

Chapter 2

Evidentialism and the Problem of Fit

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter we look at the prospects for the first in a family of views that will be labeled as *experientialism*. According to these experientialist views, perceptual justification has to do with having sufficient experiential evidence for one's beliefs. To put it in terms that will be introduced in this chapter: experientialism holds that experience *evidentially justifies* perceptual beliefs.

Before going to a specific way of spelling out this general view, I first discuss what makes it so appealing (Sect. 2.2). This has to do with its ability to explain two important intuitions about perceptual justification, namely, first, the New Evil Demon Intuition, and second, the Blindsight Intuition. The former intuition can be explained by appealing to the sufficiency of perceptual experience for perceptual justification, while the latter can be explained by appealing to the necessity of perceptual experience for perceptual justification. Taken together, these intuitions seem to provide a strong motivation for experientialism.

In Sect. 2.3, I present a well-known problem for experientialism: the Sellarsian dilemma. By using a distinction between evidential and non-evidential justification, this dilemma can be construed as a real problem for experientialism (Lyons 2009). Either experience is non-propositional in nature, and therefore unable to evidentially justify belief at all, or it is propositional, but then it is ad hoc that it can evidentially justify beliefs without being justified itself. This way of setting up the dilemma differs from how it is set up by e.g. Laurence Bonjour (1985), and I explicitly discuss this difference.

Section 2.4 focuses on the specific way in which *evidentialism* spells out the experientialist theory of perceptual justification. Evidentialism holds that a certain belief is justified if and only if it fits the available evidence (Feldman and Conee 1985). Applied to perception, this plausibly claims that at least some beliefs are justified if and only if they fit the relevant perceptual experiences. I argue that proponents of evidentialism have failed to provide an adequate notion of fit, given

that they want to allow experiences to be non-propositional. In effect, I will be arguing that evidentialism falls prey to the first horn of the Sellarsian dilemma: without propositional content, no sense can be made of the idea that certain beliefs fit certain experiences.

In Sect. 2.5, I go on to discuss an externalist construal of evidentialism (Comesaña 2010). Although this version has a good account of fit, it also has undesirable consequences in that it allows subjects to be justified in cases where they are intuitively unjustified. Moreover, because of its liberal notion of evidence, externalist evidentialism loses the motivation stemming from the Blindsight Intuition.

Section 2.6 summarizes the results of this chapter, and briefly presents how this is related to what will be discussed in the next.

2.2 Two Motivations for Experientialism

Experientialism is the view that perceptual justification is crucially related to having sufficient experiential evidence. In this section I discuss two important motivations for this view, which stem from its ability to accommodate the New Evil Demon Intuition and the Blindsight Intuition. The first intuition can be explained by appealing to the *sufficiency* of experiential evidence for perceptual justification, while the latter can be explained by appealing to the *necessity* of experiential evidence for perceptual justification.

2.2.1 The New Evil Demon Intuition

A first motivation for experientialism comes from reflection on a problem for a simple version of process reliabilism, a view which holds that a belief is justified if and only if it is the output of a reliable process, i.e., a process which tends to produce true beliefs. The problem is known as the New Evil Demon Problem, and was first presented by Keith Lehrer and Stewart Cohen:

Imagine that, unknown to us, our cognitive processes, those involved in perception, memory and inference, are rendered unreliable by the actions of a powerful demon or malevolent scientist. It would follow on reliabilist views that under such conditions the beliefs generated by those processes would not be justified. This result is unacceptable. The truth of the demon hypothesis also entails that our experiences and our reasonings are just what they would be if our cognitive processes were reliable, and, therefore, that we would be just as well justified in believing what we do if the demon hypothesis were true as if it were false.

(Lehrer and Cohen 1983, p. 192)

The scenario Lehrer and Cohen have in mind is one in which an evil demon or malevolent scientist induces experiences in a subject that are not at all reliably connected to the subject's environment (although, of course, care is taken to prevent

the subject from noticing anything about this). For a subject in this New Evil Demon scenario, call him Ned, everything would seem the same as it does to us. He would form beliefs in just the way we would form them, simply by taking perceptual experiences of the world at face value. Yet (simple) reliabilism has the consequence that Ned is unjustified in his beliefs—as they are the output of an unreliable process—while we would be justified in ours. This seems to conflict with our intuition: Ned appears to be as justified as we are. After all, he is forming his beliefs in exactly the same way as we are, and things seem to him exactly the same as they do to us. Call this intuition the *New Evil Demon Intuition*.

Now, Lehrer and Cohen claim that justification “is an evaluation of how well one has pursued one’s epistemic goals” (1983, p.193). They explain the New Evil Demon Intuition by arguing that Ned can be justified in his higher-order belief that his senses are reliable, and consequently in accepting his first-order perceptual beliefs, even if his senses are not, in fact, reliable. But one need not go as far as that, as this explanation immediately brings with it a worry about hyper-intellectualization. Even if subjects (under the influence of a powerful demon) never form higher-order beliefs about their senses, or are incapable of forming those beliefs as in the case of cognitively unsophisticated agents like animals and small children, then we still have the intuition that their first-order perceptual beliefs about their environment could be justified.¹

A better, alternative explanation of the New Evil Demon Intuition claims that (a) perceptual justification solely has to do with correctly basing one’s beliefs on experiential evidence, and (b) that Ned has the same experiential evidence as we do. Why is Ned, like us, justified in believing that there is a table before him? Because, like us, he has a perceptual experience of there being a table before him. The fact that this experience was in his case unknowingly caused by an evil demon does not affect his belief’s being justified. This explanation nicely fits in an experientialist’s account of perceptual justification, according to which perceptual justification has to do with having sufficient experiential evidence for one’s beliefs, so the New Evil Demon Intuition can provide a good first motivation for experientialism.

