

Phenomenal Explanationism and the Look of Things

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Matthew McGrath (2018) has challenged all theories that allow for immediate perceptual justification, i.e. theories that allow that S can have perceptual justification for p that is not dependent upon S's justification for believing some other proposition q .^{1,2} His challenge comes by way of arguing for what he calls the “looks view” of visual justification.³ Roughly, the looks view says that our *simple visual beliefs* are *mediately* justified based on the looks of things.

What are simple visual beliefs? They are (visual) perceptual beliefs that satisfy two conditions:

- (1) They are manifestations of a stable disposition to categorize a perceived object as F upon having certain sorts of visual experience, where F may be a sensible quality or a kind of property, and
- (2) they enjoy the phenomenology of “*just seeing that the thing is F*”.⁴ (McGrath 2018: 111)

McGrath refers to any view that allows for immediate perceptual justification as “dogmatism”.⁵ Simple visual beliefs are *prima facie* good candidates for immediate justification—or so the dogmatist contends.

McGrath's looks view maintains, in contrast, that when a simple visual belief is justified, it is always mediately justified based on the looks of things. What does it mean that S has justification for a visual belief on the basis of looks? It means S has the reason—identified by McGrath with a fact or proposition—that *this looks like an F*. For example, according to McGrath, when S has justification for believing that the thing that she apparently sees is a tree, it is because S has “looks-related reasons” for believing it is a tree—i.e., she has *it looks like a tree* as a reason for her belief. Reasons of this type are—according to McGrath—public with respect to both their content and their possession.⁶ Furthermore, importantly, S must have justification for these reasons in order for them to work as reasons, and their justification constitutes, at least partly, S's justification for the relevant simple perceptual beliefs. Hence, S has “looks-related reasons” for believing that the thing she apparently sees is a tree only if S is justified in believing that that thing looks like a tree, where this justification is a component part of S's justification for believing that it is a tree.

¹ McGrath (2018) is explicit that by “justified” he is noncommittal on whether this is a necessary component for knowledge, though he thinks that plausibly it is. He says that by “justified” he means “reasonable in believing”. Presumably, he accepts that when it is reasonable to believe p it is not also reasonable to believe $\sim p$ or suspend judgment concerning p .

² Also see his (2017) which makes similar moves challenging the possibility of immediate perceptual knowledge.

³ Although McGrath restricts his discussion to justification for *visual* beliefs, he notes that he thinks the looks view is extendable to perceptual justification more generally. We will assume that what he says about visual beliefs, if correct, would be generalizable in this way. So, we will speak of McGrath's argument as an attack on immediate perceptual justification in general (aside from the justification of beliefs about looks, which McGrath has explained in correspondence, may be immediately justified), rather than just visual perceptual justification.

⁴ When you have this phenomenology, you do not have the feel of *reasoning* from evidence, but of simply seeing that the thing is an F .

⁵ We follow McGrath in referring to such views as “dogmatism” or “dogmatist views”.

⁶ They are public with respect to content because they are not about us or our experiences, but instead about worldly objects. They are public with respect to their possession because many people can share the very same looks-related reasons.

Specifically, McGrath (2018: 119) argues for what he calls “The looks view concerning *propositional* justification”:

In cases in which one has a justified simple visual belief that an object is F, one has a looks-related reason to believe that it is F that justifies one in believing that the thing is F.

Further, McGrath claims that when our simple visual beliefs are justified, it is because they are held on the basis of looks-related reasons. In other words, *doxastic* justification for such beliefs is a result of believing on the basis of the sort of propositional justification described by the looks view. Thus, the looks view of perceptual justification is a full account of the justification of our simple visual beliefs—it provides an analysis of both propositional and doxastic justification.

Here is a sketch of McGrath’s overall argument against immediate justification for simple visual beliefs:

- (1) Simple visual beliefs (when justified) are mediately justified. (The looks view is true.)
- (2) Simple visual beliefs (when justified) are not justified both mediately and immediately.
- (3) Therefore, simple visual beliefs (when justified) are not justified immediately.

