

## Experience Does Justify Belief

Penultimate Draft

Final Version in R. Neta (ed.) *Current Controversies in Epistemology*

Nico Silins

Cornell

### Introduction

When you get a good look at a ripe tomato in the market, it's eminently rational for you to believe that it's red. And when you only get a glimpse in poor light of chalk on the back of your shirt, it can still be eminently rational for you to raise your level of confidence that something there is white. Let's say that in such cases, you gain "justification" for beliefs. But what is the source of justification in such cases? And exactly how is the justification supplied?

According to Fumerton in his "How Does Perception Justify Belief?", it is misleading or wrong to say that perception is a source of justification for such beliefs about the external world. Moreover, reliability does not have an essential role to play here either. I agree, and I will explain why in section 1. A caveat though: where Fumerton speaks of "sensation", I will instead speak of "experience", having only visual experience in mind. To my ear, the term "sensation" is most at home with cases of bodily sensation. The visual cases we are most interested in are ones in which we have experiences *of* something or the other outside of us, or at least seem to have experiences of something or the other outside of us.

According to Fumerton, when it comes to how sensations or experiences supply justification, they do not do so on their own, and instead only do so only in conjunction with support for background beliefs about how the sensations or experiences are best explained. Here I disagree. In section 2, I will clarify the question of whether sensations or experiences provide justification on their own, and will respond to Fumerton's arguments for his negative answer to the question. In section 3, I will develop my main concern about his positive view, where that concern also brings out some of the merits of the view that experiences do justify beliefs about the external world on their own.

### 1. Externalism

Fumerton and I are united in rejecting externalist views in the epistemology of perception. On these views, roughly speaking, you are justified by an experience in believing something about the external world only if you are suitably connected to the truth. On some versions, you will be unjustified if you are in a particular case of illusion or hallucination in which you fail to see things as they are. On others you will be unjustified if you are in a case of global deception. I am inclined to agree with Fumerton's rejection of externalist views. But I think there is much more to say in favor of his position than he has so far said. In particular, the "new evil demon" problem he discusses has much wider ramifications than have been recognized.

I will focus on reliabilist views, on which your experience E gives you justification to believe that p just in case E is produced by a process reliably correlated with its being the case that p.<sup>1</sup> Given the simple connection the view draws between justification and truth, the view has its attractions.

Let's first evaluate the proposed necessary condition for perceptual justification, which is standardly held to be too demanding. Here let me review the "new evil demon problem" discussed by Fumerton. Suppose an evil demon seamlessly makes someone's experiences misleading most of the time. In particular, suppose the misleading experiences are such that they couldn't easily have been accurate, so that they are robustly not reliable. The classic criticism is that, contrary to what reliabilism predicts, the victim's experiences still give her justification for ordinary beliefs (Cohen and Lehrer 1983, Cohen 1984, Fumerton this volume).

Let's now consider the sufficient condition proposed by the reliabilist for perceptual justification. This proposal is standardly held to not be demanding enough, on the classic grounds that an agent might be endowed with a reliable faculty of clairvoyance, while still failing to gain justification from the new experiences (Bonjour 1980).

A difficulty with the clairvoyance objection is that it is underspecified so far. Is there some sort of distinctive mental appearance that goes along with clairvoyance?

If yes, some non-reliabilists might actually be committed to the claim that the clairvoyant is justified. According to Huemer's "phenomenal conservatism", if it seems to you that p, and you have no beliefs or evidence that anything is amiss, then you have justification to believe that p (Huemer 2001, 2007, 2013). Now, it will seem in a certain way to the clairvoyant that p, and in some cases the clairvoyant might have no reason to be suspicious of that appearance. Huemer's view would then predict the clairvoyant to be justified. The prediction need not be problematic. Compare your own situation in cases of "forgotten evidence", in which something seems to you to be true, and nothing seems to be amiss, although you don't have any idea of how you acquired evidence for the belief (Harman 1986).

Even if the clairvoyant does not enjoy distinctive appearances, more needs to be said against the idea that the clairvoyant is justified. When we consider real world examples of mathematical savants or chicken-sexers, some people will reckon them to be justified, whether or not their capacities of judgment come along with distinctive appearances.<sup>2</sup> Why not reckon clairvoyants to be justified as well?

