

Preface

We're all probably familiar with certain common perceptual illusions: the black tie bought in the shop turns out to be dark blue, the monster in the bedroom is just the shadow of a tree in the backyard, and no one actually called your name even though it sounded just like it. Although you would probably make a false judgment in these circumstances, you appear to have a good reason for it: you consciously experienced the world as being that way. That is, even though you did not *know* that such-and-so was the case (because you were actually wrong), at least you were *justified* in your belief.

This notion of *perceptual justification*, and its relation to conscious experience and reasons, will be the main topic of investigation in this book. Let me note immediately that I do not want to commit myself to there being different kinds of justification (perceptual, memorial, inferential, etc.). I just want to focus on the justification that typically arises in successful cases of perception, whether or not this justification is of a special kind. I take it that justification is a property which gives beliefs a certain kind of positive epistemic value while remaining weaker than knowledge: a justified belief is one which is epistemically better than an unjustified belief even if for some reason it does not amount to knowledge. I'm not too concerned with whether "justification" is the right term for this, perhaps some would prefer "entitlement" or "warrant" or some other word. What I'm investigating is simply that property which typically gives perceptual beliefs their positive epistemic status, and I'll refer to that property with the term "justification."

I take this to be an interesting notion to investigate for several reasons. First of all, perception is one of our fundamental ways of gaining knowledge about the world. Given that many people take justification to be a necessary condition for knowledge, an investigation of perceptual justification could help to better our understanding of the fundamental source of knowledge that perception is. Furthermore, an investigation of perceptual justification helps to shed light on the nature of justification (and knowledge) in general, given the important role perception plays in the acquisition of many of our beliefs. If a theory of justification is unsuccessful for the case of perception, then it can be a radically incomplete theory at best. At worst, it simply is completely mistaken.

But not only is perception one of *our* fundamental sources of knowledge, it also appears to be a fundamental source of knowledge for less cognitively sophisticated epistemic agents, such as small children and animals. It would be nice to have a theory of justification that could secure the continuity between these unsophisticated cognizers and ourselves while also allowing for some important differences because of the level of cognitive sophistication. Such a strategy seems important not only for epistemology, but also for, say, philosophy of mind and action theory. If one focuses too much on the peculiarities of how we, adult human agents, are related to the relevant *analysandum*, then one's overall theory is likely to become too demanding to work for unsophisticated cognizers. This might not always be a bad result, but at least for the case of epistemology, this looks like a problem.

The externalist view of perceptual justification that I aim to defend is one that seeks to accommodate the possibility of animal knowledge, a virtue that has commonly been stressed as a motivation for externalist views in general. But it also attempts to make room for the peculiarities of human belief formation in acknowledgement of the fact that there are some important differences between sophisticated and unsophisticated agents. Not only does such a view combine two elements that are *prima facie* desirable in any epistemological theory, it will also help to solve some classic problems for externalism and some general problems for any theory of (perceptual) justification.

One important aspect of this approach has to do with distinguishing between evidential and non-evidential justification. Sometimes we come to justifiably believe new things on the basis of other things we know; this latter knowledge would then act as evidence for our new beliefs, making the cases into instances of evidential justification. For instance, I can come to justifiably believe that you won't be on time for dinner by reflecting on the fact that you told me that you had a meeting at 6 PM and the fact that your meetings tend to take a long time. However, there might also be instances in which I come to have justified beliefs without these beliefs being based on any evidence, which are instances of non-evidential justification. The main thesis of this book is that perceptual justification is best construed as such a form of non-evidential justification: whenever we perceptually experience that something is the case, we (normally) just thereby also believe that it is the case, without having to base those beliefs on the relevant perceptual experiences. In such a case, the justifier of the belief is a non-evidential one, namely, the reliability of the perceptual process. Of course, when challenged, we might supply additional *evidential* justifiers for our perceptual beliefs. For instance, if someone challenges my claim to know that there is some milk left in the fridge, I could respond by saying that I *saw* that there was some milk left in the fridge. The important point, though, is that even if we can cite and use this additional evidence to justify our perceptual beliefs, this does not mean that we needed the additional evidence to make our beliefs justified in the first place. It does mean that we, sophisticated cognizers, have justifiers at our disposal that are not available to less sophisticated ones.