Our plan for this chapter is simple: show that McGrath’s argument is *unsound* or, at the very least, that (3) is not sufficiently well supported to cause genuine concern for dogmatists—at least, there is no problem for the species of dogmatism that we have elsewhere called *Phenomenal Explanationism* (hereafter “PE”).⁷ We limit our focus to premise (1). Premise (2) is necessary for McGrath’s argument because the looks view is compatible with the claim that justified simple visual beliefs are *also* immediately justified. (In forming them, we might rely on two distinct bases, one providing mediate and the other immediate justification.) While we are not fully convinced by McGrath’s arguments in support of premise (2), they do not seem implausible *if* one grants that simple visual beliefs when justified are always justified mediately by looks-related reasons. The arguments for premise (1), however, are flawed.

We proceed by looking at both the motivations that McGrath gives for the looks view and how he attempts to defend it from a straightforward objection. Ultimately, neither the positive motivations for the looks view nor its defense succeeds. In section I, we argue that considering their respective accounts of defeat gives no reason to prefer the looks view rather than PE. In section II we take on McGrath’s central argument for the looks view and show that it is unsound. We then raise a serious problem for the looks view in section III, and we argue that McGrath’s attempt to avoid this problem fails. In light of the considerations raised in sections I-III, premise (1) of McGrath’s argument appears to lack adequate support. So, McGrath’s case for (3) is unpersuasive. Section IV concludes the chapter.

I. Explaining Defeat

McGrath begins his defense of the looks view by arguing that it provides good explanations of intuitive examples of defeat. He contends that while dogmatist views can account for the defeat in these cases, their doing so comes at a significant dialectical cost—it commits the dogmatist to acknowledging that ordinary agents have “substantial knowledge of the relation between how things are, how they look and what our experiences are” (McGrath 2018: 122). The problem is that once committed to acknowledging this, the dogmatist will be unable to charge the looks view with

⁷ For a full discussion and defense of Phenomenal Explanationism see McCain and Moretti (2021).

overintellectualizing perceptual justification, which is—as we will see in Sect III—a major objection to the looks view.

McGrath offers an example in which he claims that a defeater does its work by way of attacking the relevant “looks” proposition. Here is the example:

*Oboes*⁸

Suppose I love the sound of an oboe and can recognize it well from recordings and in concerts (though from my cheap seats I can’t usually see the oboes at all well). But suppose I’ve gotten them mixed up, by sight, with clarinets. We can imagine this is due to reading an otherwise reliable book that contains a mislabeled photograph. Show me a clarinet and I’ll think it is an oboe. My mistake isn’t verbal. I do not use ‘oboe’ to mean clarinet. I use it to mean oboe. Now, suppose, you’ve setup an identification task for me. You’ve showed me an instrument, about which I had no previous information, and asked me what it is. I declare it is an oboe, expressing my visual belief that it is an oboe, presumably a justified belief. You, who know the looks of oboes, tell me: “you’ve mixed up clarinets and oboes; this is not what oboes look like.” (McGrath 2018: 120)

McGrath claims that in this case, his justification for thinking that the instrument is an oboe is defeated. This seems correct, assuming that McGrath has reason to think that the person who has set up the identification task is not purposely trying to trick him, knows what the various instruments look like, and so on. However, as McGrath notes, one might think that this case does not really do what he needs it to do. To involve the looks view in explaining the defeat, McGrath needs a case where information about how things look undercuts the justification that one would normally get from a visual experience—i.e., he needs an example with an *undercutting* defeater. But, in this case it is plausible that what McGrath receives is a *rebutting* defeater—he is given reason to think that what he sees is not an oboe rather than reason to think that how things look to him fails to provide good evidence for thinking the instrument is an oboe. With this in mind, McGrath (2018: 120) offers a slight modification: “add that you preface your remark with ‘This just so happens to be an oboe disguised to look like a clarinet, but...’” Now we have a case where the justification provided by McGrath’s visual experience is undercut. (Of course, he receives evidence that he does not really know what oboes look like together with evidence that what he sees is in fact an oboe. So, he may still have *non-perceptual* justification for believing that it is an oboe.) McGrath claims that the defeat occurs in this case because the relevant looks proposition—[this looks like an oboe]—becomes unjustified. Once he is no longer justified in believing that this looks like an oboe, he loses his perceptual justification for believing that the instrument is an oboe.

