

# The Non-Evidential Nature of Perceptual Experience

## Abstract

Most internalist views hold that experience provides *evidential* justification for perceptual belief, although there are different ideas about how experience is able to provide this justification. Evidentialism holds that experiences can act as evidence for belief without having propositional content, while dogmatism holds that only an experience with the content that  $p$  can provide *prima facie* justification for the belief that  $p$ . I argue that both views succumb to a version of the well-known Sellarsian dilemma: it's entirely unclear how an experience could act as evidence for belief without having propositional content, and it is ad hoc to claim that experiences with propositional content can act as evidence for belief without explaining why these experiences need not be justified themselves. The way out of the dilemma lies in accepting the non-evidential nature of perceptual experience.

**Keywords:** dogmatism; evidentialism; Sellarsian dilemma; perceptual justification; externalism

## 1 Introduction

Suppose that you want to know whether your neighbors are in. You look out the window and see that all the lights are off and that there is no car in the driveway. Under these circumstances it seems natural to say that perception has provided you with evidence for the belief that your neighbors are not at home. It's not entirely clear what constitutes this evidence though. It might consist of the fact that the car is not in the driveway and the fact that the lights are off. It might also consist of your knowledge of these facts, or merely of your believing these things. Finally, your perceptual experience itself might constitute a large part of the evidence for the belief that your neighbors are not at home. Whatever the precise nature of the evidence, it seems plausible that any good account of why you have a justified belief that the neighbors are not at home will have to say something about the evidence you had. But it's also plausible that the case at hand is not one about *immediate*, or *non-inferential* justification. Your belief seems to depend too heavily on an inference that takes the car's not being in the driveway and the lights' being off as premises for the conclusion that the neighbors are not at home. So let's look instead at a belief that might follow more directly from your perceptual experience, viz. the belief that the lights are off. Is it also plausible that this belief is evidentially justified?

Most internalists would answer this question affirmatively. On their account, what constitutes the evidence for our most basic perceptual beliefs is perceptual experience itself. In contrast, some externalists, most notably Jack Lyons (Lyons, 2009a), hold that experience does not provide *evidential* justification for perceptual belief, and is instead only a contingent part of a reliable cognitive process which results in perceptual belief. Justification arises because of the reliability of the entire perceptual process, and not because experience constitutes sufficient evidence.

Although this idea is quite controversial, Lyons presents a large problem for internalists and externalists who hold the contrary: they have to overcome a version of the well-known Sellarsian dilemma (Lyons, 2008, 2009a). Either experience is non-propositional and therefore unable to serve as evidence for belief, or it is propositional but in need of justification itself before it can serve as evidence for belief.<sup>1</sup>

In this paper I expound on Lyons' argument by discussing two versions of internalism which each grasp a different horn of the dilemma. Evidentialism, as proposed by Richard Feldman and Earl Conee (1985), holds that experiences can act as evidence without having propositional content, while dogmatism, as proposed by James Pryor (2000; 2004) and Michael Huemer (2001), holds that a perceptual experience with the content that  $p$  provides immediate *prima facie* justification for the belief that  $p$ .<sup>2</sup> I argue that both theories succumb to the problems outlined above. Evidentialism does not make clear how non-propositional states could serve as evidence for belief, especially given their pivotal notion of 'fitting the evidence'. Dogmatism remains ad hoc without an explanation of what it is about perceptual experience that enables it to provide justification without being itself justified. Given these problems for the internalist views, Lyons' controversial thesis, that perceptual experience is non-evidential in nature, starts to look more and more plausible. In the final section of this paper, I discuss two externalist views that can accommodate this thesis, and end with a suggestion for their improvement.

## 2 Evidentialism

Feldman and Conee characterize their evidentialist position about justification with the help of the following biconditional (Evidentialist Justification):

**EJ** 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**  $S$ '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

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<sup>1</sup>I want to be neutral on what it exactly means to be a propositional state (a state with propositional content), but I will assume that if a state is conceptual, then it is also propositional.