We actually do not need to refine the clairvoyance cases to argue against the reliabilist sufficiency thesis. The evil demon example will do, and indeed will do better.

The severe predicament of the victim enables a stronger objection to reliabilism about perceptual justification. Here it is crucial that her experiences are robustly not reliable. When her experiences are misleading with respect to an ordinary belief that p, then, they are actually reliable with respect to the *negation* of the belief that p. Reliabilism as formulated so far predicts that the victim has justification to deny ordinary beliefs, it does not merely predict that she lacks justification to accept ordinary beliefs.

---

<sup>1</sup> For a recent defense of a view in this vicinity, see Goldman (2008).

<sup>2</sup> For a blushingly vivid description of how chicken-sexers do their work, see Foer (2011: ch. 3).

Even if you are willing to maintain that she lacks justification to believe that she has hands, it is harder to maintain that she has justification to believe she doesn't have hands.

The evil demon problem can be strengthened in two further ways.

First consider that the victim has reliable access to what experiences she is having (at least when these experiences are not construed as success states of genuine perceiving). In a given situation she will know that it visually seems to her that p. Indeed, in such a case her experience will be reliable with respect to the true conjunction that [it's not the case that p and it visually seems to her that p]. Thus, if reliabilism is correct, she will be able to get justification to believe that her experience is misleading!

Second, consider the "bootstrapping" problem for reliabilism, discussed by Fumerton 1995, Vogel 2000, and Cohen 2002. Let me first set out the objection as it arises in an everyday case, in which someone's experiences are reliable with respect to what they represent. The objection is that, if reliabilism is true, it looks like one's experiences can end up themselves giving one justification to believe that they are reliable. The experiences threaten to do so if one forms a series of justified beliefs to the effect that "p and it visually seems to me that p", and then inductively generalizes from those beliefs to conclude that one's experiences are reliable.

Here it might be tempting to bite the bullet, as Van Cleve 2003, Bergmann 2004, and Kornblith 2009 in effect do. We plausibly can have justification to believe that our experiences are reliable, and unless the domain of *a priori* justification is greatly expanded, how else would we get it? Given that there arguably is no plausible view about how we can have justification to believe that our experiences are reliable, it is perhaps not outrageous to allow bootstrapping as a source of such justification.

The evil demon case allows us to present a much worse instance of the bootstrapping problem. If reliabilism is true, it looks like the victim's experiences can end up giving her justification to believe that they are *unreliable* with respect to what they represent. The experiences threaten to do so if she forms a series of beliefs to the effect that "it's not the case that p and it visually seems to me that p", and then inductively generalizes to the conclusion that her experiences are unreliable with respect to what they represent. Here it is much harder to bite the bullet.

Let me now consider several possible responses on behalf of reliabilists, responses which are tailored to the argument I have set out (for valuable more general discussion of bootstrapping, see Weisberg 2010).

First, the reliabilist might say one gains a justified belief from an experience only when one takes the experience at face value, so that an experience as of something there's being green cannot justify one in believing the negation of the proposition. However, there is reason to reject the addition to the theory, since experiences arguably can justify one in believing one has them, without yet representing that one has them. In any case, since experiences can have reliable connections to subject matters which outstrip their content, it's unprincipled for a reliabilist to make the addition to the view. For example, the reliabilist perspective should allow that experiences of smoke can justify beliefs concerning fire.

Second, one might try to refine simple reliabilism in the following causal terms: your experience of type E gives you justification to believe that p just in case tokens of E are *reliably caused* by its being the case that p. Given that the experiences of the victim of the evil demon are not caused by its failing to be the case that p, the new proposal does

not predict that the victim has justification to reject the contents of her experience. The new proposal however is too demanding. Suppose that some of our beliefs about what mental states we are in are not caused by those mental states, but are instead constituted by the mental states, so that it is impossible to have the beliefs without being in the relevant mental states (cf. Chalmers 2003; Horgan and Kriegel 2007). The reliabilist shouldn't forbid such a non-causal connection from conferring justification, but the new proposal does just that. (One might respond by advancing a disjunctive version of the reliabilist proposal, but I take the move to be ad hoc).