McGrath suggests that similar considerations apply in instances where one only gains a partial defeater. For example, if one were to learn that “*many of the clarinets in this shop have been made to look like oboes*”,⁹ then one’s justification for believing that the instrument one is looking at is an oboe will be reduced from what it was prior to learning about the disguised clarinets. How does this and consideration of the previous example support the looks view? McGrath points out that if part of one’s justification for the simple visual belief that this is an oboe came from one’s reason that *this* looks like an oboe, we would expect exactly the sort of defeat that we find in these cases. So, the looks view gets the right results in cases where one’s simple visual beliefs are defeated, and it provides an explanation for how the defeaters in these cases do their work.

⁸ We have named McGrath’s example.

⁹ McGrath (2018: 121).

It is important to note that this does not in itself pose a problem for dogmatist views. As McGrath acknowledges, the dogmatist can simply allow that evidence about how things look, or the connection between how things look and how they are, can defeat *immediate* justification too. After all, dogmatists generally allow that immediate justification is defeasible. Consequently, dogmatists can claim that McGrath, in the above examples, has immediate perceptual justification for believing that what he sees is an oboe, but once he learns that, say, this is not what oboes look like (even if it is an oboe), his immediate perceptual justification is defeated. Yet, as said at the beginning of this section, McGrath contends that if dogmatists respond to his cases in this way, there is a significant dialectical cost for them. We disagree. To clarify the reasons for our disagreement, we first need to address a correlated but more direct challenge McGrath presents for dogmatism.

Drawing from his discussion of *Oboes*, McGrath emphasizes that it takes cognitive sophistication to be able to use evidence about looks to provide defeat for immediate justification. Specifically,

One needs to be able to see that one could easily have had one's experience while not looking at an oboe when one is informed of the likes of: (a) that's not what oboes look like (even though it is an oboe); (b) this is a situation in which many non-oboes look like oboes; or (c) here is what an oboe looks like (showing picture). (2018: 121)

McGrath rightly notes that most ordinary agents can easily appreciate the power that (a), (b), and (c) have to generate defeat. However, he claims that whereas the looks view “easily” explains this defeat, dogmatist views require “more complicated inferences or background knowledge” (2018: 121).

McGrath's claim seems false, at least if the dogmatist view in question is something like our preferred theory of epistemic justification, PE. Among all the forms of dogmatism available in the literature, only PE allows for a clear explanation of defeat.¹⁰ Take the sort of case McGrath is interested in—S has a visual experience of an instrument, and she has justification for thinking that the instrument is an oboe. PE, roughly, says that S has justification for believing that this is an oboe just in case [this is an oboe] is part of the best explanation of her evidence and that explanation is itself sufficiently good.¹¹ Assuming that S's evidence is a *presentational appearance* (an appearance that apparently presents the truth maker for its content) that this is an oboe, S will have immediate justification for believing that this is an oboe.¹²

Now, what if S receives (a)? Supposing that the evidence for accepting (a) is itself sufficiently strong, S will still have justification for believing that this is an oboe. This is because (a) includes the claim that the instrument is in fact an oboe. However, in this case it will not be S's original appearance that is doing the justifying, rather whatever gives S justification for (a) will give her justification for believing that the instrument is an oboe. Given PE, it is easy to see how this sort of defeat works. (a) makes it so that [this is an oboe] is no longer part of the best sufficiently good explanation of S's appearance. After all, S's evidence now includes the trustworthy information that appearances of this sort are not typically caused by oboes. So, [this is an oboe] is not part of a good explanation of the visual appearance that S has in this case. It is, however, part of the best

¹⁰ See in particular McCain and Moretti (2021: §2.1 and §4.5.1)

¹¹ Note that this does not require S to consider this explanation, or conduct any sort of evaluation of competing explanations (see McCain and Moretti 2021: 97).

¹² At first glance there may seem to be a problem here because one might worry that if justification depends on explanation, then justification must be inferential and not immediate. However, closer inspection reveals that this worry is ultimately no cause for concern (see McCain and Moretti 2021: 87-88).

sufficiently good explanation of S's *overall* evidence in this case, which includes both S's appearance and testimony that this is in fact an oboe. There does not seem to be any complicated inferences or significant background knowledge at play here.