2.2.2 *The Blindsight Intuition*

A second motivation for experientialism comes from reflection on the phenomenon of blindsight. Some patients with a damaged visual cortex claim not to perceive anything in a certain part of their visual field, but are still able to perform far better

¹Note that Lehrer and Cohen respond to a hyper-intellectualization objection to their view by arguing that cognitively unsophisticated cognizers may have *information* even though they lack *knowledge* (Lehrer and Cohen 1983, p.200). However, given that we commonly attribute knowledge to these creatures, an account that could accommodate such knowledge is to be preferred.

than chance when they are forced to guess about, e.g., the presence or orientation of a stimulus.² Now suppose that a hypothetical blindsighted subject, call him Bill, is aware of the fact that he has lost visual experience in a certain part of his visual field, yet—in contrast with actual blindsighters—continues to form correct beliefs about what is going on in his blind field. Bill is not aware of the reliability of his own blindsight capabilities and is unable to produce any more justification for his beliefs other than that it just seems to him that such-and-so is going on in his blind field.³ Are Bill's beliefs justified? Intuitively, the answer seems to be 'no'. Call this the *Blindsight Intuition*.

Experientialism can easily accommodate the Blindsight Intuition. Bill does not have perceptual justification for his beliefs, because he lacks experiential evidence for them. If he would have visual experiences of what goes on in his blind field, then he would have sufficient evidence for his beliefs. Indeed, this is just what is going on in normal perceivers. However, in the absence of these experiences, Bill lacks sufficient evidence for his beliefs, making them unjustified.

The hypothetical blindsight case resembles one of BonJour's (1985) clairvoyance cases that is meant as a counterexample to externalist theories such as reliabilism:

Norman, under certain conditions which usually obtain, is a completely reliable clairvoyant with respect to certain kinds of subject matter. He possesses no evidence or reasons of any kind for or against the general possibility of such a cognitive power or for or against the thesis that he possesses it. One day Norman comes to believe that the President is in New York City, though he has no evidence either for or against this belief. In fact the belief is true and results from his clairvoyant power under circumstances in which it is completely reliable.

(BonJour 1985, p. 41)

Again the intuition here is that, contra reliabilism, Norman's belief is *unjustified*. Yet the case is still in an important respect different from the blindsight case. In the blindsight case it's clear that if Bill still had intact visual experience, then he would have justification for his beliefs. Something similar is not clearly true for Norman. Even if Norman had some sort of experience that mediated his clairvoyant power, then we might still hesitate to grant that his beliefs were justified. Just suppose that you yourself now suddenly have an extremely vivid image of the President's walking around in New York City. This should not lead you to form the belief that the President is now in New York City. At the very least, it is not as plausible to grant that this belief is justified as it is to grant that Bill's belief is justified if he still had intact visual experiences. This makes the blindsight case better suited as an argument in favor of experientialism, instead of being just an argument against

²For an overview of the research on, and objections to, blindsight, see Cowey (2010).

³This makes Bill importantly different from the super-blindsighters introduced by Daniel Dennett (1991).

reliabilism. The blindsight case more clearly motivates the necessity of experience for perceptual justification, rather than, as the clairvoyant case does, presenting just the insufficiency of reliability for perceptual justification.⁴

2.3 The Sellarsian Dilemma

In the previous section we saw that experientialism could accommodate both the New Evil Demon Intuition and the Blindsight Intuition, thereby deriving a strong motivation in its favor. However, experientialism also faces a general worry about its underlying epistemological theory. Experientialism holds that perceptual experiences provide justification for beliefs by serving as their evidence, even though these experiences themselves cannot and need not be justified. The important question is *how* experiences are able to play this foundational and justifying role. A dilemma, sketched by BonJour (inspired by Sellars 1956), seems to be lurking in the back:

[...] the proponent of the given [in our case, the experientialist] is caught in a fundamental and inescapable dilemma: if his intuitions or direct awarenesses or immediate apprehensions are construed as cognitive, at least quasi-judgmental (as seems clearly the more natural interpretation), then they will be both capable of providing justification for other cognitive states and in need of it themselves; but if they are construed as noncognitive, nonjudgmental, then while they will not themselves need justification, they will also be incapable of giving it. In either case, such states will be incapable of serving as an adequate foundation for knowledge.

(BonJour 1985, p. 69)

BonJour's thought is that only cognitive states, states with assertive propositional content, are capable of providing justification for belief, and that these states are only able to do so if they are themselves justified. The idea behind this thought is that justification always has to do with having *reasons*, and reasons need to have assertive propositional content to connect them to the beliefs they justify (BonJour 1985, p. 68). However, for any representational state, a question can be raised about its accurateness, which is why they can only confer justification if they are themselves justified (BonJour 1985, p. 78). Something can act as a reason only if one is already justified in taking the content of this reason to be true.