<sup>2</sup>Note that Huemer's theory is actually about immediate justification in general (not just about perceptual justification) and is called 'phenomenal conservatism' in its full generality.

- (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 questions left 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, fn. 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.

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, 2004, 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. 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.<sup>3</sup> The proposition *that* an experience with such-and-such properties occurs 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, it seems that the event of my having a headache is again not the same as the experience of the headache itself, so we would no longer retain Feldman and Conee’s idea that experiences themselves can act as evidence for belief. And that is exactly the thesis that is currently under consideration. Moreover, Pryor’s suggestion excludes the possibility that I have a justified *but false* belief about my own experience, given that there will then be no event relevantly similar in structure to the content of my belief.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>See (Williamson, 2000, pp. 194-200) for this kind of argument in favor of the thought that all evidence is propositional.

<sup>4</sup>Lyons (2009b) uses this argument against any theory of introspection which holds that introspective beliefs are justified by experiential evidence.

Laurence BonJour (2003) 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, fn. 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 second-order awareness of our experience, i.e., a second-order belief that we have an experience with such-and-such properties, then this just pushes the question about evidence and propositionality one step further back. 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.

A final internalist suggestion to overcome the problem of providing an evidential connection between non-propositional experience to 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 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. At best this might provide a way to define propositional justification: if a subject has access to a reliable indicator 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  $p$ . Of course we could choose to use ‘basing’ and ‘evidence’ in this externalist way, but this would then describe a justificatory process that is still different from the way in which one might hold a belief 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 the ways in which one can arrive at a justified belief.

So far we have only considered the question of how a single non-propositional state could serve as evidence for a specific proposition. The situation only gets worse once one focuses on the question of when a doxastic attitude fits a 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 Feldman<sup>5</sup>), then there even is an extra non-propositional factor to make the weighing process more difficult.

Again the externalist turn might seem to provide some help. Take the following suggestion by Juan Comesaña:

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).

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 fitness 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-weighing disappears. Yet this externalist account of fit also encounters similar worries as the earlier externalist suggestion. It's possible that the evidence seems to indicate that  $p$  from the subject's perspective, even though having the evidence is, in fact, actually reliably connected with  $\neg p$ . For instance, suppose that a subject has an auditory experience of a reliable source telling him that  $p$ , but that having this specific auditory experience is actually reliably connected to  $\neg p$  because (unbeknownst to the subject) the specific tone of voice indicates that the source is lying. On Comesaña's account, disbelieving that  $p$  would now fit the evidence. Hence, the subject would be justified in disbelieving  $p$  and unjustified in believing  $p$  on the basis of his evidence. Yet surely, the subject in question would be doing something irrational if he disbelieved  $p$  on the basis of his auditory experience, as he has no idea of the connection between tone of voice and lying.

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 decisive 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 merely that it is entirely unclear how non-propositional states could *evidentially* justify certain beliefs. This leaves open whether they contribute to the justification of beliefs without serving as evidence for them by, for instance, reliably causing them.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, in the last section of this paper I present an externalist alternative that is fully compatible with this idea.

### 3 Dogmatism

So far we have considered evidentialism, which holds that perceptual experience can provide evidential justification without having any propositional content. This theory thus grasps the first

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<sup>5</sup>See their collection of essays (2004), p. 70, 76, 112, 238-9.

<sup>6</sup>See (Lyons, 2009a, pp. 21–26) for more on the distinction between evidential and non-evidential justifiers, and evidential and non-evidential justification.

horn of the Sellarsian dilemma, and is indeed faced with the difficult challenge of explaining how a non-propositional state could provide any evidential justification. In contrast, dogmatism grasps the second horn of the dilemma, and holds that perceptual experience does have propositional content that is important for evidential justification. Its view can be summarized by the following conditional (Dogmatist Justification):

**DJ** If  $S$  has a perceptual experience that  $p$ , then  $S$  has immediate *prima facie* justification for the belief that  $p$  (Pryor, 2000, 2004; Huemer, 2001).