What if S receives (b)? Here the situation is very similar to when S gets (a). Given PE, [this is an oboe] is no longer part of the best sufficiently good explanation of S's appearance. After all, S's evidence now includes the trustworthy information that appearances of this sort in the situation that S is in are likely caused by something other than oboes. So, [this is an oboe] is not part of the best sufficiently good explanation of the visual appearance that S has in this case. The rival explanation provided by the claim that this is an instrument disguised to look like an oboe is as good (or nearly so) as the explanation provided by [this is an oboe]. As a result, S's justification for believing that this is an oboe is significantly decreased once she has sufficiently strong evidence for (b). Unlike the previous situation where S receives (a), S's overall evidence does not support believing that this is an oboe because her evidence no longer includes the testimony that the instrument she is looking at is in fact an oboe. In other words, when S receives (b) she only gains a defeater; she does not gain any additional evidence that the instrument is an oboe like she does when she receives (a). Again, there does not seem to be any complicated inferences or significant background knowledge at play here.

What if S receives (c)? As expected, it is again the case that [this is an oboe] is no longer part of the best sufficiently good explanation of S's evidence. Assuming that S has sufficiently strong evidence to trust that the picture actually represents what oboes look like, and this is different from her original appearance, [this is an oboe] is not part of the best sufficiently good explanation of her evidence. S now has evidence that appearances like the one she has when looking at this instrument are unlikely to be caused by oboes. So, a better explanation of her total evidence is that her appearance is caused by some other instrument. Yet again, there does not seem to be any complicated inferences or significant background knowledge at play here.

In conclusion, PE can account for the patterns of defeat that McGrath appeals to without positing any exceedingly complex cognitive machinery. In fact, PE's accounts does not seem any more cumbersome than that of the looks view. Of course, this does not show that the looks view is mistaken. Yet since PE can explain the defeat in McGrath's cases at least as easily as the looks view, these cases provide no reason to prefer the looks view over PE. Since PE is a kind of dogmatism, McGrath's defeater cases fail to provide reason to think that we need to posit mediate, rather than immediate, justification of simple visual beliefs in order to properly account for what is going on in these sorts of situations.

Let us turn to the issue of the dialectic cost of the dogmatist's explanation of defeaters. McGrath claims that this explanation commits the dogmatist to acknowledging that ordinary agents have substantial knowledge of the relation between "how things are, how they look and what our experiences are". The above accounts of cases (a)-(c), which rely on PE, cast doubts on McGrath's claim. Phenomenal explanationists can explain defeat in these situations without attributing to S substantial knowledge of the relation between how things are, how they look, and what her experiences are. What matters is that the new information S gains by coming to possess (a), (b), or (c) changes the quality of the explanations provided by the previously justified proposition. And, this can happen without S possessing the sort of substantial knowledge to which McGrath refers.

II. The Straightforward Argument

Following up on his discussion of defeat, McGrath (2018) offers what he calls the "**straightforward argument**" for the looks view. According to McGrath, the dogmatist is forced to respond to what he said about defeaters in a way that "leaves open the possibility that there is an important sort of epistemic dependence relation between the relevant looks propositions and [the] proposition that

the thing is an F” (2018: 122). McGrath intends to say that the dogmatist must grant that it is at least possible that simple visual beliefs are mediately justified by relevant looks propositions. We can concede that this very generic claim is true. (Although we saw that the phenomenal explanationist can account for the defeat that McGrath discusses without adducing this sort of epistemic dependence.) McGrath contends that, once the dogmatist grants this possibility, she will be committed to concluding that simple visual beliefs are *actually* mediately justified by relevant looks propositions. In this section we show that this contention is false.

Let us begin by getting clear on McGrath’s **straightforward argument**. Here is his description of it:

All this gives us a **straightforward argument** for the looks view concerning propositional justification. Take a case of a justified simple visual belief that a thing is an F. There will be an appropriate looks proposition that one must be independently justified in believing in order to be justified in believing it is an F. Moreover, this looks proposition will support the belief that the object is an F (this support relation will not be defeated). But if one is independently justified in believing such a looks proposition, which supports the target proposition that the thing is an F, and this support is undefeated, then one will have a mediate justification from a looks-related reason to believe the thing is an F. Extending the same argument to beliefs attributing sensible qualities, we arrive at the looks view concerning propositional justification. (2018: 123)

The linchpin of McGrath’s argument is the claim that when one has a justified simple visual belief, there must be “an appropriate looks proposition that one must be independently justified in believing”.

