

## Reflection, Fallibilism, and Doublethink<sup>1</sup>

Rhys Borchert  
University of Arizona

According to Comesaña (2020a), empirical evidence is not *constituted* by experiences but rather experiences *provide* empirical evidence. In this way, Comesaña and Williamson (2000) are in agreement. A further point of agreement is that one's confidence in a proposition ought to be determined by conditionalizing on one's total evidence.<sup>2</sup> A significant point of disagreement is regarding the nature of the evidence that experience provides. Williamson maintains that experience only provides a proposition as evidence when it amounts to knowledge of that proposition. Call this view *Factivism*. Comesaña, however, maintains that experience provides a proposition as evidence when one is basically justified in believing that proposition. Call this view *Experientialism*. A distinctive feature of Experientialism is that experience can provide false propositions as evidence, whereas, given that knowledge is factive, Factivism entails that only true propositions can be evidence.

I want to discuss an objection to Experientialism from Littlejohn & Dutant (2021).<sup>3</sup> They argue that a reflective agent who accepts that evidence could be false is rationally compelled to update their credences differently than unreflective agents, or else they will be guilty of a problematic kind of doublethink: evidence *in general* can be false, but *my* evidence is never false.<sup>4</sup> I argue that the reasoning they give in favor of this conclusion extends to any epistemological view that says that it is possible for a rational agent to be wrong about what their evidence is.<sup>5</sup> When a rational agent reflectively accepts that they

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<sup>1</sup> Penultimate draft of a [paper published in \*Inquiry\*](#). Please cite the published paper.

<sup>2</sup> More precisely, the view is that the degree of epistemic support for any proposition relative to an agent is determined by an objective evidential probability function conditional on the agent's evidence. For Comesaña, one's evidence is all and only the propositions one is basically justified in believing. For Williamson, one's evidence is all and only the propositions one knows.

<sup>3</sup> In Littlejohn & Dutant (2021), they present three arguments against Experientialism. The first argues that Experientialism implies that one's evidence could be inconsistent (see also the discussion in Comesaña 2020a, §6.6) and that this is a serious defect of the view. The second argues that Experientialism implies that reflective agents ought to update their credences in a different way than unreflective agents. The third argues against the purported motivation for having one's evidence be constituted by worldly propositions instead of appearance propositions. I only address the second argument in this paper, so even if I am correct that their second argument does not single out a unique difficulty for Experientialism, this would not undermine their other arguments against Experientialism.

<sup>4</sup> Strictly speaking, Comesaña does not accept that evidence can *be* false, but rather that we can *have* false evidence. The problem for Littlejohn & Dutant, then, is about an agent who comes to believe that it is possible that a proposition P is part of their evidence yet P is false. See Comesaña (2020a; forthcoming) for clarifications on this subtlety.

<sup>5</sup> I think White (forthcoming) pithily hits on this point when he says that what "Comesaña calls false evidence the rest of us might call counterfeit evidence—non-evidence which is perhaps innocently mistaken for evidence."

could be wrong about their evidence they are rationally compelled to update their credences differently than unreflective agents, or else they will be guilty of a problematic kind of doublethink: even though rational agents *in general* are wrong about their evidence, *I'm* never wrong about *my* evidence. Given that accepting fallibility toward one's evidence is a common tenet of contemporary epistemology, reflecting on Littlejohn & Dutant objection to Experientialism ultimately reveals a challenge for a wide range of epistemological views.<sup>6</sup>

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In section I, I reconstruct the argument from Littlejohn & Dutant and show how parallel reasoning to theirs applies to fallibilist theories in general. In section II, I respond to some possible objections. In section III, I discuss ways to respond to this problem and suggest that the fallibilist ought to endorse the allegedly problematic form of doublethink. I conclude in section IV.

### ***I. Different Theories, Same Problem***

In order to address Littlejohn & Dutant's argument against Experientialism, it will be helpful to first imagine a very simple case.

Jim is about to look at a jelly bean. Suppose that there are two possible states. The jelly bean is either red (R) or orange (O). Call these the *worldly propositions*. Also distinguish between the state where the jelly bean ( $L_R$ ) *looks* red and the state where the jelly bean *looks* orange ( $L_O$ ). Call these *appearance propositions*.<sup>8</sup> Let's presume that the worldly propositions and the appearance propositions can come apart. There are four possible states for Jim.