As Jack Lyons (2009, p. 40) points out, there are some difficulties with BonJour's argument. It's not clear why justification must always involve having reasons, nor is it clear why representational states must be justified before they can confer justification. Even if reliability is not necessary or sufficient for justification, we do have the intuition that the reliability of a certain process can be relevant for the

⁴Something similar can be said in relation to Lehrer's (1990) Truetemp example, in which Mr. Truetemp unknowingly gets a so-called tempucomp implanted in his brain which then reliably produces beliefs about the specific temperature. Even if the tempucomp works by producing certain experiences in Truetemp, then it is still unclear whether his beliefs are justified.

justification of the belief that is its outcome. Similarly, even if the coherence of a set of beliefs is not necessary or sufficient for these beliefs to be justified, the coherence might well be taken to improve the individual justification of each of the set's members. Yet reliability or coherence by itself is not a reason for or against a certain belief, nor is it the kind of thing that can be justified. So why assume that *all* justification has to do with having reasons, and that *all* justification presupposes that the justifier is itself justified?

To strengthen the Sellarsian dilemma for experientialism, Lyons distinguishes between evidential and non-evidential justifiers (2009, pp. 21–24). An evidential justifier for a belief “is any state that serves as part or all of the agent’s justifying grounds, that is, evidence, that is, reasons for that belief” (Lyons 2009, p. 23), while a non-evidential justifier is “anything else that makes it the case that the belief is justified, or contributes toward making it the case that the belief is justified” (Lyons 2009, p. 24). This will enable us to count reliability and coherence as non-evidential justifiers for beliefs, while, for instance, beliefs could count as evidential justifiers for other beliefs. Whether these non-evidential and evidential justifiers in the end succeed in justifying a belief depends on other factors as well. Beliefs held for bad reasons will not justify other beliefs, and coherence alone will not provide justification if the set of coherent beliefs is totally disconnected from the external world.

Evidential justifiers need not be taken as such by agents basing their beliefs on them. If a certain belief is used as a basis for another, I need not be aware of this relation. For instance, having performed the same inferential steps several times, I might come to a justified conclusion without consciously reasoning through all of the needed premises. In such a case, it seems that I was not aware of all of the evidential justifiers that were relevant in justifying my conclusion. However, in this case it also seems that I could become aware of those evidential justifiers if I reflected on how I arrived at the conclusion. But even this need not be the case. Suppose that I have unconscious biased beliefs against certain groups of people. Then I might actually base my decision against hiring someone from this group on this unconscious belief, all the while thinking that I based it on something else instead. What matters for being an evidential justifier is that a state is actually *used* as evidence for another belief, rather than that an agent is aware of so using this state.

On the basis of the distinction between evidential and non-evidential justifiers we can define evidential justification as the relation between an evidential justifier and the beliefs it justifies, and non-evidential justification as the relation between a non-evidential justifier and the beliefs it justifies. However, according to Lyons, it is important to realize that there is only one property of being justified, although there are two different relations things might have towards a belief with this property (Lyons 2009, pp. 25–6). Non-evidential justifiers are supposed to be the *metaphysical basis* for justification, and are thus present in any case of justification. Even if a belief that *p* is properly based on the belief that *q*, then the fact that the belief is so based is still supposed to count as a non-evidential justifier. So if one were to think of the property of being justified as coming into two separate kinds,

the non-evidential and evidential kind, then all beliefs would come out as being non-evidentially justified, and only some beliefs would in addition be evidentially justified.

Still, one might as well hold that the fact that a belief is properly based on another belief is different in kind from the fact that a belief was produced by a reliable cognitive process. Perhaps one would then prefer to say that being non-evidentially justified *is* different in kind from being evidentially justified. This would go more into the direction of, for instance, Tyler Burge (2003) and Peter Graham (2012), who both claim that the genus of *epistemic warrant* has *entitlement* and *justification* as its species, where only justification has to do with having reasons or evidence for one's beliefs. I'm also fine with taking the distinction between evidential and non-evidential justification along these lines. Whichever way one wants to draw the distinction, the important point is that there is a distinction to be made: some factors simply impact the justification of a belief without serving as reasons or evidence for that belief.

The earlier observations with regard to BonJour's argument can now be expressed in these terms. We need not assume that all justification has to do with reasons, as there might be beliefs that are only non-evidentially justified (e.g., by being the output of a reliable process). Similarly, not all justification will presuppose that the justifier is itself justified, as non-evidential justifiers like reliability and coherence are not even the kinds of things that can be justified. But we can reformulate BonJour's argument in terms of evidential and non-evidential justification, making it more plausible.⁵ The dilemma for the experientialist then becomes the following: either experience is non-propositional, but then it cannot *evidentially* justify belief at all; or experience is propositional, but then it would be ad hoc to claim that it could evidentially justify beliefs without being justified itself. Note that the claim is not that experience needs to be *evidentially* justified before it can evidentially justify belief. The idea is precisely that non-evidential justifiers provide the ultimate foundation for evidential justifiers.

This version of the Sellarsian dilemma has more bite to it, as it specifically attacks the experientialist's claim that experiences act as *evidence* for belief. First, it makes sense to suppose that all evidence is propositional, because evidence needs to stand in some sort of logical relation to the propositions it supports. How else could we explain why precisely those propositions are supported by precisely that evidence? This is what lends credibility to the first horn of the dilemma: if experience is non-propositional, then it is entirely unclear how it would be evidence for some beliefs but not others.

