are justified. It appears to us that PC is true. It appears to us that we believe PC because it appears to us that PC is true in the absence of defeaters, and it appears to us that all of these appearances are just the kinds of things that justify most of our beliefs. We can coherently believe – and, crucially, *believe* ourselves to coherently believe – that no other theory of justification can be coherently believed.