$S_1$ : R& $L_R$

$S_2$ : R& $L_O$

$S_3$ : O& $L_R$

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<sup>6</sup> The use of 'fallibilism' and 'infallibilism' varies in the literature, and my usage differs from other discussions of infallibilism. For example, sometimes it is used to denote the view that knowledge requires infallible belief (e.g. Dutant 2016), while other times it is used to denote the view that knowledge that P requires that one's evidence entails P (e.g. Brown 2018). According to my usage, fallibilism is the view that no doxastic state is so secure that it is not open to coherent doubt, so even a Factivist would be a fallibilist in this sense due to the fact that they reject KK and luminosity. Importantly, this implies that beliefs about one's evidence are always open to coherent doubt. Difficulties in delineating what counts as a fallibilist view are not new. For instance, some contextualists about knowledge describe their view as a species of fallibilism (e.g. Cohen 1988), while others describe their view as infallibilism (e.g. Lewis 1996).

<sup>7</sup> I suspect that this issue is also connected to the problem of exogenous defeaters (see Weisberg 2009; 2015 and Comesaña 2020a; 2020b) which *also* seems like it is a problem for everyone, but I do not get into that issue in this paper.

<sup>8</sup> Note that an appearance proposition is about a mental state, not about an external object. So *that the jelly bean looks red* is about the agent's mental state, not about the jelly bean.

S<sub>4</sub>: O&L<sub>0</sub>

While it is possible for the jelly bean to look red to Jim while it is actually orange and *vice versa*, assume that S<sub>1</sub> is perfectly indistinguishable from S<sub>3</sub>, and S<sub>2</sub> is perfectly indistinguishable from S<sub>4</sub>. Let us also presume that Jim has never experienced a situation where a jelly bean was a different color than the color it appeared to be.

Consider what different epistemological views will say about what Jim's evidence is in each of these possible states.

	S <sub>1</sub>	S <sub>2</sub>	S <sub>3</sub>	S <sub>4</sub>
Phenomenal Conservatism	L <sub>R</sub>	L <sub>O</sub>	L <sub>R</sub>	L <sub>O</sub>
Experientialism	R	O	R	O
Factivism	R	L <sub>O</sub>	L <sub>R</sub>	O

According to Phenomenal Conservatism,<sup>9</sup> one's evidence is always constituted by appearance propositions. According to Experientialism, one's evidence, absent any defeaters, is always constituted by worldly propositions. According to Factivism, one's evidence can either be appearance propositions or worldly propositions depending on what one knows.<sup>10</sup>

In order to set up the background dialectic for Littlejohn & Dutant's argument, I will highlight some of the alleged virtues of Experientialism.

A problem for Phenomenal Conservatism is that appearance propositions do not seem strong enough to explain or justify our ordinary beliefs and actions. Furthermore, it seems that appearance propositions hardly ever *actually* feature in our reasoning. For example, we often, *in fact*, rule out counter-possibilities when forming beliefs and when deciding what to

<sup>9</sup> Huemer (2001).

<sup>10</sup> This is the version of Factivism argued for in Williamson (2000), however, fully fleshed out versions of Factivism can differ in what they will say about Jim in S<sub>2</sub> and S<sub>3</sub> (see, e.g., Williamson forthcoming; Littlejohn 2012, forthcoming; Lasonen-Aarnio forthcoming). The strongest version of Factivism would be akin to the kind of epistemological disjunctivism defended by McDowell (1998a, 1998b, 1998c) and would say that in S<sub>2</sub> and S<sub>3</sub> it is not that Jim's evidence is constituted by appearance propositions. Rather, Jim *has no evidence* regarding the color of the jelly bean — he has no *justification* for believing incorrectly, only an *excuse* for believing incorrectly. Regardless of which flavor of Factivism one prefers, my arguments in this paper should still apply.

do and it seems that *we are justified* (at least in certain situations) in ruling out counter-possibilities when forming beliefs and deciding what to do. Given that appearance propositions, by their very nature, do not rule out counter-possibilities, these considerations seem to support Experientialism over Phenomenal Conservatism.<sup>11</sup>

A problem for Factivism is that it is counterintuitive to say that Jim's evidence is different in these cases. According to Factivism, epistemic rationality demands that Jim should have different doxastic attitudes for each of the four states. Assuming a standard Bayesian framework, Factivism says that Jim ought to have credence 1 in R in  $S_1$  and credence 1 in O in  $S_4$ , however he should have credence less than 1 in R in  $S_3$  and less than credence 1 in O in  $S_2$ , even though  $S_1$  is perfectly indistinguishable from  $S_3$  and  $S_2$  is perfectly indistinguishable from  $S_4$ .