In the final response I will consider, reliabilists might maintain that the victim has defeating evidence which prevents her from having justification to believe that nothing there is green. She after all might seem to receive ample testimony that something there is green. The problem with this response is that it conflicts with the reliabilist position. Given the unreliability of the apparent testimony she receives, a reliabilist shouldn't give it the power to defeat.

By the lights of the evil demon, the victim has no justification to believe that her experiences are misleading. If reliabilism is true, however, it looks like the demon is deluded. Biting the bullet here is not an option. Evil demons cannot be foiled with such ease.

The "new evil demon problem" for reliabilism isn't just that reliabilism predicts the absence of justification for ordinary beliefs in the case. The problem is that, without further refinement, reliabilism predicts the presence of justification for the negations of ordinary beliefs, and the presence of justification to believe that experience is unreliable.

## **2. Basicness**

Fumerton and I agree that experience, in the absence of perception, sometimes justifies belief. Experience does so in some cases of illusion, or hallucination, and even radical deception. What we disagree about is how experience justifies belief. In particular, does experience ever justify belief by itself? Fumerton thinks the answer to the question is "no". I say "yes".

Let me start by clarifying the question and the commitments of answers to it. I'll then articulate Fumerton's arguments for his negative answer, and respond to them.

To formulate the present question about how experience justifies belief, first consider a contrast case. Suppose you get a good look outside in the morning at the snow in your empty street, and form a belief that it's likely that someone is shoveling in the neighbourhood. No one should say that your experience justifies that belief on its own--- you didn't experience anyone outside at all! Instead, what makes you justified in forming that belief is your experience and your having independent reason to hold an appropriate linking belief, e.g to the effect that if there's snow outside in the morning, it's likely that someone is shoveling in the neighbourhood. Let's say that, in cases like this, your experience gives you "non-basic" justification for a belief. On Fumerton's view, experiences only ever give us non-basic justification for beliefs about the external world. Whenever an experience gives us justification to believe something about the external world, it's doing so only jointly with our having independent reason for further beliefs.

For a contrasting example of "basic justification", consider how a sharp pain can justify you in believing that you are in pain. Here your pain gives you justification to

believe you are in pain, in a way that does not happen only in conjunction with your having independent reason to hold any further beliefs. On the basic justification view I defend, experiences sometimes give us basic justification for beliefs about the external world. They sometimes give justification for beliefs about the external world, in a way that does not happen only in conjunction with our having independent reason for further beliefs.

The crucial question for basic justification is about the role of having justification for further beliefs. The question actually does not concern whether your experiences suffice for having justification from them for beliefs about the external world. Even if experiences provide basic justification, they might need an appropriately reliable connection to the external world, or to be appropriately free from influence by our own expectations and desires, or to meet further requirements which are not formulated in terms of background beliefs. So the view that experiences provide basic justification is not committed to anything as strong as Huemer's "phenomenal conservatism". That view might well be too demanding, but the basic justification view does not make such a demand.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, the basic justification view is not committed to foundationalism, as Pryor (2000) points out. Foundationalism is a view about the overall structure of the justification of our beliefs about the external world. It says roughly that, for any belief *b* about the external world that is justified but not basically justified, *b*'s justification is traceable to that of some basically justified belief (e.g. Bonjour 1985). One need not hold this view about the overall structure of justification to hold that some beliefs have basic justification from experiences. You could combine the basic justification view with some coherentist story about the justification of other beliefs about the external world.<sup>4</sup>

Having clarified the question of whether experiences ever provide basic justification for beliefs about the external world, let me now turn to Fumerton's central arguments for the conclusion that they don't.

One important argument is based on what it takes to have the concepts which figure in external world beliefs. The starting point is the thought that, in order to have a concept of the external world, one must make assumptions about the external world in order to have it. For example, perhaps one has a concept of a stable color only if one assumes that the color of a thing can remain constant while the thing appears differently in different viewing conditions (Fumerton, this volume). Further, these assumptions

---

<sup>3</sup> The view thereby also avoids recent challenges in terms of "cognitive penetration" (Markie 2005, Siegel 2012, Vance forthcoming). For example, if Jack looks angry to you merely because you had a unjustified belief that he is angry, then perhaps your experience fails to give you reason to believe that he is angry. Be that as it may, the basic justification view does not entail that the experience does give you reason to believe that he is angry, since the view proposes no sufficient condition for getting justification from an experience.