Why does McGrath think there must be an independently justified looks proposition in order to have justification for simple visual beliefs? He appeals to a scenario like *Oboes*. This time McGrath asks us to suppose that he is justified in disbelieving that, or suspending judgment on whether, the object that he sees looks like an oboe. McGrath correctly points out that, in both versions of the case, it seems he does not have justification for believing that what he sees is an oboe. McGrath elaborates on the second alternative. To make his point explicit, he emphasizes how strange it would be to say that he forms a *justified* simple visual belief that the instrument is an oboe at the same time that he suspends judgment on whether or not the instrument looks like an oboe. McGrath claims that when it comes to his simple visual belief and his suspension of judgment about the corresponding looks proposition, “without the assumption that one must be justified in a relevant looks proposition in order to be justified in believing it is an oboe, it is difficult to see why this combination of states would make no sense, i.e., would be irrational” (2018: 122). Thus, McGrath concludes that one must be justified in believing the relevant looks proposition in order for one to have justification for a simple visual belief. Of course, McGrath has to supplement his argument to get from this to the claim that the looks belief must be *independently* justified. However, if he can get to the conclusion that one must be justified in believing the relevant looks proposition, it is not hard for him to get to the claim that the justification must be independent of one’s current visual experience. So, we grant that he can get to the independence claim from the conclusion that believing the relevant looks proposition must be justified. We do not think that he can get to the conclusion that believing the relevant looks proposition must be justified, though. Hence, the move to the independence claim is irrelevant.

The problem with McGrath’s argument is that it misconstrues a negative requirement as a positive requirement. Let us explain. We agree with McGrath that if *Oboes* is modified so that he has justification for disbelieving that, or suspending judgment about whether, the instrument looks like

an oboe, he does not have justification for his simple visual belief that this is an oboe. This is so because his disbelief or suspending judgment would give McGrath a defeater. That said, it is a mistake to think that we can move from the fact that one's having justification for disbelieving or suspending judgment about the relevant looks proposition provides one with a defeater to the claim that one must have justification for believing the looks proposition in order to have justification for the simple visual belief. One can readily accept a no-defeater condition without also accepting a corresponding higher-order requirement on justification.¹³ For example, a non-reductionist about testimony might accept that S's having justification for disbelieving that, or suspending judgment about whether, S* is a reliable informant provides a defeater for S*'s testimony without also accepting that S must, therefore, have justification for believing that S* is reliable in order for accepting S*'s testimony to be justified.¹⁴ Instead, S can justifiedly accept S*'s testimony even if S has no justification for adopting any doxastic attitude about whether or not S* is a reliable informant. So, we can grant that having justification for disbelieving or suspending judgment on the looks proposition provides a defeater without accepting that in order to have justification for a simple visual belief one must have justification for believing the relevant looks proposition. That is to say, we can plausibly accept a negative higher-order requirement on justification (one cannot have a defeater for the looks proposition) without committing to a corresponding positive high-order requirement (one has to have independent justification for believing the looks proposition).

In order to make this point clearer, let us consider a couple ways in which McGrath might fail to have justification for believing a looks proposition about oboes while having justification for believing the correlated simple visual belief.¹⁵ Suppose *o* is “this looks like an oboe” and *p* is “this is an oboe”. In each case our goal is to determine (i) if McGrath has or does not have justification for adopting any doxastic attitude toward *o* and (ii) whether McGrath's relation to *o* negatively affects the justification for his simple visual belief that *p*. First, let us imagine that McGrath has a simple visual belief *p* caused by a *presentational appearance* that *p* and he is just now, for the first time, considering *o*. As McGrath is looking for evidence for *o*, he is interrupted by an emergency that requires his full attention. McGrath's simple visual belief that *p* is retained, but he never finishes his deliberations concerning *o*, and let us assume this results in his having no available evidence for or against it. McGrath does not have justification for believing or disbelieving *o*, but it is not clear that he has justification for suspending judgment about *o* either. After all, in this case McGrath has no relevant evidence when it comes to *o*, so it is not unreasonable to think that McGrath is still in a state where no doxastic attitude toward *o* is justified.¹⁶ In spite of this, it does not seem that McGrath's justification for his simple visual belief that *p* disappears at any point during this process. Now, let us consider an additional case. Suppose McGrath is affected by a form of amnesia that prevents him from—among other things—retrieving evidence for looks propositions.¹⁷ McGrath still has a presentational appearance that *p* (“this is an oboe”). So, he does have justification for believing *p*. Yet as soon as he tries to substantiate *o* (“this looks like an oboe”), he cannot find any

¹³ See Bergmann (2005) for discussion.