According to dogmatism, justification is immediate in the sense that a subject can have justification for the belief that  $p$  without being in need of any evidence or justification to believe some other proposition. The thought is that you do not need to be justified in believing that you are not a brain in a vat to have justification for the belief that you have two hands. All you need for the latter is to have a perceptual experience that you have two hands.

Second, dogmatism holds that the justification arising out of experience is *prima facie*: experiential justification can be defeated by additional evidence. For instance, if I know that the two lines in the Müller-Lyer illusion only appear to be of a different length, then this knowledge defeats my *prima facie* experiential justification for the belief that the lines are of a different length. As the theory holds that perceptual experience is propositional, there is no longer a problem in claiming that additional evidence can e.g., contradict, and thereby defeat, perceptual experience.

Third, most dogmatists hold that their thesis is *necessarily* true in virtue of an experience's phenomenology.<sup>7</sup> Although one could, in principle, be a reliabilist dogmatist on the grounds that it is contingently true that an experience that  $p$  is reliably related to the belief that  $p$ , I am only concerned with the former *phenomenalist* version of dogmatism (Chudnoff, 2011).

The fact that, according to dogmatism, you merely need to *have* a perceptual experience that  $p$  to have justification for the belief that  $p$  might lead one to conclude that the experience is not really acting as evidence after all. One might feel confident in this conclusion especially because Pryor explicitly claims that “it would be misleading to call these experiences your ‘evidence’ for belief” (Pryor, 2000, p. 519). However, Pryor is here concerned with being misinterpreted as claiming that one needs to reason from premises about experiences to a conclusion about the world. Dogmatism is especially meant to resist such a strong demand for justification: the experience itself is what provides the justification for the belief, not any premises about the experience.

Moreover, the focus on having an experience that  $p$  also arises because, again, the discussion is directed at *propositional* justification. Once one starts discussing doxastic justification, it becomes clear that more is required than just having an experience that  $p$ . The subject in question should also base his belief that  $p$  on the experience that  $p$  in the right way. For instance, the belief that  $p$  won't be justified, despite a subject's having the experience that  $p$ , if the subject bases the belief on the fact that he likes the sound of  $p$ . What the basing requirement further demands of a subject is not entirely clear. According to Huemer, “when one apprehension, B, is based on another, A, A causes B *because* A (apparently) logically supports B” (Huemer, 2001, p. 56). Huemer clarifies this proposal with the following example: “I am disposed to infer that Liz isn't home from the fact that her phone rang eight times with no answer, only because the latter fact appears to me logically relevant to that conclusion” (*ibid*). This seems to suggest that a subject must somehow understand that his experience logically supports a certain belief to be justified in holding this belief on the basis of the experience. But this demand might be too strong to account for justified beliefs (and knowledge) of unsophisticated epistemic agents.

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<sup>7</sup>This is true of e.g. Pryor (2000; 2004), Huemer (2001), Tucker (2010), and Chudnoff (2011).

However one wants to deal with this issue exactly, it should be clear that dogmatism views experience as *evidentially* justifying belief. That is why it is important that experiences have propositional content: without it, the logical connection that Huemer takes to be important for evidential justification is not clearly present. But even though propositional content makes sure that it is possible to logically connect experiences to beliefs, it also brings with it some other requirements before they can *justify* those beliefs.

Take the case where my belief that  $q$  is justified by my belief that  $p$  and my belief that if  $p$ , then  $q$ . There is a clear logical connection between the former belief and the latter two in that it is logically entailed by them. Yet the belief will not be justified if the premise beliefs themselves are unjustified. This is basically the same point as made in discussing Feldman and Conee's account of what could constitute evidence, although it is no longer couched in those terms. The point is simply that a belief cannot evidentially justify another belief if it is itself unjustified. So there are at least some propositional states that need to be justified before they can evidentially justify another belief.