<sup>4</sup> The basic justification view is also not a solution to skeptical problems. A proper response to skepticism needs to articulate the best arguments for skepticism, and to explain where they go wrong, and perhaps even why they seemed to go right. The basic justification view by itself does none of these things.

presumably must be justified for particular applications of the concept to be justified. But the requirements for concept possession might then seem to rule out the view that experiences sometimes give us basic justification.

I'll sketch the argument using Fumerton's example of the concept *red*, while remaining schematic about what it takes exactly to have the concept:

### *The Concept Possession Argument*

(1) If one has the concept *red*, then for some proposition that *p* one presupposes that *p* in applying *red* on the basis of experience.

(2) If one presupposes that *p* in applying *red* on the basis of experience, then one is justified in applying *red* on the basis of experience only if one has independent reason to believe that *p*.

(3) If one is justified in applying *red* on the basis of experience only if one has independent reason to believe that *p*, then an experience never justifies one in applying *red* on its own, but instead only in conjunction with one's having independent reason to believe that *p*.

So,

(4) An experience never justifies one in applying *red* on its own, but instead only in conjunction with one's having independent reason to believe that *p*.

I have several points to make in response.

First, even if the argument succeeds for the case of *red*, it's not clear how the template will work for all beliefs about the external world. Suppose someone forms a very minimal belief on the basis of experience, to the effect that *that is there*, leaving open the details of what that is and where it is. It's not clear to me whether any presuppositions need to be made in order to have such thin concepts (if some very general presuppositions do need to be made, they may simply figure in experience as well as discussed in the paragraph below). The threat so far is that experience will still be able to justify some beliefs about the external world. Such beliefs may be too thin to serve as an adequate foundation for the rest of our beliefs about the external world, but that again is a different matter. The basic justification view is not committed to foundationalism, so it does not have to answer "the formidable question of how we could even get a robust enough foundation out of internal states" (Fumerton, this volume, page 45)."

Second, against premise (2), even if a presupposition needs to be made in order to apply the concept *red*, it may be that the presupposition is appropriately reflected in experience itself, so that no independent reason to believe is required. For instance, Fumerton emphasizes the fact that red things can have different appearances in different viewing conditions. He takes this to threaten the ability of experiences to justify ascriptions of color without the assistance of further beliefs, because we need to have the presupposition in place that red things which acquire a different appearance in new viewing conditions are still red. But now consider what science says about color constancy<sup>5</sup>. The consensus view seems to be that red things still look *red* in a wide range of viewing conditions, as when a partially shaded Corvette still uniformly looks to be red

---

<sup>5</sup> For an overview, see Burge (2010).

rather than two-toned. If color experience itself delivers the verdict that the Corvette is uniformly red, it's not clear why outside presuppositions must be playing any essential role in the justification of the belief that the car is uniformly red. On Fumerton's picture, something from the outside must correct for the misleading appearance of the object, but color vision doesn't seem to be in need of any such correction. There is room for us so far to be justified in believing that the object is uniformly red by taking the experience at face value.

Third, it is in any case unclear whether presuppositions must be in place for to deliver verdicts about uniform color. Color experience seems to deliver the verdict that the car is uniformly red regardless of what background beliefs you have, or regardless of what independent reason you have for background beliefs. So even premise (1) needs further defense here.

Finally, it's not clear to me how to justify premise (3). Even if having independent reason for a certain belief is a necessary condition for the possession of a concept, it's not clear why that should prevent experience from providing basic justification for an application of the concept. For instance, one arguably has the concept *red* only if one has (non-perceptual) reason to believe the triviality that red things are red, but surely that fact does not get in the way of experiences to provide justification for applications of red. Or, one arguably has the concept *red* only if one has had color experience, but that fact presumably does not get in the way of having a priori justification for some beliefs using the concept, such as the belief that red things are red.<sup>6</sup> Here experience supplies a necessary condition for having the concept, without figuring in the justification of a certain use of the concept. More needs to be said explain why the requirement for concept possession laid down in premise (2) prohibits getting basic justification for an application of the concept.