This odd consequence from Factivism is further highlighted when we consider what Jim ought to do in these cases.<sup>12</sup> Suppose that Jim loves red jelly beans but hates orange jelly beans. Assuming that the practical choice for Jim is determined by expected utility, then Experientialism renders the intuitively correct verdict about what Jim should do in each of these cases. In  $S_1$  and  $S_3$  it would be rational for Jim to grab the jelly bean and in  $S_2$  and  $S_4$  it would be rational for Jim to refrain from grabbing the jelly bean. Of course, in  $S_3$  Jim unfortunately grabs an orange jelly bean and in  $S_2$  Jim unfortunately passes up a chance to eat a red jelly bean, but this itself should not constitute a condemnation of Jim's rationality. Given his evidence and his desires, it would be irrational for Jim to grab a jelly bean when it looks orange (and there are no defeaters) and to refuse a jelly bean when it looks red (and there are no defeaters). If Jim were to grab and eat the jellybean in  $S_2$ , it could at most make Jim lucky, not rational. Just like a blackjack gambler who hits on a 20 and gets dealt an ace is lucky, not rational.

Factivism cannot vindicate this intuitive line of thought. Given that Jim's evidence is different in each case, his doxastic attitudes should be different in each case. Thus, this opens up the possibility that Factivism says that if the jelly bean were to look red but actually be orange, then Jim would be irrational in grabbing the jelly bean. This is in spite of the fact that Jim has never been tricked in this way before, so he had no reason to suspect that he was being tricked.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See Comesaña & McGrath (2016) for an extended defense of these claims. See also Littlejohn & Dutant (2021) as one of their lines of criticism that I do not address in this paper takes aim at these claims from Comesaña & McGrath.

<sup>12</sup> Here I am assuming what Comesaña (2020) calls *Fumerton's Thesis*: rational action presupposes rational belief.

<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the Factivist seems to be forced to say that in situations like this Jim would be irrational no matter what he believed and no matter what he did (see Comesaña 2020, ch. 4).

So Experientialism seems to handle this simple case well. Indeed, this is precisely the kind of case that Comesaña (2020a) uses to motivate his view. However, Littlejohn & Dutant maintain that if we add an additional assumption to this case, then the case becomes a serious challenge to Experientialism. The assumption is that before Jim looks at the jelly bean, he carefully reflects on the possible states of affairs and the nature of empirical evidence. So it is not just that  $S_1$ - $S_4$  are possible states for Jim, but that Jim *knows* that they are possible states. We can further assume that Jim is consciously attending to these possible states before he looks at the jelly bean. It is this kind of situation where the agent is *reflective* that Littlejohn & Dutant think causes trouble for Experientialism.

Here is the argument.<sup>14</sup> We assume all of the above regarding Jim and the jelly bean, but we now further assume that Jim has read *Knowledge and Its Limits*, *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*, and *Being Rational and Being Right*. Jim found Comesaña's arguments more compelling than Huemer's, so comes to believe that, absent any defeaters, experience provides worldly propositions as evidence. He also found Comesaña's arguments more compelling than Williamson's, so comes to believe that sometimes the worldly propositions that constitute his evidence can be false.

Now Jim is about to look at a jelly bean. Given that he is committed to Experientialism, Jim thinks that if the jelly bean looks red, then he should form credence 1 that the jelly bean is red. However, given that Jim is reflecting on the nature of evidence, he admits that it is possible that the jelly bean may look red but actually be orange. Even though this has never happened to him before, he admits that it is possible that his evidence will be false. He then forms a .999 credence that his evidence will be true and a .001 credence that his evidence will be false. But now, says Littlejohn & Dutant, it no longer makes sense for Jim to conditionalize in the way Experientialism demands.

For unreflective Jim, if he were in  $S_1$  or  $S_3$ , then his evidence would be R. So traditional conditionalization says that Jim should update in a very straightforward way.

$$\text{Cr}(R|R) = 1$$

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<sup>14</sup> This is not how Littlejohn & Dutant structure their argument, but I think this reconstruction makes salient what their objection to Experientialism amounts to.

But suppose some further proposition depends on R. Suppose Jim finds 9/10 red jelly beans *very* tasty and he finds no other color of jelly bean to be very tasty. Let V stand for the proposition that this jelly bean will be very tasty. In  $S_1$  or  $S_3$ , his credence in V should be .9.<sup>15</sup>

But now, for reflective Jim, he cannot update the normal way on R. This is because he admits that there is a small chance that R will be part of his evidence, yet R will be false. Instead, according to Littlejohn & Dutant, he should update in a way that involves the following two propositions.