Second, it makes sense to suppose that propositional states need to be justified before they can be rightly considered as evidence, or at least, evidence capable of justifying beliefs. Not just any propositional state can count as evidence for another. For instance, if I simply adopt some beliefs that logically support another, then

⁵Note that the way I present the Sellarsian dilemma is different from the precise way in which Lyons construes the dilemma himself.

these beliefs still do not count as evidence for the belief they support. Further, desires and imaginations also do not count as evidence even though they might both be propositional states. Both facts can be explained by appealing to the idea that propositional states need to be justified before they can be evidence for another. This lends credibility to the second horn of the dilemma: if experience is propositional, then it is ad hoc to claim that it can evidentially justify beliefs without being itself justified.

In the next section, I will expound on the first horn of this version of the Sellarsian dilemma by discussing evidentialism, a theory which holds that experiences can act as evidence for beliefs even if they are non-propositional. The second horn of the dilemma will await further discussion until the next chapter, when the dogmatist theory of perceptual justification is at issue.

2.4 Evidentialism

One well-known theory which can be understood as grasping the first horn of the Sellarsian dilemma is Richard Feldman's and Earl Conee's evidentialism. Feldman and Conee characterize their evidentialist position about justification with the help of the following biconditional:

Evidentialism Doxastic attitude D toward proposition p is epistemically justified for S at t if and only if having D toward p fits the evidence S has at t .

(Feldman and Conee 1985, p. 15)

The first thing to notice about this characterization is that it is only about what is called '*propositional justification*': it tells us only which doxastic attitude is justified for a subject, and not whether a subject is actually justified in the doxastic attitude he has. The latter notion is called '*doxastic justification*'. A certain doxastic attitude might be propositionally justified without being doxastically justified if the subject in question does not base the attitude on the evidence that makes it propositionally justified. To give an example: if I have strong evidence for the belief that p , but do not believe p on the basis of that evidence (I rather like the sound of p and therefore believe it), then my belief that p is propositionally but not doxastically justified.

To accommodate the notion of doxastic justification, Feldman and Conee also present a characterization of well-foundedness (WF):

WF S 's doxastic attitude D at t toward proposition p is well-founded if and only if

- (i) having D toward p is justified for S at t ; and
- (ii) S has D toward p on the basis of some body of evidence e , such that
 - (a) S has e as evidence at t ;
 - (b) having D toward p fits e ; and
 - (c) there is no more inclusive body of evidence e' had by S at t such that having D toward p does not fit e' .

(Feldman and Conee 1985, p. 24).

This characterization includes that a subject actually has a certain doxastic attitude on the basis of some body of evidence, and thus enables evidentialists to deal with the above distinction between propositional and doxastic justification. There are still some important questions left unanswered though. First, what *constitutes* the body of evidence for a doxastic attitude, and, second, when does a doxastic attitude *fit* the evidence?

With regard to the first question, Feldman and Conee answer that “it seems clear that this [evidence] includes both beliefs and sensory states such as feeling very warm and having the visual experience of seeing blue” (Feldman and Conee 1985, p. 32, n. 2). However, it seems equally clear that not *all* beliefs should count as evidence. I cannot improve the epistemic status of my belief by randomly adopting other beliefs that support it. One plausible explanation of this fact is that the randomly adopted beliefs would not be justified, and therefore unable to confer any justification onto the beliefs that can be inferred from them. So an important constraint on those beliefs that can constitute evidence seems to be that these beliefs must themselves be justified, i.e., supported by evidence. Although this looks like the start of a regress, note that this need not be the case if sensory states can also constitute evidence. This would make sensory states extremely important for Feldman and Conee’s theory, as they would provide the foundation for all other evidence.⁶

However, sensory states also bring with them some difficult issues if they are to serve as evidence. Feldman and Conee do not require that sensory states must have propositional content to constitute evidence, as they do not really think that experiences take propositions as their objects. According to them, such a view is one of several “somewhat contorted attempts to make some other views match the view we prefer” (Conee and Feldman 2004a, p. 2). But if sensory states do not have propositional content, then it is unclear how they, on their own, could serve as evidence for specific propositions. Indeed, it is precisely for this reason that John McDowell (1994) maintains that experiences should have propositional content: only then can experiences constitute genuine reasons for beliefs.

Feldman and Conee are surprisingly silent about this matter. What is it about a feeling of warmth that makes it evidence for the belief that I am warm, instead of evidence for the belief that I am cold? If the state does not have propositional content, then it certainly does not imply that I am warm instead of being cold. Nor does it seem to make sense that the experience itself makes a certain belief probable.⁷ The proposition *that* an experience with such-and-such properties occurs

⁶Couldn’t Feldman and Conee also adopt coherentism instead? They could, but the problems for coherentism are well-known: coherent systems need not be true—it seems that they could lack any connection to the world whatsoever—and there is again the danger of over-intellectualizing how perceptual beliefs are justified. See Pollock (1974, pp. 26–29) for an early presentation of some of these objections.

⁷See Williamson (2000, pp. 194–200) for this kind of argument in favor of the thought that all evidence is propositional.

might stand in these relationships to belief, but this proposition is different from the experience itself.