There are also propositional states that cannot confer evidential justification at all. Take desires and imaginations as an example. I might come to believe that  $p$  because of my strong desire that  $p$ , but this belief would surely not be justified. Similarly, simply imagining that  $p$  also cannot evidentially justify me in believing that  $p$ . Now one explanation of this fact is that *all* states need to be justified before they can provide any evidential justification (Lyons, 2009a, 74-5). This would preclude desires and imaginations from evidentially justifying beliefs not simply because they are not themselves beliefs, but rather because they are not the kind of states that can be justified. And if this explanation is correct, then the same goes for perceptual experience.

Even if one does not agree with this explanation, it does provide a challenge for dogmatism which puts the burden of proof back on its shoulders. Dogmatism needs to explain two things to provide a ground for their otherwise ad hoc claim that perceptual experience can evidentially justify belief. First, it needs to explain the difference between perceptual experience and non-justifying propositional states like desire and imagination that enables only the former to provide evidential justification. Second, it needs to explain the difference between perceptual experience and belief that enables only the former to provide evidential justification without being itself in need of justification. Call this the *Distinctiveness Problem* for dogmatism. Note that it will not help dogmatism to appeal to the non-propositional nature of experience to answer the Distinctiveness Problem, as this will only land the theory on the other, equally unsatisfying, horn of the Sellarsian dilemma.

Several phenomenal properties have been suggested with which one might answer the Distinctiveness Problem. Huemer (2001, pp. 77–79) claims that perceptual experience has the property of forcefulness: it not only has representational content but also presents this content as actualized. Pryor (2005, p. 357) holds that a perceptual experience has the distinctive phenomenology of “seeming to ascertain that a given proposition is true.” Chudnoff (2011) presents a theory according to which perceptual experience (and other seemings, like intuitions) has a presentational phenomenology: in having a perceptual experience “you both seem to fact-perceive that  $p$  and seem to be sensorily item-aware of an item that makes it the case that  $p$ ” (Chudnoff, 2011, p. 320). I extensively argue elsewhere that it is not clear whether all these proposed properties are really distinctive of perceptual experience, and that, even if they are, they might well be reducible to, or caused by, higher-order beliefs (Author, 2013). If the latter suggestion is true, then this is devastating to the dogmatist’s thesis, as it cannot solve the Distinctiveness Problem by invoking other beliefs for which no account of justification has been provided.

Another problem with the proposed phenomenal properties is that it’s not clear why these are *epistemically* relevant. If one wants to explain what is distinctive of perceptual experience

that enables it to provide evidential justification without being itself justified, then an explanation needs to appeal to a distinctive, epistemically relevant property. But why does it matter epistemically that an experience presents a certain representational content in a specific way? The dogmatist already accepts the second horn of the Sellarsian dilemma, that experiences have propositional content, to make sure that they can have familiar evidential relations to the propositions they supposedly justify. So why then still think that phenomenology can also make an epistemic difference? Although this question might be difficult, in the light of the externalist alternative it would be best if the dogmatist was able to answer it.

## 4 The Externalist Alternative

Each of the two discussed theories grasps a different horn of Lyons' (2008; 2009a) version of the Sellarsian dilemma without being able to overcome the problems associated with it. The way out of the dilemma is to reject the idea that perceptual experience provides evidential justification for belief. I'll briefly discuss two recent externalist alternatives that accommodate this idea, and suggest a way to improve on them.