$R_T$  = My evidence is R and R is true.

$R_F$  = My evidence is R and R is false.

One possible update procedure that would accommodate this would be Jeffrey conditionalization. So we would have the following update procedure once Jim sees the red jelly bean.

$$\text{Cr}(R) = \text{Cr}(R|R_T)\text{Cr}(R_T) + \text{Cr}(R|R_F)\text{Cr}(R_F) = (1)(.999) + (0)(.001) = .999$$

And now, when we calculate Jim's new credence in V, we must use  $\text{Cr}(R) = .999$  instead of  $\text{Cr}(R) = 1$ .

$$\text{Cr}(V) = \text{Cr}(V|R)\text{Cr}(R) + \text{Cr}(V|\sim R)\text{Cr}(\sim R) = .9(.999) + 0(.001) \approx .899$$

So reflective Jim, once he recognizes that his evidence can be false, comes to have a lower credence in R and V than his unreflective counterpart. There are two objections here. The first objection is that this implies that, at least for reflective agents, Experientialism cannot endorse traditional conditionalization. Given that Comesaña does accept a form of traditional conditionalization (ur-prior conditionalization), this would reveal a tension in his view. (I say more about the nature of this tension in the next section). The second objection is that this answer is the same answer that Phenomenal Conservatism gives. Recall that one motivation for Experientialism over Phenomenal Conservatism was that appearance propositions were (a) not strong enough and (b) did not feature in our reasoning. If this line of argument is correct, then worldly propositions are ultimately just as strong as appearance propositions for reflective agents and, while appearance

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<sup>15</sup> I have added this extra step to Littlejohn & Dutant's argument because in their example they use appearance propositions. Yet a key aspect of Comesaña's view is that, absent any defeaters, one's evidence is not constituted by appearance propositions. So I do not think that we should model Jim as updating on appearance propositions from the outset in an argument against Comesaña's view.

propositions do not appear in the reasoning, propositions that are analogous to them do.<sup>16</sup> So what was the point of using worldly propositions in the first place?

For now, I will grant the above reasoning. My claim is that, insofar as this line of reasoning applies to Experientialism, it applies to any epistemological theory that admits that rational agents can be wrong about what their evidence is.

Imagine, instead of Jim, we have Tim. Tim also read *Knowledge and Its Limits*, *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*, and *Being Rational and Being Right*. However, Tim was most convinced by Williamson's arguments in *Knowledge and Its Limits* (not at all due to their shared first name). So Tim comes to believe that his evidence is constituted by all and only the propositions that he knows. He also believes that KK is false and rejects luminosity. Consequently, he comes to believe that it is not always the case that he is in a position to know what his evidence is.

Tim is about to look at a jelly bean. He knows that the following are the only possible states.

$S_1$ : R&L<sub>R</sub>

$S_2$ : R&L<sub>O</sub>

$S_3$ : O&L<sub>R</sub>

$S_4$ : O&L<sub>O</sub>

Given that he is committed to Factivism, Tim thinks that if the jelly bean looks red and he knows that it is red, then he should have credence 1 that it is red. However, given that Tim is reflecting on the nature of evidence, he admits that it's possible that the jelly bean may look red but actually be orange. This would be a case where he would not be in a position to know what his evidence is. Even though this has never happened to him before, he admits that this is a possibility. He then forms a .999 credence that he will be in a position to know what his evidence is and a .001 credence that his experience of what is the case will be misleading. But now it seems that he should not simply conditionalize in the way Factivism demands.

For unreflective Tim, if he is in  $S_1$ , then Tim's evidence would be R. So in  $S_1$ , Tim should update as follows.

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<sup>16</sup> Appearance propositions, by their very nature, do not rule out counter-possibilities. If it appears that R, this leaves open that it is not R; using appearance propositions in one's reasoning or inferences involves giving credence to counter-possibilities. Using the pair of propositions  $R_T$  and  $R_F$  seems to serve the same purpose of giving credence to counter-possibilities, which is why I say the use of  $R_T$  and  $R_F$  is analogous to the use of appearance propositions.

$$\text{Cr}(R|R) = 1$$

And if Tim is considering whether the red jelly bean will be very tasty, then Tim should update as follows.

$$\text{Cr}(V|R) = .9$$

If instead he is in  $S_3$ , then Tim's evidence would be  $L_R$ . So in  $S_3$ , Tim's credence in R should be:

$$\text{Cr}(R|L_R) = .999$$

And his credence in V should be:

$$\text{Cr}(V) = \text{Cr}(V|R)\text{Cr}(R) + \text{Cr}(V|\sim R)\text{Cr}(\sim R) = (.9)(.999) + (0)(.001) \approx .899$$

But now, for reflective Tim, he cannot update the normal way. This is because he knows that how he should update depends on what he knows, and he knows that either his evidence will be R or his evidence will be  $L_R$ . So reflective Tim should update in a way that involves the following two propositions.