James Pryor (2005, p. 193) thinks that there might be another way to find a connection between non-propositional experience and belief that explains how the former could justify the latter. This suggestion has to do with the “logical structure” of events and propositions, and the idea is that the event of my having an experience, e.g., a headache, has a similar logical structure as the proposition that I have a headache. This similarity in logical structure supposedly explains why my having a headache justifies my belief that I have a headache, instead of some other proposition. Unfortunately, at first glance it seems that the event of my having a headache is again not the same as the experience of the headache itself. The event of my having a headache seems to include me *and* the headache that I’m having, whereas the experience of the headache might not include me in the same way. If this is true, then we would no longer retain Feldman and Conee’s idea that experiences themselves can act as evidence for belief.

A more important problem has to do with the fact that experiences are not only supposed to provide evidence for introspective beliefs, but also for external world beliefs. Should we then say that the logical structure of, e.g., the event of my having a visual experience of a laptop in front of me is similar to *both* the logical structure of the proposition that I have a visual experience of a laptop in front of me *and* the logical structure of the proposition that there is a laptop in front of me? What’s more, it also seems possible that an experience of a red, roundish shape in front of me justifies my belief that there is a tomato in front of me, but here the similarity in logical structure is even more difficult to find. One could of course maintain that experiences only justify beliefs about, say, shapes and colors, but then the experientialist proposal will certainly lose some of its appeal.

Another suggestion to link non-propositional experiences to beliefs is provided by Laurence Bonjour (2003). Bonjour takes there to be a descriptive relation between a non-propositional experience and a conceptual belief *about* that experience, where the character of the experience determines whether the description is true. Bonjour further claims that “an awareness of that non-conceptual [and non-propositional, p. 70, n. 6] character can seemingly constitute a kind of *reason* for thinking that the description is true or correct [...]—thus apparently providing a basis for the justification of the conceptual claim” (Bonjour and Sosa 2003, p. 72). Now if Bonjour means that we have a higher-order awareness of our experience, then this just pushes the question about evidence and propositionality one step further back. How could this higher-order awareness constitute evidence for a specific belief if it is non-propositional (or if it is propositional: why is this higher-order experience itself not in need of justification)?

However, Bonjour stresses that the awareness should not be thought of as a higher-order awareness of the experience (Bonjour and Sosa 2003, pp. 63–4), but rather, as a “constitutive, or “built-in,” non-apperceptive awareness of [the experience’s] distinctive sort of [sensory] content” (Bonjour and Sosa 2003, p. 70). But then this suggestion seems to come down to little more than *stating* that being conscious of a non-propositional content, in other words, undergoing a non-

propositional experience, can serve as evidence for belief—albeit a belief about the experience itself. We started with the question of how a non-propositional experience could constitute evidence for a specific belief, and the answer we’ve been given claims roughly that our first-person awareness of an experience constitutes a reason for holding a specific belief about that experience. This just leaves unexplained how this awareness is supposed to favor one belief over another.

A final internalist suggestion to overcome the problem of providing an evidential connection between non-propositional experience and belief would have it that the feeling of warmth, together with my knowledge of the reliable connection between this feeling and my being warm, is sufficient to constitute evidence of my actually being warm. However, such a move would only invite the question where the knowledge of the reliable connection stems from. On what evidence is this knowledge in turn based? We would now be back in the evidential regress that sensory states were exactly meant to end.

One might therefore turn (slightly) externalist instead, and hold that a feeling of warmth is evidence for the belief that I am warm merely because it reliably indicates that I am, thereby no longer presupposing that I have to know about this connection. This cannot explain how experience provides *doxastic* justification though, or at least, it cannot on Feldman and Conee’s definition of it (WF). At best this might provide a way to define propositional justification: if a subject has access to a reliable indicator (evidence) that *p*, then he has propositional justification for the belief that *p*. But if the subject does not know of the connection between the reliable indicator and what it indicates, then he can hardly be said to hold his belief that *p* “on the basis of” (Feldman and Conee 1985, p. 24) this reliable indicator—after all, we supposed that the subject need not know of the reliable connection between the indicator and *p*.

Note that the problem here is not the fact that the supposed subject does not consciously take his feeling of warmth to be a reliable indication of the fact that he is warm. As mentioned before, one can base one’s belief on some evidential justifier without realizing that one is doing so, as can be the case with unconscious biases. The problem in this case is that, even when the subject is presented with his supposed evidential justifier, i.e., the reliably indicating non-propositional experience, then he would still not be able to understand its connection to what it reliably indicates in the absence of any knowledge of this connection. This might not be obvious in the case of feeling warm, but it becomes more obvious when we look at different examples. For instance, take the following example from Jack Lyons:

Suppose a mad neurosurgeon rearranges some of my neural connections while I sleep, in such a way that excessive pressure on my right big toe now reliably causes a sensation of warmth on my left cheek, but for some reason, I’m prone to infer from this that there’s pressure on my right big toe. Suppose that the cheek sensation only occurs when there is pressure on the toe. Supposing that I have no idea that this odd connection holds, the intuitive verdict is that the belief is not *prima facie* justified.

(Lyons 2009, p. 64)

If one supposes that experiences can do their evidential work without having propositional content, but simply on the basis of reliable indication, then the

example should be one in which the subject does turn out to have a justified belief. Yet this is clearly not the case, because it seems that the evidential connection should somehow be understandable by the subject in question. This is an important difference with the case of unconscious bias: once someone tells me that my belief that the candidate is unfit for the job is based on a biased belief I have against this candidate, then I will be able to understand the evidential connection between the biased belief and the opinion about the candidate—even if I still don't accept that I actually have this biased belief. Being able to understand evidential connections does not mean that one is always aware of them.