It may be that some revision of Fumerton's argument avoids all these concerns, but I'm not sure what it is.

I take there to be a related but different argument in Fumerton's discussion, one which brings in considerations about the fallibility of the connection between experience and belief.<sup>7</sup> This argument is articulated when Fumerton writes that

... everyone, at some level, realizes that round things don't always look round, that rough surfaces don't always feel rough, and that sour things don't always taste sour. But once one realizes that there is a "gap" between appearance and reality, it is not hard for the skeptic to exploit that gap and demand some reason to suppose that the beliefs about reality formed on the basis of appearance are likely to be true (this volume, p. 49).

The core thought here is that, given that appearances are sometimes misleading, one needs independent reason to believe they are non-misleading in order to gain justification from them. Some intermediate belief is needed to "bridge the gap" between appearance

---

<sup>6</sup> See Kitcher (1980) and Burge (1993).

<sup>7</sup> There are further arguments out there as well. One involves the bootstrapping considerations mentioned earlier. For a response, see Cohen (2010) or Wedgwood (forthcoming). Another involves considerations from probability theory, see White (2006) for the argument and Silins (2008), Willenken (2011) or Pryor (2013) for responses.

and reality. Call this the “demand for a bridge”. We can formulate it and the larger argument as follows:

### *The Gap Argument*

(5) Whenever it visually seems to you that p, it’s possible for it to visually seem to you that p when it’s not the case that p.

(6) If it’s possible for it to visually seem to you that p when it’s not the case that p, your experience gives you justification to believe that p only in conjunction with your having independent reason to reject the error hypothesis that [it visually seems to you that p when it’s not the case that p].

So,

(7) Whenever it visually seems to you that p, your experience gives you justification to believe that p only in conjunction with your having independent reason to reject the error hypothesis that [it visually seems to you that p when it’s not the case that p]

My first response is that, as before, there are complications in arguing that experience *never* provides basic justification for beliefs about the external world. One example comes from the sort of content externalist Fumerton discusses in his note 7. Suppose I get a good look at a bird outside, and it visually seems to me that *that exists*. According to the sort of externalist Fumerton has in mind, things can seem that way to me only if the object in question does exist. But then we’ll have a counterexample to premise 5, and the demand for a bridge won’t apply. Another complication is raised by the possibility of self-directed perceptual content. Suppose I get a good look at myself in a mirror, and it visually seems to me that *I exist*, or that *Nico exists*. Things couldn’t visually appear to me in any way whatsoever unless those propositions are true. So we again have a potential counterexample to premise 5 where the demand for a bridge won’t apply.

The examples above are no doubt controversial. Let me set aside further debate about them aside and now turn to my main line of response. The demand for a bridge is important and influential, but I think much more needs to be said in favor of it. Most importantly, in order for Fumerton to appeal to the demand, he needs to show that it doesn’t simply lead to skepticism. The challenge here is to find a bridging belief that does not itself generate a need for a further bridging belief.

To see how the threat arises, think back to your counterpart who is a victim of an evil demon. Suppose that you are justified by x in rejecting the error hypothesis. This amounts to being justified by x in having the bridge belief that [if it visually seems you that p, then p]. Setting aside complications involving the terms “you” and “I”, on the internalist approach taken by Fumerton, your counterpart will be as justified as you, also by x, in having the bridging belief. But in the case of your radically deceived counterpart, the bridging belief is false! It visually seems to your counterpart that p while it actually fails to be that case that p. So now it turns out that there is a gap between x and the truth of the bridging belief. If we accept the demand for a bridge, we will need something to bridge this new gap. That is, since x is consistent with the falsehood of the bridging belief, we will need a further reason to reject the hypothesis that x obtains while the bridging belief is false. Now, for any further candidate we find, that candidate will be



equally available to your deceived counterpart, on Fumerton's internalist approach. It's not clear how any gap between appearance and reality will ultimately be bridged.