$R_K$  = The jelly bean looks red and I know it is red because it is red.

$R_{DK}$  = The jelly bean looks red and I do not know that it is red because it is orange.<sup>17</sup>

As before, one possible update procedure that would accommodate this would be Jeffrey conditionalization. So when Tim sees the jelly bean and it looks red, he should update as follows.

$$\text{Cr}(R) = \text{Cr}(R|R_K)\text{Cr}(R_K) + \text{Cr}(R|R_{DK})\text{Cr}(R_{DK}) = (1)(.999) + (0)(.001) = .999$$

And now, when we calculate Tim's new credence in V, we must use  $\text{Cr}(R)=.999$  instead of  $\text{Cr}(R)=1$ .

$$\text{Cr}(V) = \text{Cr}(V|R)\text{Cr}(R) + \text{Cr}(V|\sim R)\text{Cr}(\sim R) = .9(.999) + 0(.001) \approx .899$$

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<sup>17</sup> Here I am ignoring the complication of borderline cases, which would be a situation where it looks red and it is red, but the belief that it is red is too unsafe to count as knowledge.

Notice the parallel. Given that Jim accepts Experientialism, he is worried about *false* evidence: evidence that is rightly taken to be evidence but is false. Given that Tim accepts Factivism, Tim is worried about *counterfeit* evidence: evidence that is wrongly taken to be evidence, but that is perfectly indistinguishable from a case where it would be rightly taken to be evidence.<sup>18</sup> Ultimately, they are worried about the same thing; namely, the indistinguishability between  $S_1$  and  $S_3$ , and  $S_2$  and  $S_4$ . When they try to incorporate these worries into how they conditionalize, then they end up with the same answer as Phenomenal Conservatism.

One may suspect that the problem stems from the fact that both Factivism and Experientialism are committed to saying that our evidence is sometimes constituted by worldly propositions. This is not the case. Any view where one accepts that one can be wrong about what one's evidence is will run into this issue.

In order to see this, imagine Hashim, our third and final reflective agent. Just like Jim and Tim, Hashim has read *Knowledge and Its Limits*, *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*, and *Being Rational and Being Right*. However, Hashim was most convinced by Huemer's arguments in *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*. So Hashim comes to believe that his evidence is constituted by appearance propositions. While he is a committed internalist, Hashim is not a committed Cartesian. So he thinks that not only does he only have fallible access to worldly propositions, but also that he only has fallible access to appearance propositions. Consequently, he believes that sometimes he may make incorrect judgments about how things look to him.

Hashim is about to look at a jelly bean. He knows that the following are the only possible states.

$S_1$ : R& $L_R$

$S_2$ : R& $L_0$

$S_3$ : O& $L_R$

$S_4$ : O& $L_0$

Given that he is committed to Phenomenal Conservatism, Hashim thinks that if the jelly bean looks red then he should have credence .999 that it is red. However, given that Hashim is reflecting on the nature of evidence, he admits that it is possible that he will judge that the jelly bean looks red when in fact it looks orange. Even though this has never happened to him before, he admits that this is a possibility. He then forms a .999 credence that he will

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<sup>18</sup> I got the term 'counterfeit evidence' from White (forthcoming).

correctly judge what color the jelly bean looks like and a .001 credence that he will incorrectly judge what the color of the jelly bean looks like. But now it seems that he should not simply conditionalize the way that Phenomenal Conservatism demands.

For unreflective Hashim, if he is in  $S_1$  or  $S_3$ , then Hashim's evidence would be  $L_R$ .

$$\text{Cr}(R|L_R) = .999$$

And if Hashim is considering whether the red jelly bean will be very tasty, then Hashim should update as follows.

$$\text{Cr}(V) = \text{Cr}(V|R)\text{Cr}(R) + \text{Cr}(V|\sim R)\text{Cr}(\sim R) = (.9)(.999) + (0)(.001) \approx .899$$

But now, for reflective Hashim, he cannot update the normal way, because, while he knows he should update on how things seem to him, he also knows that he could be wrong in judging how things seem to him. So reflective Hashim should update in a way that involves the following two propositions.