The only process that could be going on between the reliable indicator and the belief, in the absence of knowledge about the connection between indicator and what it indicates, seems to be a purely causal rather than evidential process. Of course we could choose to use 'basing' and 'evidence' in this externalist way, but this would then describe a justificatory process that is quite different from standard cases of evidential justification, where, say, someone believes that q on the basis of the belief that p and the belief that if p , then q . So instead of providing an illuminating account of perceptual justification, this way of putting matters would actually obscure important differences between cases of evidential and non-evidential justifiers.

So far we have only considered the question of how a single non-propositional state could constitute evidence for a specific proposition. The situation only gets worse once one focuses on the question of when a doxastic attitude fits an entire body of evidence. The idea is that a complete body of evidence could favor or disfavor (or neither) a certain proposition. But then some sort of logical interaction between different pieces of evidence seems to be necessary to determine whether the complete body of evidence favors a proposition or not. Now suppose that there are non-propositional sensory states among the complete body of evidence. Then it is entirely unclear how these should be weighed in combination with, say, propositional beliefs. If I believe that the store is open on Monday, but you tell me that the store is closed on Monday, then your testimony contradicts my belief. My belief has the content that p , while your testimony has the content that $\neg p$. But there would be no such contradiction in content between my feeling of warmth and my belief that I am cold. If there is a different kind of tension between these two things, then it would be nice to have some sort of theory about it. And once one even allows feelings of confidence or certainty into the evidence mix (which is hinted at several times by Conee and Feldman⁸), then there even is an extra non-propositional factor to make the weighing process more difficult.

The problem of making clear how a non-propositional state could serve as evidence for a specific proposition, and the problem of explaining how a certain doxastic attitude could fit an evidence set which consisted partly out of non-propositional states, appear to be serious problems for the evidentialist view as proposed by Feldman and Conee. Note that my claim is not that non-propositional sensory states could never contribute to the justification of beliefs. My claim is

⁸See their collection of essays (2004a), pp. 70, 76, 112, 238–9.

merely that it is entirely unclear how non-propositional states could *evidentially* justify certain beliefs—exactly the worry raised by the first horn of the above Sellarsian dilemma. This leaves open whether they contribute to the justification of beliefs without serving as evidence for them by, for instance, reliably causing them. Indeed, the theory I will defend in the final chapters is fully compatible with this idea.

2.5 Evidentialist Reliabilism

In the previous section we saw that evidentialism had major problems in explaining how non-propositional states could evidentially justify beliefs. Juan Comesaña has recognized some of these problems, and proposes a specific synthesis of reliabilism and evidentialism, called *evidentialist reliabilism*, to solve them (Comesaña 2010).⁹

First of all, Comesaña proposes the following clear alternative account of fitting the evidence:

Reliabilist Fit Necessarily, believing that p fits e for subject S if and only if:

1. e doesn't include any beliefs of S and the connection between S 's having e and p is actually reliable; or
2. e includes beliefs of S , all of these beliefs are justified, and the connection between S 's having e and p is conditionally actually reliable.

(Comesaña 2010, p. 581)

Notice that Comesaña distinguishes between a reliable connection and a conditionally reliable connection between S 's having e and p 's being true.¹⁰ The former requires that S 's having e is mostly connected to p 's being true, while the latter requires that S 's having e is mostly connected to p 's being true *given that all of the beliefs in e are true*.

Comesaña gives a similar account of when disbelieving that p fits the evidence (just substitute $\neg p$ for p in the two clauses), and defines suspension of judgment as a fitting attitude when neither believing nor disbelieving fits the evidence. The benefit of this account of evidence-fit is that it need not consider any logical connections between different pieces of evidence, but can instead focus on the connection between the subject's *having* some collection of beliefs and sensory states, and the truth (or falsity) of the proposition in question. Thus, the previous problem of evidence-weighting disappears.

Yet this externalist account of fit also encounters similar worries as the earlier externalist suggestion, having to do with a subject's own perspective on his

⁹It is also meant to solve some problems for reliabilism, to wit, the problem of Clairvoyance (mentioned in Sect. 2.2.2), and the Generality Problem (which will be discussed in Chap. 5).

¹⁰For our purposes we won't focus on Comesaña's point that the connection needs to be (conditionally) *actually* reliable, where 'actually' is understood as having a two-dimensional semantics (Comesaña 2010, p. 579).

evidence. This will be clearer when we look at the full theory developed by Comesaña:

Evidentialist Reliabilism A belief that p by S is justified if and only if:

1. S has evidence e ;
2. the belief that p by S is based on e ; and either
 - (a) e doesn't include any beliefs and the type *producing a belief that p based on evidence e* is actually reliable; or
 - (b) e includes other beliefs of S , all of those beliefs are justified and the type *producing a belief that p based on evidence e* is conditionally actually reliable.

(Comesaña 2010, p. 584)

Now consider the following case. A subject is told by a reliable source that p is the case. In being told that p is the case, the subject presumably undergoes a specific sort of auditory experience. However, the specific auditory experience in this case is, unbeknownst to the subject, actually reliably connected with $\neg p$ because the specific tone of voice indicates that the source is lying. Let's further suppose that the subject has no beliefs about the reliability of the source to make sure that condition (b) does not spring into action (this is a simplifying assumption that could probably be dropped). What results would Comesaña's account have in this specific case?