This latter aspect is related to what is distinctive for sophisticated cognizers: the capability for higher-order thought. Not only do we often see, and thereby know, that such-and-so is the case, we normally also know *that we are seeing*

that such-and-so is the case. And for this type of higher-order knowledge, a similar question arises as before: is this knowledge best analyzed as depending on evidential justification on the basis of experience, or is it better seen as depending on non-evidential justification? Again, the preferable answer is the latter one. It is a mistake to think that conscious experience itself provides evidence on the basis of which we conclude that we are currently seeing that such-and-so is the case, a mistake that lies at the bottom of some persistent philosophical problems. Once one accepts the possibility of non-evidential justification for first-order and higher-order beliefs, one can answer these philosophical problems and present a persuading externalist account of perceptual justification.

This externalist view does limit the role of conscious experience in epistemology. In effect, the view argues that reliability is far more important for perceptual justification than conscious experience, something that seems to go against some of our *prima facie* intuitions about justification. That is why I start with a critical discussion of contemporary theories of perceptual justification that argue in favor of the idea of experiential evidence and leave discussion of my own preferred externalist alternative until later.

The precise outline of the book will be as follows. Chapter 1 introduces the theories of perceptual justification to be discussed in relation to a challenge that arises from the indistinguishability of perception and hallucination. Each of these theories will highlight different aspects of perception, namely, conscious experience, higher-order belief, and reliability of the perceptual process.

Chapters 2 and 3 are both devoted to *experientialist* views of perceptual justification, which hold that perceptual experiences justify perceptual beliefs by acting as their evidence. Chapter 2 is devoted to variants of *evidentialism*, which hold that perceptual experience can fulfill its evidential role without having propositional content. Chapter 3 is devoted to variants of *dogmatism*, which hold that a perceptual experience with the propositional content that *p* is sufficient for immediate (*prima facie*) justification of the belief that *p*. The overall problem for these experientialist views will be presented in the form of a (Sellarsian) dilemma: if a perceptual experience lacks propositional content, then it is entirely unclear how it can serve as evidence for belief, but if a perceptual experience has propositional content, then one has to explain how it is able to do so without being justified itself.

Chapter 4 discusses variants of *epistemological disjunctivism*. According to these accounts, perceptual justification has to do with having access to factive reasons of the form “I see that *p*.” Epistemological disjunctivism thus holds, in agreement with experientialism, that perceptual justification has to do with having evidence, but in contrast with experientialism, it takes this evidence to consist in factive reasons. The largest problem I present for this view is that of hyper-intellectualization: having access to factive reasons plausibly requires having the capacity for higher-order beliefs, which is too cognitively demanding for unsophisticated epistemic agents. This chapter thus not only critically discusses an alternative account of evidential perceptual justification, it also starts the discussion of the role of higher-order beliefs in perceptual justification.

After displaying the problems of several accounts of perceptual justification that connect justification to evidence, Chap. 5 introduces a non-evidential view of justification: *process reliabilism*. The first part of this chapter focuses on the classic account of process reliabilism, which holds that the reliability of a specific type of belief-forming process determines whether a belief is justified. The second part discusses two alternatives to this classic account, i.e., inferentialist reliabilism and proper functionalism, in the light of the well-known New Evil Demon Problem (which argues against the necessity of reliability for justification) and Clairvoyance Problem (which argues against the sufficiency of reliability for justification).

In Chap. 6 I integrate several insights from epistemological disjunctivism, inferentialist reliabilism, and proper functionalism to account for the Clairvoyance Problem and New Evil Demon Problem. Although Chap. 4 shows that higher-order beliefs should not be taken as necessary for perceptual justification, they can still play a role in providing additional evidential justification for perceptual beliefs as long as they are the output of reliable introspective mechanisms. What's more, the fact that we have these introspective mechanisms can also be used to explain, first, how perceptual beliefs get defeated in cases of clairvoyance and, second, why we would overestimate the importance of experience in providing perceptual justification—thereby leading to the mistaken New Evil Demon Intuition. With the Clairvoyance and New Evil Demon Problem out of the way, I conclude that a non-evidential theory of perceptual justification definitely comes out on top.

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