$L_{RR}$  = I judge that the jelly bean looks red and it does look red.

$L_{RO}$  = I judge that the jelly bean looks red but it looks orange.

Again, one possible update procedure that would accommodate this would be Jeffrey conditionalization. So when Hashim judges that the jelly bean looks red, he should update as follows.

$$\text{Cr}(R) = \text{Cr}(R|L_{RR})\text{Cr}(L_{RR}) + \text{Cr}(R|L_{RO})\text{Cr}(L_{RO}) = (.999)(.999) + (.001)(.001) \approx .998$$

And now, when we calculate Hashim's new credence in  $V$ , we must use  $\text{Cr}(R) \approx .998$  instead of  $\text{Cr}(R) = .999$ .

$$\text{Cr}(V) = \text{Cr}(V|R)\text{Cr}(R) + \text{Cr}(V|\sim R)\text{Cr}(\sim R) \approx .9(.998) + 0(.002) \approx .898$$

So, just like Jim and Tim, once Hashim reflects on the nature of evidence, he is rationally compelled to change the way that he updates his credences.

Littlejohn & Dutant argued that once Jim reflected on the nature of evidence according to his favorite theory of epistemic justification, Experientialism, he would be required to update his credences in a different way than his unreflective counterpart. What I have shown is that analogous reasoning also applies to rival theories of justification. Reflective

Tim, who accepts Factivism, would be required to update his credences differently than his unreflective counterpart. And reflective Hashim, who accepts Phenomenal Conservatism, would be required to update his credences differently than his unreflective counterpart. It seems to me that we have a parity among the three views. A problem for one is a problem for all.<sup>19</sup>

## ***II. Attempting to Break the Parity***

I will now address objections to my alleged parity on behalf of the Factivist. The most tempting objection may simply be to say that I was not allowed to say that reflective Tim should modify the way that he updates. Factivism says that one should update on what they know. In  $S_1$ , Tim knows  $R$  and so should update on  $R$ . In  $S_3$ , Tim does not know that  $R$ , since  $R$  is false, but he does know that  $L_R$ . So Tim should only update on  $L_R$  in  $S_3$ . Factivism does not say that when the jelly bean looks red, Tim should update in a way that involves  $R_K$  and  $R_{DK}$ . In other words, this objection on behalf of the Factivist says: ‘That’s not my view. In suggesting that reflective Tim ought to conditionalize differently, you implicitly assumed that Factivism is false. Hence, your reasoning is question-begging.’

This objection is not compelling, at least relative to this dialectic, since such a reply is equally available to the Experientialist and the Phenomenal Conservatist. Experientialism says that Jim should update on  $R$  and Phenomenal Conservatism says that Hashim should update on  $L_R$ . So when I said that reflective Jim should update on  $R_T$  and  $R_F$  or that reflective Hashim should update on  $L_{RR}$  and  $L_{RO}$ , both the Experientialist and the Phenomenal Conservatist could respond by saying ‘that’s not my view.’

The above point is straightforward, but here is one way of fleshing it out. Littlejohn & Dutant try to establish the following contradiction.

(E1) If Experientialism is correct, then the degree of epistemic support for any proposition relative to an agent is determined by all and only the propositions the agent is basically justified in believing. [Statement of Experientialism].

(E2) If Experientialism is correct, then, for reflective agents, the degree of epistemic support for agents is sometimes determined by propositions they are not basically justified in believing (e.g.  $R_F$ ). [Littlejohn & Dutant’s conclusion]

Contradiction.

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<sup>19</sup> Note that this seems to imply that Comesaña has *two* problems since one could rerun my reasoning on Comesaña’s view. However, this does not undermine my claim that the reasoning from Littlejohn & Dutant, if taken seriously, generalizes to fallibilism in general.

However, a tacit premise in the reasoning in favor of (E2) is something like the following.

*Changing Demands:* The demands of rationality can change for reflective agents.