First, let's look at what Comesaña's account predicts about evidence-fit. For now, let's suppose that the only relevant evidence is the auditory experience in question. Given that having this specific auditory experience is reliably connected to $\neg p$, disbelieving that p would now fit the evidence. There seems to be no problem with talking this way, given that we are viewing things from the externalist perspective.

Let's go on to look at what beliefs will be justified for the subject under consideration. Suppose the subject, not unnaturally, believes that p because of what his source told him. The type in question, believing that p on the basis of having this specific auditory experience, is actually unreliable. So the subject does not have a justified belief that p . Again, from an externalist perspective this might not be such a bad result: although the subject himself thinks he has a justified belief, the external conditions are such that he does not actually have a justified belief. The subject might be blameless in his belief, but not, unfortunately, justified.

However, suppose now that the subject actually believes that $\neg p$ on the basis of his auditory experience. He typically does not do so when people tell him that p , but in this particular case, he just happens to do it. The belief-forming type in question now becomes reliable, because $\neg p$ is actually reliably connected to the specific evidence. This means that, on Comesaña's account, the subject under consideration turns out to have a justified belief that $\neg p$. But even from an externalist perspective, this is an unintuitive result. The subject has no reason to base exactly that belief on the evidence he has, at least when the evidence is viewed from his own perspective.

Note that it won't help Comesaña's account if one adds additional beliefs to the evidence set e . For instance, suppose that the subject not only has the specific auditory experience he has, but also believes that he has just been told that p . We can assume that this belief is justified on the basis of the auditory experience, and so

it can rightfully be taken to be part of the evidence. Given that there are now beliefs in e , we should take into consideration clause (b) which deals with conditional reliability. However, this new evidence set e is also conditionally reliably connected to $\neg p$: even when it is true that one has just been told that p , the specific auditory experience in question will still be reliably connected to $\neg p$ rather than p . So if the subject believes that $\neg p$ on the basis of his auditory experience and his belief that he has just been told that p , then the subject's belief is still justified according to Comesaña's account. Of course, the result one would like to have is that the subject's belief that he has been told that p works as a *defeater* for the justification of his belief that $\neg p$. But this result simply cannot be had in Comesaña's theory.

Another response to the example under consideration might focus on the fact that testimonial justification cannot be reduced to justification that arises out of auditory experiences. Where the example has gone wrong, according to this response, is in its supposition that testimonial justification can be reduced to perceptual justification. Although this non-reductivism about testimony might be correct, this does not seriously affect the example against Comesaña's account. First of all, whether or not one wants to classify it as *testimonial* evidence, the auditory experience remains some sort of evidence for $\neg p$. Second, even if one wants to include the perhaps irreducible evidential fact that someone testified that p in the evidence set, then one is left with an evidence set that will, in its entirety, still be reliably connected to $\neg p$ rather than p . So the problem remains.

Finally, one might also think that all of this is just an instance of the *generality problem*: what exactly is the type of belief-forming process at work here?¹¹ Is it believing on the basis of testimony, believing on the basis of auditory experiences, believing on the basis of these specific auditory experiences, etc.? However, Comesaña's account is exactly meant as a way of responding to this problem, as the relevant belief-forming types in his account are specified as *producing a belief that p based on evidence e* .

Instead of appealing to the generality problem, I suggest that what has gone wrong has to do with the combination of a very liberal externalist conception of evidence and a rather vague notion of basing. To compare: it's one thing to say that the growth rings of trees are evidence for a tree's age because they reliably indicate that age, but quite another to say that a subject is evidentially justified in believing that the tree is of a certain age *on the basis of* the amount of growth rings if the subject does not have any justified beliefs about the connection between growth rings and age. What one could do to overcome this problem is to restrict the notion of 'evidence' or 'basing' in such a way that a subject is required to have justified beliefs about the relation between the evidence and the beliefs it supports. But of course this merely leads back to the regress we encountered earlier: if perceptual beliefs require justified higher-order beliefs in order to be justified, then it is totally unclear how these higher-order beliefs in turn could be justified.

¹¹I will discuss this problem in more detail in Chap. 5.

The fact that the notions of ‘evidence’ or ‘basing’ are, without further restriction, problematic for evidentialist reliabilism also shows up once we consider one of its purported motivations.¹² Comesaña believes that his evidentialist reliabilism, unlike alternative reliabilist accounts, is able to escape the Clairvoyance Problem mentioned in Sect. 2.2.2. According to Comesaña, “[...] one crucial feature of BonJour’s example is that Norman has no evidence for or against his clairvoyant powers, or regarding the whereabouts of the President—the belief just “pops up” in his head” (Comesaña 2010, p. 582). Evidentialist reliabilism is supposed to solve this problem by explicitly making evidence necessary for justified belief, thereby excluding Norman from having a justified belief regarding the whereabouts of the President. The problem is, though, that with Comesaña’s liberal conception of evidence, there is no reason to assume that Norman did not have any evidence for his beliefs. Norman’s clairvoyant faculty is assumed to work reliable, so there will probably be some cognitive mechanism at work that tracks, say, the changes in energy waves and outputs beliefs about the future. Nothing excludes that Norman has unconscious representations that reliably indicate that such-and-such is going to happen, so nothing excludes that Norman has evidence that such-and-such is going to happen.¹³

For the same reason, evidentialist reliabilism cannot be motivated by appealing to the Blindsight Intuition mentioned in Sect. 2.2.2. According to the Blindsight Intuition, Bill, our hypothetical blindsighted subject, lacks justification for his perceptual beliefs, and evidentialism could explain this by pointing to the fact that Bill lacks experiential evidence. But if having evidence that p merely requires that a subject has a certain mental state which reliably indicates that p , then Bill can still be said to have evidence that p . This means that evidentialist reliabilism, construed with a liberal notion of evidence, cannot explain why Bill would have unjustified perceptual beliefs.