The challenge laid out above involves a bridging belief that is false in the case of deception. In response to the challenge, one might point out that Fumerton could appeal to a bridging belief that is true.<sup>8</sup> For example, perhaps on a suitably epistemic understanding of probability, the victim of the evil demon has the true bridging belief that it visually seems to her that *p* only if it *probably* is the case that *p*. But now we need to consider how one could be justified in having the new bridging belief. Suppose you are justified by *y* in having it. If *y* is not supposed to guarantee the truth of the new bridging belief, we again face the challenge outlined above, where we need a new reason to prefer the conjunction of *y* and the new bridging belief to the conjunction of *y* and the negation of the new bridging belief. If *y* instead is supposed to guarantee the truth of the new bridging belief, we need a story about how such a special reason is to be found. Fumerton's own discussion of how a bridging belief might be justified, discussed in further detail below, is in terms of an inference to the best explanation. Inference to the best explanation is normally not a source of support for a conclusion which guarantees the truth of the conclusion. So it's not clear how a bridging belief is found that doesn't need its own bridging belief. In general, whenever a reason *R* is offered that fails to guarantee the truth of the conclusion *C* it is supposed to support, we will need a further reason to prefer [*R* and *C*] to [*R* and not-*C*]. It's not clear how we'll ever find a reason that guarantees the truth of the needed conclusion.<sup>9</sup>

Fumerton's second argument has the potential to show that our experiences never give us basic justification for external world beliefs. It also threatens to show that our experiences never give us any kind of justification for external world beliefs.

### 3. Evaluation of Fumerton's positive view

Having responded to Fumerton's arguments against what happens to be my view, let me turn to evaluating his own view.

According to Fumerton, experiences do provide non-basic justification for beliefs about the external world, thanks to the availability of an inference to the best explanation of facts about experience by facts about the external world. Here I will leave open the question of exactly how the explanation is meant to go, and of why it should be the best, better than any skeptical alternative. I will focus on what I take to be the main problem for Fumerton's view (where an advantage of the basic justification view is that it avoids the problem).

---

<sup>8</sup> Thanks here to Matt Frise, Richard Fumerton, and Declan Smithies.

<sup>9</sup> A further possibility here is that the appropriate bridging belief of yours is justified, but not justified by anything. Perhaps the demand for a bridge only applies when a belief is justified by something, and so does not apply in this case. Although this is an option available in theoretical space here, I don't see any reason to believe it. Another option would be to claim that the appropriate bridging belief is itself a necessary truth, not false in any situation. This option has a better prospect of removing the demand for a bridge, but I don't see any reason to believe that there is a necessary truth to play the appropriate role.

My major concern about Fumerton's position is that it threatens to "over intellectualize" what it takes for experience to justify belief (Burge 2003 is a standard exposition of this sort of concern). We can make the concern concrete with an example. Consider a young child or an unreflecting adult, who gets a good look at the Sesame Street character Elmo in a book, and who forms the belief that *that is red* without further ado. In forming the belief, they certainly do not consciously draw on beliefs about the reliability of their experience, or about the best explanation of their experience. In the case of the child, she does not even have the concepts required to form beliefs about the reliability of her experience, or the best explanation of her experience. So it's not clear how the inference to the best explanation promoted by Fumerton is even available to her. However, the child and adult are plausibly both justified in forming and in holding the belief that *that is red*. It is not clear how Fumerton's outlined account could allow for this, given the heavy demands it seems to impose for having justified perceptual beliefs.

In response, one might claim that the child's beliefs are unjustified, as does Bonjour (1978). This response seems too harsh to me. Consider another child who sees Elmo in equally good environmental conditions, with no background information about anything going wrong, who nevertheless suspends judgment about whether that is red. The suspicious child's suspension of judgment seems to be unjustified, and the ordinary child's belief positively seems to be justified.

In another response, one might insist that what goes for the child does not go for the adult. As Schechter (2013) puts it in a different context, one might invoke a "Spiderman principle" in epistemology, according to which greater conceptual power brings along greater epistemic responsibility, and higher standards for justification. Given that the child cannot even form beliefs about the reliability or best explanation of her experiences, there are less requirements for her to form justified perceptual beliefs. In the case of the adult, who does have the concepts required to form such beliefs, more is required.