It's important to read 'demands of rationality' as the fundamental or ultimate demands of rationality. Reflection may introduce a novel source of evidence, but this would not change the fundamental demands of rationality. For example, suppose one thought, that reflecting on one's fallibilities changes the context in an epistemically relevant way in a way described by Greco (2015, 2017). Accepting this view would not be an instance of accepting *Changing Demands*, since the shifting context merely changes what propositions the agent ought to conditionalize on; it does not shift how one should conditionalize. For instance, one version of Greco's proposal is a combination of Factivism with contextualism about knowledge. On this view, all agents, reflective or otherwise, ought to conditionalize on all and only the propositions they know. Given the contextualist aspect of the view, what propositions they know changes with the context. So, on this kind of view, one's epistemic situation might change based on whether (and even when) one reflects on one's fallibilities. However, this kind of sensitivity to the reflective powers of an agent is not the kind that is posited by *Changing Demands*.

*Changing Demands* is a substantial premise. Because of this, if the premise is to be used in an argument against a view, then the premise must be employed in a theory-neutral way. It would be question-begging to use the following premise.

*Question-Begging Version of Changing Demands:* If Experientialism is true, then the demands of rationality can change for reflective agents.

*Question-Begging Version of Changing Demands* simply assumes that Experientialism is false; according to Experientialism, the demands of rationality do not change for reflective agents.<sup>20</sup> So Littlejohn & Dutant's argument must rely on *Changing Demands*, not *Question-Begging Version of Changing Demands*. However, once it is an open possibility that the demands of rationality change for reflective agents, I showed in section II that analogous reasoning in favor of the conflict between (E1) and (E2) can be given to support the following conflict.

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<sup>20</sup> Or between any agents for that matter, though there is a sense in which the demands of rationality may take different forms for different creatures. Our eyes and ears are often sources of basic justification, but less so our noses; yet a beagle's nose will be a primary source of basic justification for them. We do not naturally have a sense for magnetic fields, but perhaps futuristic body modifications will allow a sensitivity to magnetic fields which will provide them with basic justification. In each of these scenarios, the demands of rationality are the same, even though the shape of those demands may differ.

(K1) If Factivism is correct, then the degree of epistemic support for any proposition relative to an agent is determined by all and only the propositions the agent knows. [Statement of Factivism].

(K2) If Factivism is correct, then, for reflective agents, the degree of epistemic support for agents is sometimes determined by propositions they do not know (e.g.  $R_{DK}$ ). [My conclusion]

Contradiction.

With this in mind, a more promising way to break the parity would be to say that the intuitive motivation provided by Littlejohn & Dutant holds when applied to Experientialism but not when applied to Factivism. This response would be to say that, while both Experientialism and Factivism do reject *Changing Demands*, it is only Experientialism that is committed to a counterintuitive consequence as a result.

This is where the allegedly problematic kind of doublethink enters the picture. According to Littlejohn & Dutant, an Experientialist who rejects the reasoning about a reflective agent in section I, which I have described in this section as a rejection of *Changing Demands*, is committed to a problematic kind of doublethink.

Here is what they say.

“[The Experientialist] might reply that even though we should expect that in general evidence can be false, it is irrational to suspect that one’s own future evidence will be false. But this attitude is unreasonable. It’s unreasonable to think that everyone around us might have false evidence but remain certain that we’ll never be like them in having false evidence.”<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps this is an unreasonable attitude; I’ve not dubbed it a kind of doublethink because it sounds reasonable. However, in order for the parity to be undermined, it must be the case that the fallibilist, in rejecting my reasoning in section I, is not committed to an analogous form of doublethink. Yet, I think that they are. To see this, we can simply reword the above quote so that it applies to Factivism instead of Experientialism.

Factivists might reply that even though we should expect that in general we can be wrong about our evidence, it is irrational to suspect that one will be wrong about one’s future evidence. But this attitude is unreasonable. It’s unreasonable to think that everyone around us might be wrong about our evidence, but remain certain that we’ll never be like them in being wrong about our evidence.

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<sup>21</sup> Littlejohn & Dutant (2021, p. 819).

It would not make sense to insist that it is unreasonable for a person to accept Experientialism and remain certain that their evidence is never false, but reasonable for a person to accept Factivism and remain certain that they are never mistaken about their evidence. So I think the reasoning Littlejohn & Dutant give in favor of their argument against Experientialism also applies to Factivism.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, given my discussion of Phenomenal Conservatism in section I, I think that it applies to fallibilism in general. So, while I think that Littlejohn & Dutant may indeed be putting their finger on a difficult problem for Experientialism, reflecting on this issue reveals a more general difficulty for fallibilism.