To overcome this problem, evidentialist reliabilism would have to incorporate some kind of an extra requirement on evidence. A consciousness requirement which says that all evidence has to be conscious, seems too strong: surely an evidentialist would want to allow that one can base beliefs on evidence without consciously inferring those beliefs from the evidence. For instance, a mathematician who immediately ‘sees’ the solution to a certain difficult mathematical problem should turn out to have based his belief on his previous mathematical knowledge—even if he was not consciously aware of it.

An accessibility demand on evidence seems more promising, but has its own problems. For instance, one could say that a subject has evidence that p if and only if he is able to have introspective access to a certain mental state that reliably indicates

¹²I will focus on the notion of evidence in my discussion, but one could equally make the point by asking for the correct conditions for basing a belief on the evidence.

¹³In fact, as remarked above (Sect. 2.2.2), even if Norman were to have some kind of evidence in the form of a specific sort of clairvoyant experience, then he might still appear to have unjustified beliefs.

that *p*. But now the notion of ‘access’ seems to set us in the direction of the earlier regress again. Having introspective access to a certain mental state seems to be best spelled out in epistemic terms, namely, that one has some justified beliefs about that mental state acquired via introspection (Fumerton 1995, p. 64). But where does the evidence for these justified beliefs then stem from? What’s more, one might not want to take a stand on the empirical thesis that all of our perceptual beliefs are based on such accessible evidence: why not think that we can e.g., recognize things and people for what they are without having access to the properties on the basis of which we recognized them?

These considerations seem to be sufficient to place a large burden of proof on proponents of evidentialist reliabilism. Without a good refinement of the notion of ‘evidence’ (or of ‘basing’), evidentialist reliabilism will have counter-intuitive results and will not be motivated by the Blindsight Intuition. Moreover, the necessary refinement does not appear to be forthcoming, given that some of the most likely candidates lead to problems. In combination with the fact that standard evidentialism has no satisfactory account of fit, the non-propositional evidentialist take on perceptual justification is definitely in trouble.

2.6 Conclusion

I have started this chapter with describing two motivations in favor of experientialism, the view that perceptual justification has to do with having sufficient experiential evidence for one’s beliefs. These motivations arise from its ability to accommodate two intuitions about perceptual justification, to wit, the New Evil Demon Intuition and the Blindsight Intuition. By appealing to the sufficiency of experiential evidence for perceptual justification, experientialism is able to explain why radically deceived subjects like Ned are still justified in their perceptual beliefs. By appealing to the necessity of experiential evidence for perceptual justification, experientialism is able to explain why a blindsighted subject like Bill lacks perceptual justification.

However, experientialism also faces a version of the Sellarsian dilemma. On the one hand, if experiences are construed as non-propositional, then it is entirely unclear how they can *evidentially* justify perceptual beliefs. On the other hand, if experiences are construed as propositional, then it appears ad hoc to claim that they can evidentially justify beliefs without being in need of justification themselves. Although there surely are instances of justification in which the justifier is not itself propositional or justified (think of reliability or coherence), it is also clear that these are not cases of evidential justification. This makes this version of the Sellarsian dilemma, in terms of evidential and non-evidential justification, much harder to refute.

Evidentialism grasps the first horn of this Sellarsian dilemma. It holds that a subject has a justified belief if and only if it is based on evidence that fits the doxastic attitude of belief. For some cases of perception, this plausibly comes

down to the idea that a subject has a justified belief if and only if it is based on non-propositional experience. Unfortunately, evidentialism is unable to overcome the problems associated with the horn of non-propositionality. First, it does not explain how certain non-propositional sensory states could serve as evidence for some beliefs but not others in the absence of propositional content logically linking the states to the beliefs. Second, it does not explain how to determine which doxastic attitudes fit the evidence, given that the evidence can consist partly out of non-propositional states.

Evidentialist reliabilism is meant as an improvement of reliabilism by employing a reliabilist notion of evidence-fit. However, without restricting the notion of evidence far more than its reliabilist roots would suggest, evidentialist reliabilism will give counter-intuitive verdicts about justification and will lose the motivation stemming from the Blindsight Intuition. Moreover, the correct restriction of the notion of evidence is not easily available, as two obvious candidates, consciousness and accessibility, both lead to problems. Thus, evidentialism appears in trouble on either variant of it.

This naturally leads to the question of whether it would be better to go for the second horn of the Sellarsian dilemma. Perhaps a version of experientialism can be upheld if we assume experiences to be propositional. The next chapter will focus on one popular internalist alternative that tries to develop such a view: dogmatism.

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