A problem with the line of response is that it might still be too demanding. We can bring out the problem by focusing on what it takes to have a "well founded" or "doxastically justified" belief.<sup>10</sup> Having a belief with that status is a matter of properly using the epistemic resources one has rather than merely having reason to hold a belief. To use a standard example, Holmes and Watson might have the same reasons to hold a belief, where only Holmes makes proper use of the reasons he has in forming that belief, so that only Holmes ends up with a belief that is well founded. Now, in the case of unreflecting adults, they arguably have not formed requisite beliefs about the reliability or best explanation of their experiences, and at any rate do not recruit such meta-cognitive beliefs in the process of the formation of their everyday perceptual beliefs. So it's not clear how Fumerton's account allows even for ordinary adults to have well founded perceptual beliefs.

In response, one might say that metacognitive beliefs are somehow implicitly involved in adult perceptual belief formation. It is not clear to me whether they even play an implicit role. It is striking here that even the expert theorist has not yet articulated the metacognitive beliefs, suggesting that they are not even implicitly held by the ordinary

---

<sup>10</sup> I develop this challenge in my (2008). For some recent discussion of the challenge, see Silva (2013).

subject, and again at any rate aren't playing a basing role with the ordinary subject. If Fumerton and other theorists did have the relevant beliefs implicitly, presumably they shouldn't be so hard to articulate. So the threat remains that justified perceptual beliefs are predicted to be unjustified by Fumerton's approach.

Finally, there is a further way to press the worry about over-intellectualization, one which draws directly on Fumerton's own discussion. It thereby promises to avoid a risk of simply talking past him, where I would be using a different, less demanding concept of "justification" than his own. Since we are drawing on his own discussion here, we presumably are using the same concept expressed by "justification" as him. To see the worry, reconsider how Fumerton ultimately formulates the "evil demon problem" for externalist views. As he puts it:

Consider the following propositions:

- 1) I have a phenomenally rich life of sensations and apparent memories (these can be laboriously described so that the experiences have the same intrinsic character as do yours).
- 2) These are caused directly by a powerful, malevolent being (and similar sensations have always been caused in like fashion).
- 3) I form beliefs whose content describes a physical environment (the kind of beliefs you form about your physical environment).

Does the conjunction of 1), 2) and 3) entail

- 4) I have epistemically justified beliefs[?] (this volume, p. 44)

Like Fumerton, I think that the answer to the question is yes! But notice how meta-cognitively thin the base is that is supposed to entail 4. We are indeed told that the subject has a rich fabric of experience, as well as beliefs about an external world. But we are not told about the availability of beliefs about the reliability or best explanation of her experience. The entailment still seems to go through. Given that it seems to go through, the requirements imposed by Fumerton's suggested account again seem to be over-intellectualized. And here they arguably seem that way even by his own lights.

Fumerton's view seems to make it too hard for experience to justify beliefs about the external world, by making heavy intellectual demands of the subject. Since the basic justification view does not make such demands, it has a significant advantage here over Fumerton's view.

## **Conclusion**

How does perception justify belief? Strictly speaking, perception doesn't justify belief. Experience does. So far Fumerton and I are not in disagreement. I have simply tried to provide further considerations against the externalist views we both oppose.

Fumerton and I are in disagreement about whether experience ever justifies external world belief on its own, in a way that is basic. I hope to have shown that Fumerton's arguments against my view fail, and I hope to have shown that my view has a significant advantage over his own.

What exactly makes it possible for experience to provide basic justification? And how are we to account for the achievement of full-blown knowledge of the external

world? These are further questions, ones that require their own contemporary debates in epistemology.<sup>11</sup>