¹⁴ For discussion of this point see Adler (2017) and Lackey (2008).

¹⁵ For discussion of various ways that one might hold doxastic attitudes other than believing or disbelieving, see Feldman & Conee (2018) and Friedman (2013, 2017).

¹⁶ One might worry that this situation is one in which McGrath faces an epistemic dilemma. This worry is misplaced though. Since McGrath is still deliberating, it is not clear that McGrath is actually in a position to adopt a doxastic attitude toward *o* at all, and plausibly one can be in an epistemic dilemma only if the situation is such that one must adopt a doxastic attitude and no such attitude is justified. For discussion of this point about epistemic dilemmas see Stapleford and McCain (2021).

¹⁷ Perhaps humans are not affected by this sort of amnesia. The relevant fact is, however, that the situation that we describe is at least metaphysically possible.

independent evidence for o . McGrath cannot recall any past episode in which something similar to the oboe he is looking at has been identified as an oboe. He does not even have an appearance that o . In this case too it seems that McGrath does not have justification for believing, disbelieving, or suspending judgment about o . Nevertheless, it seems clear that prior to his failure to retrieve memorial evidence for o he has justification for believing p .¹⁸ In each of these situations, McGrath does not have justification for believing o , and yet his simple visual belief that p seems to be justified.

Now, one might complain that in these cases McGrath is not justified in suspending judgment concerning o , so these are not the sort of situation that McGrath initially described. True, but in both cases, we do have someone who plausibly has justification for a simple visual belief that p without being justified in believing the relevant looks proposition. This, of course, straightforwardly rebuts McGrath's claim that one must be justified in accepting the relevant looks proposition in order to have justification for the simple visual belief. Furthermore, consideration of these cases helps to illustrate our general point that the fact that having justification to suspend judgment on a higher-order proposition might provide a defeater for a lower-order belief does not entail that one must have justification for believing the higher-order proposition in order to have justification for the lower-order belief. Applied to this particular issue, the key point is that while McGrath is correct that being justified in disbelieving that, or suspending judgment about, o does defeat his justification for the simple visual belief that p , it is a mistake to move from this to the conclusion that one must, therefore, be justified in believing o in order to have justification for the simple visual belief that p . Consequently, the **straightforward argument** is unsound because its central premise (stating that when one has justification for a simple visual belief, there must be "an appropriate looks proposition that one must be independently justified in believing") is false.

Before moving on, let us briefly address McGrath's claim that when it comes to his simple visual belief that p and his suspension of judgment about the corresponding looks proposition, without the looks view "it is difficult to see why this combination of states would ... be irrational". Appealing to PE is helpful in showing that McGrath is mistaken in this case too. PE provides an explanation of why this combination would be irrational that is at least as simple as that afforded by the looks view. PE entails that in order for McGrath to have justification for believing that p ("this is an oboe"), p has to be part of the best sufficiently good explanation of McGrath's evidence. Plausibly, when he does not have evidence concerning o ("this looks like an oboe"), p can still be the best sufficiently good explanation of his evidence. On our view, what is going on in this case is that it appears to McGrath that p . McGrath's appearance provides him with justification for thinking that p because the best sufficiently good explanation of its appearing that p includes p . Now, if we add to the case that McGrath is justified in suspending judgment on o because his evidence for $\sim o$ is just as strong as his evidence for o , p is no longer part of the best sufficiently good explanation of McGrath's evidence. After all, once it is the case that McGrath should suspend judgment on o , his evidence includes that he cannot tell that an instrument is an oboe by its appearance—it includes evidence that makes it so that he should not think that this sort of appearance is one of an oboe. The truth of p does not provide a very good explanation of McGrath's appearance coupled with his evidence that the appearance fails to give him a good reason to believe p . Given this, it is not difficult to see why the combination of suspending judgment on o and believing that p is irrational.