### 4.1 Millar's higher-order recognitional account

The first externalist alternative is presented by Alan Millar (e.g., 2011), according to which the evidential justification for perceptual beliefs is provided by *factive* reasons along the following lines (Higher-Order Perceptual Justification):

**HOPJ** *S*'s perceptual belief that *p* is justified by *S*'s knowledge of the fact that *S* perceives that *p*.<sup>8</sup>

Although Millar agrees with the evidentialist and dogmatist that perceptual justification is evidential in nature, he has a radically different take on what constitutes this evidence. According to Millar, *knowledge* is the primitive notion in terms of which the notion of justified belief should be explained (Millar, 2011, pp. 337-8). The evidence for perceptual beliefs is not constituted by perceptual experience, but by higher-order knowledge of one's own situation.

For Millar, both first-order perceptual knowledge and higher-order knowledge of one's own situation have to do with the exercise of recognitional abilities. In the case of first-order perceptual knowledge, the relevant abilities are perceptual-recognitional abilities, which are ways of telling that certain things have certain properties from the way these things appear (Millar, 2011, p. 334). For instance, I have the ability to visually recognize tomatoes if I am able to tell that something is a tomato from the way it looks. However, I can only have this ability if tomatoes present a distinctive appearance, one that is a reliable indication of their being a tomato (Millar, 2011, p. 343). Perceptual-recognitional abilities are thus environment-dependent: if I live in an environment with lots of ringers for tomatoes, then I could not have a perceptual-recognitional ability for tomatoes. Moreover, even if I am in a favorable environment, I could still fail to *exercise* a perceptual-recognitional ability if I am unknowingly confronted with the only tomato-ringer in the entire country. According to Millar, exercising a perceptual-recognitional ability is a success-notion: I have only exercised it if I have actually recognized an object for what it is (Millar, 2011, p. 342).

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<sup>8</sup>To be precise, according to Millar *the fact* that I see that *p* is the reason for believing *p*, and this reason is *made available* to me if I know that I see that *p*. But I think that HOPJ will suffice for our purposes.

It is important to stress that Millar does *not* take perceptual knowledge to be based on evidence.<sup>9</sup> Although an object must have a distinctive appearance to ground a subject's perceptual-recognitional ability, this distinctive appearance does not act as evidence for the subject's belief that the object is, say, a tomato. The subject might not even be able to articulate on the basis of which precise features he is able to identify an object. So even though Millar agrees with dogmatists and evidentialists that perceptual *justification* is evidential in nature, he disagrees in taking perceptual *knowledge* to be non-evidential in nature.

In analogy with his theory for first-order perceptual-recognitional abilities, Millar also provides a theory for higher-order knowledge of one's own situation (Millar, 2011, p. 344). The relevant recognitional ability is in this case not a perceptual-recognitional ability, as one does not recognize that one is e.g., seeing that there are tomatoes in the basket on the basis of the appearance of the tomatoes and the basket. Still, one has a certain way of telling that one is seeing that there are tomatoes in the basket, i.e., a recognitional ability towards one's own situation. The exercise of this higher-order recognitional ability depends on the first-order ability in the following way: a subject can only recognize that he is seeing that *p* if he is in fact seeing that *p*. This again reflects Millar's idea that exercising a recognitional ability is a success notion.

Nevertheless, it is possible for someone to *believe* that he is seeing tomatoes in the basket, without actually seeing them. Given Millar's thesis that having a justified perceptual belief has to do with having a factive reason for this belief, this means that someone might think he has a reason for his perceptual belief which he does not in fact have. This could happen by being unwittingly in an unfavorable environment, or by being in a favorable environment while unwittingly looking at the only look-a-like in the neighborhood. In both these cases, a subject fails to exercise his recognitional abilities and thereby lacks perceptual knowledge and justification.

Millar's approach to knowledge and justification brings with it two related problems.<sup>10</sup> First, on Millar's account, having knowledge does not entail having a justified belief. Millar's theory does not exclude that there are cases in which we see that, and thereby know that, *p*, without recognizing that we see that *p*. Since first-order and higher-order knowledge have to do with different recognitional abilities, it surely is possible that someone exercises the former without exercising the latter. But that means that there are possible cases in which one has a knowledgeable belief without having justification for that belief, which goes against our ideas about the relation between knowledge and justification.