## References

- Bach, K. 1985: "A Rationale for Reliabilism", *The Monist*, 68: 246-63.
- Bergmann, Michael (2004). Epistemic circularity: Malignant and benign. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 69 (3):709–727.
- BonJour, L. 1978: Can Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation? *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15 (1):1-14.
- 1980: "Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge", *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 5: 53-73.
- 1985: *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Burge, T. (1993) 'Content Preservation', *Philosophical Review*, 102: 457-488.
- 2003: 'Perceptual Entitlement', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 67: 503-48.
- Burge, T. 2010. *Origins of Objectivity*. Oxford: OUP.
- Chalmers, D. 2003. "The Content and Epistemology of Phenomenal Belief." In *Consciousness: New Philosophical Perspectives*, edited by Q. Smith and A. Jokic. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 220-272.
- Goldman, A. 2008. "Immediate Justification and Process Reliabilism," in Q. Smith, ed., *Epistemology: New Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Harman, G. 1986: *Change in View: Principles of Reasoning* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; M.I.T. Press/Bradford Books: 1986)
- Horgan, T., and U. Kriegel. 2007. "Phenomenal Epistemology: What Is Consciousness That We Know It So Well?" *Philosophical Topics* 17: 123–144.
- Huemer, Michael. 2001: *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield.
- 2007: "Compassionate Phenomenal Conservatism," *Philosophy & Phenomenological Research* 74 (2007): 30-55.
- Cohen, S. and Lehrer, K. 1983: "Justification, Truth, and Coherence", *Synthese* 55: 191-207.
- Cohen, S. 1984: "Justification and Truth", *Philosophical Studies*, 46: 279-295.
- 2002: "Basic Knowledge and the Problem of Easy Knowledge", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 65:309-329.
- 2010: "Bootstrapping, defeasible reasoning, and a priori justification". *Philosophical Perspectives* 24 (1):141-159.
- Foer 2011: *Moonwalking with Einstein: the Art and Science of Remembering Everything* (New York: Penguin).

---

<sup>11</sup> Thanks for help with this material to Matt Frise, Andrew Chignell, Richard Fumerton, Ram Neta, Annika Grace Ortolano, Derk Pereboom, Declan Smithies, Brian Weatherson, Ralph Wedgwood, and Timothy Williamson.

- Fumerton, R. 1995: *Metaepistemology and Skepticism*. Rowman and Littlefield.
- Goldman, A. 2008: "Immediate Justification and Process Reliabilism," in Q. Smith, ed., *Epistemology: New Essays*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Huemer, M. 2013: "Phenomenal Conservatism Uber Alles," in *Seemings and Justification: New Essays on Dogmatism and Phenomenal Conservatism* (Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 328-50
- Kitcher, P. (1980). "A priori knowledge". *Philosophical Review* 89 (1):3-23.
- Kornblith, H. 2009: "A Reliabilist Solution to the Problem of Promiscuous Bootstrapping", *Analysis* 69: 263-267.
- Markie, P. (2005). The mystery of direct perceptual justification. *Philosophical Studies*, 3, 347–373
- Pryor, James. 2000: "The Skeptic and the Dogmatist", *Noûs*, 34: 517-49.
- 2001: "Highlights of Recent Epistemology" (52): 95-124.
- 2004: "What's Wrong with Moore's Argument?", *Philosophical Issues*, 14.
- 2013. Problems for Credulism. In Chris Tucker (ed.), *Seemings and Justification: New Essays on Dogmatism and Phenomenal Conservatism*.
- Schechter, Joshua (2013). Rational Self-Doubt and the Failure of Closure. *Philosophical Studies* 163 (2):428-452.
- Siegel, S. (2012). Cognitive penetrability and perceptual justification. *Nous*, 46(2), 201–222.
- Silins, N. 2008: "Basic Justification and the Moorean Response to the Skeptic", *Oxford Studies in Epistemology: Volume 2*.
- Silva, P. (2013). How To Be Conservative: A Partial Defense of Epistemic Conservatism. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 91 (3):501-514.
- Vance, J. (forthcoming). Emotion and the new epistemic challenge from cognitive penetrability". *Philosophical Studies*.
- Van Cleve, J. 2003: "Is Knowledge Easy---or Impossible? Externalism as the Only Alternative to Skepticism", in S. Luper (ed.) *The Sceptics: Contemporary Essays*. Ashgate.
- Vogel, J. 2000: "Reliabilism Leveled", *Journal of Philosophy*, 97: 602-32.
- 2008: "Epistemic Bootstrapping", *Journal of Philosophy*, 105: 518-39.
- Wedgwood, Ralph (forthcoming). "A Priori Bootstrapping". In Albert Casullo & Joshua Thurow (eds.), *The A Priori In Philosophy*. Oxford University Press.
- Weisberg, J. Forthcoming: "Bootstrapping in General", to appear in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, available at <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/~weisber3/docs/Intransitivityv2.pdf>.
- Willenken, T. (2011). Moorean responses to skepticism: a defense. *Philosophical Studies* 154 (1):1 - 25.