¹⁸ We allow that it might be the case that if McGrath tries and fails to recall evidence in support of o , his recognition of failing in this way gives him new evidence that makes it so that he should suspend judgment about o . If he does end up in a situation where he is justified in suspending judgment about o , it is plausible that this gives him a defeater for believing p . However, prior to gaining this new evidence for suspending judgment about o McGrath has justification for believing that p .

III. Beliefs About Looks

Having taken himself to have shown that the looks view is correct when it comes to *propositional* justification, McGrath (2018) turns toward making the case that the looks view also applies to *doxastic* justification. He acknowledges that in order for this to be correct, assuming that the looks view is correct about propositional justification, it has to be that we ordinarily base our simple visual beliefs on beliefs we actually have about how things look. Of course, this is where the looks view faces a problem that plagues classical foundationalist views—it does not seem true that we ordinarily form all the looks beliefs that we would need if the looks view is to accurately account for our justified simple visual beliefs.^{19, 20}

Recall from above that McGrath thinks that his discussion of defeaters shows that the dogmatist is committed to claiming that ordinary agents “know about the relations between how things are, how they look and how we experience them”. We have seen, nevertheless, that McGrath fails to establish this point. For the phenomenal explanationist is not committed to the idea that ordinary agents have such knowledge. Because of this, the phenomenal explanationist could charge advocates of the looks view with overintellectualizing perceptual justification without the fear of receiving a *tu quoque* reply. The phenomenal explanationist can insist that since it is implausible that ordinary people generally know about the relations between how things are and how they look, we should not expect that they generally form the looks beliefs they would need in order to acquire doxastic perceptual justification according to the looks view.

Nevertheless, McGrath makes a case for thinking that ordinary agents do have the required looks beliefs. McGrath asks us to consider a scenario where one sees an apple and forms the simple visual belief that *that is an apple*. According to him,

In ordinary cases of seeing an apple, one doesn't form the belief [that] the thing looks like an apple in the sense of *making a conscious judgment* to this effect. Still, one obviously knows and so believes it looks like an apple. When I ask you, “does it look like an apple?” you[r] answer is “of course it does.” It doesn't seem to you that you are forming a belief; you already had the belief. Whether we want to say the belief/knowledge is implicit, tacit, or whatever, it is there. And it can do epistemic work. (2018: 123)

In order to help illustrate how beliefs not explicitly manifested in one's thinking can do epistemic work, McGrath describes an example (not concerning a looks belief) that he draws from Senor (2008): “I look at a sunset and judge that it's a beautiful sunset. I don't consciously judge that it's evening. But I know it's evening, and this is surely part of my justification for believing it is a beautiful sunset” (2018: 124). According to McGrath, this is just one example among many.

The question here is whether these sorts of examples genuinely show that one has the relevant belief rather than merely a *disposition* to form the belief. Let us take the sunset example first. If one knows that it is evening, that knowledge helps justify believing that it is a *sunset* that one is seeing rather than a *sunrise*. Since knowledge presumably entails justified belief, in this case, one's justified belief that it is evening is part of the justification one has for thinking that it is a beautiful

¹⁹ See Feldman (2003) for discussion of this sort of problem for classical foundationalism.

²⁰ It may be that McGrath has a somewhat easier time with this problem than classical foundationalists because he holds that looks are “out in the world” in some sense. This may allow us to access the content of looks beliefs in a way that requires less cognitive resources than what is needed for forming beliefs about the nature of our own mental states as the classical foundationalist requires. Nevertheless, on McGrath's view, in order for a simple visual belief to be doxastically justified it must be based on another belief about how things look.

sunset that one is seeing. That said, would one have to have knowledge (or justified belief) that it is evening in order for this belief about the sunset to be justified? It seems not. Consider a variation on the case where one does not actually believe, and so does not know, that it is evening, but one is sufficiently justified in believing that it is evening. In this case it still seems like one is justified in believing that one is seeing a beautiful *sunset*. It seems that all that is required is that one have justification for believing that it is evening—especially since one is not actually inferring from a belief that it is evening.