Second, Millar precludes unsophisticated believers from having *any* justified beliefs. Since unsophisticated believers are not able to form any higher-order beliefs, they will never have access to the factive reason that they are perceiving that *p*, and will therefore always lack justification for the perceptual belief that *p*. So although unsophisticated believers are able to have perceptual knowledge, they could never have perceptual justification according to Millar's account. These two problems, while maybe not knock-down objections to the theory, nevertheless provide a good reason to look for a possible alternative theory of perceptual knowledge and justification.

## 4.2 Lyons' inferentialist reliabilism

The second externalist alternative I'd like to discuss is Lyons' (2009a) inferentialist reliabilism. Although Millar rejected the idea that *perceptual experience* provides evidential justification for belief, he nonetheless retained the idea that perceptual beliefs are evidentially justified. Lyons, in contrast, goes one step further and altogether denies that perceptual beliefs are evidentially justified.

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<sup>9</sup>This is stressed in (Millar, 2010, pp. 121-22).

<sup>10</sup>These problems were brought to my attention by Christoph Kelp.

Like dogmatism, Lyons' inferentialist reliabilism takes perceptual beliefs to be epistemically basic: one need not have justification for other beliefs to have justification for perceptual beliefs. In fact, inferentialist reliabilism stresses that basic beliefs, which do *not* depend on evidential connections to other beliefs for their *prima facie* justification, should be clearly distinguished from non-basic beliefs, which do. Each class of beliefs has its own conditions for justification: reliability of the belief-forming process is sufficient for justification of basic beliefs, but the justification of non-basic beliefs requires at least conditional reliability of the belief-forming process *and* justification of the beliefs on which the non-basic beliefs are based (Lyons, 2009a, pp. 177-8).

The following conditional expresses Lyons ideas about the justification of basic beliefs, the class of beliefs to which perceptual beliefs belong (Inferentialist Reliabilist Basic Justification):

**IRBJ** If *S*'s belief that *p* is the result of the noninferential operation of a primal system, and the relevant process is reliable, then the belief that *p* is *prima facie* justified (Lyons, 2009a, p. 177).

On this theory, perceptual beliefs are *non-evidentially* justified by being the output of a specific sort of reliable process. It is able to overcome the classic problems of clairvoyance (Bonjour, 1980) and Mr. Truetemp (Lehrer, 1990), in which odd but reliable processes intuitively do not lead to justified beliefs, by the clause that the processes leading to basic beliefs must be carried out by a primal system. Such a primal system is a system that (a) is inferentially opaque, i.e., its output beliefs are formed cognitively spontaneous, and (b) has developed as the result of the interplay of learning and innate constraints (Lyons, 2009a, p. 136).

Condition (a) appears to be relevant for the definition of justified basic belief in a way that condition (b) is not. Just suppose that, in contrast with (a), I had access to the fact that some of my beliefs were used by my perceptual system in producing its outputs. Specifically, suppose that I could introspectively ascertain that Jack's looking angry was caused by my prior belief that Jack is angry.<sup>11</sup> In that case it seems that my belief that Jack looks angry would neither be epistemically basic, nor justified.

In contrast, condition (b) appears to be more ad hoc.<sup>12</sup> Although it excludes clairvoyance and Truetemp-style cases, there seems to be no general reason to suppose that a system must have developed as the result of an interplay of learning and innate constraints in order for it to produce justified, basic beliefs. To make this clear, let's first look at the original Truetemp case, and then proceed to a variation on it.

In the original case, Mr. Truetemp has, unbeknownst to him, recently been implanted with a device which reliably registers the specific temperature and reliably produces beliefs about this specific temperature (a 'tempucomp'). Truetemp accepts these beliefs without reflection, and thus comes to believe such facts as that it is now 104°F. Intuitively, Truetemp is not justified in his beliefs, even though they are the output of a reliable process. This case can thus be used as support for the claim that reliability by itself is insufficient for justification.

Lyons' way out of this problem is that Truetemp's tempucomp does not count as a primal system (as it did not develop in the right way), thereby making his beliefs about temperature non-basic. And, according to inferentialist reliabilism, reliability by itself is indeed insufficient for justification of *non-basic* beliefs. However, suppose that Mr. Truetemp *two* not only has a tempucomp implanted, but that his brain is also rewired in such a way that it is *as if* he has had this new sensory modality for quite some time, and as if he had fully adapted to it through

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<sup>11</sup>The example is from Susanna Siegel (2012).

<sup>12</sup>Note that Lyons himself is not necessarily adverse to dropping this condition (Lyons, 2009a, pp. 164-5).

learning.<sup>13</sup> Truetemptwo's new sense modality is fully integrated with his other senses, and Truetemptwo trusts in the output of his tempucomp just as he trusts in the output of his other senses. In fact, the surgery is such a success that Truetemptwo does not even notice any relevant difference between his tempucomp and his other senses.

Truetemptwo appears to be justified in his beliefs even though his tempucomp still does not count as a primal system — something that Lyons has to deny given his full theory of justification (Lyons, 2009a, pp. 177-8). Truetemptwo did not acquire the system through (a combination of) learning or innate development, but had it instead implanted into the brain as if he had learned to sense with it. Although this example might appear artificial, the point it makes can also be developed with other cases. For instance, suppose that an unsophisticated believer, a creature only capable of first-order belief, developed a tempucomp-like sense because of exposure to radiation. It had always been capable of feeling heat, but could now discriminate temperatures far more precisely. On the basis of this new sense it forms the belief that its favorite food is located at places with precisely *this* temperature, and even manages to locate more food on the basis of this belief. The intuitive pull to judge this creature to be unjustified in its beliefs appears to be less strong than in the original Truetemp-case. This suggests that the intuitions about justification in Truetemp-style cases do not have anything to do with the fact that the beliefs are not the output of primal systems, but rather, that it has something to do with the higher-order beliefs of the epistemic agents in question.

### 4.3 Higher-order Defeat

The latter suggestion can be cashed out by taking higher-order beliefs to be capable of *defeating* first-order perceptual beliefs. Although the suggestion that Truetemp-style cases can be dealt with by appealing to the notion of defeat is hardly new (e.g., Goldman 1986, pp. 111-2; Greco 2003, p. 475) it is interesting to see how this proposal combines the good aspects of both Millar's and Lyons' account without falling prey to the problems I mentioned. Moreover, what I will be suggesting about higher-order defeat also differs in some crucial aspects from what others have proposed.

Millar plausibly claims that we, human believers, normally know that we are perceiving that *p* when we are perceiving that *p*. Similarly, one can also claim that we usually know that we remember that *p* when we remember that *p*. We normally have at least some higher-order knowledge of the source of our beliefs, even if we do not know precisely how they are caused.<sup>14</sup> However, problems for Millar's theory arise once we take this fact to show that perceptual justification, or basic justification in general, *requires* that we have higher-order knowledge of the source of our beliefs. This precludes unsophisticated believers from having perceptual justification, and has the counter-intuitive result that subjects can have perceptual knowledge while they lack perceptual justification.

In contrast, these problems do not arise if we take the evidential relation between higher-order beliefs and perceptual justification to be possible but not necessary. Higher-order beliefs can serve to strengthen the justification of perceptual beliefs if they are themselves justified in the way inferentialist reliabilism envisages. More importantly for our purposes, higher-order beliefs can *defeat* the *prima facie* justification of the beliefs they are about, thereby making them *ultima facie* unjustified. In the case of Truetemp, the specific belief that it is 104°F comes out

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<sup>13</sup>James Beebe (2004) uses this variation on the Truetemp case to show that the original case is actually underdescribed and therefore leads to the mistaken conclusion that Truetemp is unjustified in his beliefs. I think this response focuses too much on the contingencies of human belief acquisition to work as a general response against Truetemp-style cases.