Similar considerations apply in McGrath's apple case. The fact that one *would* answer that it looks like an apple, if asked whether it does, gives us very strong grounds for thinking that one has the *disposition* to affirm and believe that it looks like an apple. And, it is very plausible that one has propositional justification for this belief as well. What is unclear, however, is why we should think that one already has the belief in question. The nature of the question being asked may explain why one does not seem to oneself to be forming a belief. One is being asked to affirm or deny that the object looks like an apple. Being asked in this way puts the proposition [this looks like an apple] directly before one's mind for conscious consideration, which makes it easy to form a belief about it almost immediately. Consider, if one is looking at a bookshelf full of books one might not believe (or disbelieve) that there is a red book on the shelf. However, when asked "do you see a red book?" one might almost immediately answer "yes". This does not show that one believed all along that there is a red book on the shelf. Rather, it shows that either one already believed there is a red book on the shelf, or one was disposed to form this belief almost immediately when asked.²¹ These are equally good explanations of what is going on in this case. Similarly, in McGrath's example it seems that there are two equally good explanations for what happens. One is, as McGrath suggests, that the person already believes that the object looks like an apple. The other explanation is that the person does not yet believe the object looks like an apple, but instead is only disposed to form this belief almost immediately when asked. In light of this, at the very least it is clear that McGrath's case does not *obviously* support his claim.

Things become even less congenial to McGrath's claim when we think about very young children or other unreflective agents. Plausibly, such agents can have a justified belief that this is an apple, but they do not seem to have beliefs about how things look. Of course, McGrath may want to insist that his looks view is only applicable to agents capable of having reflective justification. Fair enough. But, even if we limit our focus to reflective agents, it does not seem that we have enough looks beliefs to do the work that McGrath needs. For the looks view to be workable at the level of doxastic justification, it would have to be that for every justified simple perceptual belief that *S* forms, she also has a belief about how things look. The looks view must posit at least two beliefs in each case of a justified simple visual belief,²² where dogmatist views, such as PE, only have to posit one. And, as we have mentioned, it is unclear that one needs to posit these additional beliefs to account for the data that McGrath appeals to when trying to motivate the looks view. It is plausible, instead, that all that is needed is a disposition to form looks beliefs when prompted in the appropriate way. Therefore, when it comes to the problem of whether or not we ordinarily form

²¹ Our point here relies upon the very intuitive idea that one can have evidence for *p* without forming the belief that *p*. Hence, one can have evidence that there is a red book on the shelf prior to forming the belief. In such a case, one's being asked whether there is a red book can prompt one to form the belief supported by the evidence one already has.

²² It might be many more than two. Consider again the example that McGrath draws from Senor. Suppose *s* is "it is a beautiful sunset" and *e* is "it is evening". McGrath agrees with Senor that his belief that *e* provides part of the doxastic justification for his belief that *s*. So the belief that *e* appears to be an additional doxastic basis for his *simple visual* belief that *s*. The other basis is the belief that *this looks like a beautiful sunset*. Clearly, McGrath's simple visual belief that *s* may have—simultaneously—many other doxastic bases of this sort. If this is what McGrath has in mind, the looks view must posit far more than two beliefs in many cases of justified simple visual beliefs.

looks beliefs, there is not a decisive objection to the looks view, but it is far from clear that we do form such beliefs. The looks view appears questionable on this point.

IV. Conclusion

The considerations adduced in the previous three sections reveal that McGrath's supporting strategy for the first premise of his argument against immediate perceptual justification—which asserts that the looks view is true—fails. The cases he constructs in support of the looks view are in fact unpersuasive. First, McGrath contends that the looks view provides a good explanation of defeat, more straightforward than that provided by dogmatism. This is false: PE supplies a simpler and so preferable account of defeat which—unlike the looks view—cannot be charged with overintellectualizing perceptual justification. Second, McGrath contends that since justification to disbelieve or withhold concerning looks propositions would defeat justification for the correlated simple visual beliefs, the justification of the latter beliefs must rest in part on justification for the former beliefs. This conclusion does not follow from the premise, so this argument is invalid. Third, McGrath contends that only the looks view can easily explain why it would be irrational to claim that one has justification for a simple visual belief when one is justified in suspending judgment about the corresponding looks proposition. This is untrue: PE offers an explanation that seems equally simple. Finally, the looks view appears false, or at least not sufficiently plausible, when it is applied to doxastic justification. This leaves us without reason to think that the justification for simple visual beliefs is mediate. Hence, dogmatism—at least in the form of PE—does not look to be in any trouble.²³

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²³ We are grateful to Matt McGrath and Declan Smithies for helpful comments on earlier drafts.

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