<sup>14</sup>I agree with Greco (2000, p. 188) that we usually do not have occurrent beliefs about the source of our beliefs, but we do have some dispositional beliefs about it even if they are not always very specific.

of the blue, something that should be recognizable even for Truetemp himself. Given that we normally are aware of the source of our beliefs, recognition of the fact that one does not know where one's belief comes from seems sufficient to distrust or reject this belief altogether. Note that such an analysis of the case also explains why Truetemptwo is justified in his belief that it is 104°F. Truetemptwo believes that his belief that it is 104°F is no different from, say, his belief that the air is very dry: he takes both beliefs to stem from his senses even if he does not know which one exactly. Truetemptwo therefore lacks the relevant higher-order belief that would defeat his first-order belief, and remains justified in his belief that it is 104°F.<sup>15</sup> This enables inferentialist reliabilism to deal with Truetemp-style cases without the ad hoc addition of an etiological constraint on the cognitive systems capable of producing basic beliefs.

The details of the process of defeat could be worked out in different ways. One could try to use Goldman's (1979) analysis of defeat in terms of an alternative reliable process that would lead to disbelieving  $p$ , but then the Truetemp-case could be adapted in a way that would prevent Truetemp's beliefs from being defeated. For instance, Truetemp might be terrible at introspection, thereby having no alternative *reliable* process which would lead to disbelieving that it is 104°F.<sup>16</sup> The lesson we should draw from this, I suggest, is that higher-order beliefs are capable of defeating the justification of first-order beliefs *even if the higher-order beliefs are themselves unjustified*. This is not as strange as one might at first expect: if one accepts that justified higher-order beliefs can defeat first-order beliefs, then why think that defeat does not occur in a situation that is epistemically *worse*, namely when one's higher-order beliefs are *unjustified*?

Finally, note that the idea that unjustified beliefs can defeat *prima facie* justification is fully compatible with Lyons' own ideas about evidential justification. According to Lyons, non-basic beliefs derive their justification from whatever justified the beliefs on which they are based (Lyons, 2009a, p. 75). Thus, if the premise beliefs are not justified themselves, then the concluding non-basic belief also cannot acquire justification. In contrast, in the case of defeat, the defeated belief *loses* justification (if anything), so there is no need for the supposition that the defeater itself is justified. This means that there is nothing in Lyons' view on evidential justification that prevents him from accepting that unjustified beliefs can be defeaters, even if the details of this story remain to be worked out.

## 5 Conclusion

Evidentialism and dogmatism both succumb to a version of the Sellarsian dilemma because of their commitment to the idea that perceptual experience is evidential in nature. Evidentialism cannot make sense of the supposed evidential relation between non-propositional experiential states and beliefs, and dogmatism cannot explain why propositional experiential states need not be justified themselves before they can confer any evidential justification. There are at least two externalist alternatives that can accommodate the idea that perceptual experience is non-evidential in nature, thus allowing a way to block the dilemma. One can either accept that perceptual beliefs are evidentially justified by higher-order knowledge, or accept that perceptual beliefs are non-evidentially justified by being the outcome of some sort of reliable process. I have suggested that a specific combination of these views works best: perceptual beliefs are non-evidentially justified, but can be evidentially defeated by higher-order beliefs.

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<sup>15</sup>The same is true for the unsophisticated creature that gains an extra sensitive heat-sense due to radiation: since it lacks higher-order beliefs, it lacks defeaters that could prevent it from being justified.

<sup>16</sup>Lyons (2009a, p. 124) raises this objection to dealing with Truetemp-style cases in terms of defeat.

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