Here's one way of summarizing the dialectic thus far. Experientialism says that an agent, in general, ought to have a greater than zero credence of 'I undergo an experience that presents me with P as evidence, but P is false'. Factivism says no such thing, since only veridical experiences can possibly provide evidence. So it initially seems that the problem Littlejohn & Dutant are putting their finger on is a problem specific to Experientialism. However, any fallibilist will accept that agents, in general, ought to have a greater than zero credence of 'I conditionalize on P, but P is false' or 'I conditionalize on P, but P is not part of my evidence' or 'I conditionalize on P, but P is not evidence'. In other words, if we are

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<sup>22</sup> A Factivist pushing back on the legitimacy of this parallel would strike me as particularly odd once we consider what Factivism sometimes demands of reflective agents. Littlejohn & Dutant suggest that it is unreasonable for an Experientialist to ignore the possibility that their evidence will be false, yet Factivism has an even more counterintuitive conclusion. It says there are cases where an agent ought to ignore the overwhelming probability that their evidence is not-E, and conditionalize on E (Williamson 2014). (Or, more precisely since Williamson would object to conceiving of his view as involving acts of conditionalizing (see Williamson forthcoming), the agent knows that it is almost certainly the case that their epistemic support for propositions is not determined by E, however, the degree of epistemic support is determined by E. So the agent's doxastic attitudes ought to match the degree of epistemic support provided by E, even though they know that it is almost certainly the case that such matching would be irrational).

For example, consider again Tim, our reflective Factivist. Suppose that Tim takes a break from rereading *Knowledge and Its Limits*, and looks at a particularly austere clock. Using some formal tools he learned from Jaako Hintikka, he rationally concludes that it is .99999 probable that his evidence is not-E. Yet unbeknownst to Tim he knows E. Surely, it would be reasonable, given that it is .9999 probable that his evidence is not-E, for Tim not to update on what he unknowingly knows. Yet the Factivist says that it would be unreasonable for Tim not to conditionalize on E. And not just unreasonable, but downright irrational. So I think that it would be odd to maintain that it is unreasonable to ignore the mere possibility of false evidence, but that it is reasonable to ignore the overwhelming probability of true evidence.

This footnote may appear to be belaboring a mere *tu quoque*, but it is not. The objection I was responding to was of the form: 'it is more plausible to think that the combination of Experientialism and *Changing Demands* leads to implausible consequences when compared to the combination of Factivism and *Changing Demands*.' The considerations in this footnote, I think, cast doubt on this. The Factivist might point out that they have learned to live with the variety of counterintuitive implications of their view, but the point here is not simply to point out a counterintuitive implication. Rather, it is to show that from a theory-neutral standpoint, one cannot reasonably hold that the justification for (E2) is more compelling than the justification for (K2).

modeling rational agents as conditionalizers, then we ought to think that they may conditionalize incorrectly. And if we are modeling *ourselves* as a conditionalizer, then we ought to think that *we* may conditionalize incorrectly. So when Littlejohn and Dutant say it is unreasonable to think that ‘everyone around us might have false evidence but remain certain that we’ll never be like them in having false evidence’ they ought to also say that it is unreasonable to think that ‘everyone around us might have wrongly conditionalized, but remain certain that we’ll never be like them in wrongly conditionalizing’.<sup>23</sup> But this is indeed what a fallibilist who models rational agents as conditionalizers has to admit, since updating in a way that accounts for worries about wrongly conditionalizing will violate conditionalization.<sup>24</sup>

### ***III. Responding to the Parity***

I have been arguing for a certain kind of parity. Insofar as Experientialism is committed to a certain kind of unreasonable attitude, so too is any kind of fallibilist. However, before moving on to how one could respond to the parity I have established, I will say that I disagree with the interpretation of the alleged problematic attitude from Littlejohn & Dutant.

According to Littlejohn & Dutant, Experientialism says that one should not preemptively account for the possibility of false evidence. This is correct. Littlejohn & Dutant interpret this lack of preemptive accounting to be an attitude of ‘everyone around me might have false evidence but I’m certain I’ll never have false evidence’, which they take to be a reason for rejecting Experientialism. I have pointed out that Factivism, and any fallibilist view in general, says that one should not preemptively account for the possibility that they will incorrectly respond to evidence. Following Littlejohn & Dutant, this lack of preemptive accounting should be interpreted as ‘everyone around me might wrongly respond to evidence, but I’m certain I will always respond correctly to evidence’. It would not be reasonable to think that the lack of preemption for false evidence is a defect of

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<sup>23</sup> This attitude certainly sounds bad, and I will give a more charitable interpretation of it in the next section. But even setting that aside, I think there is a precedent for it in the philosophical literature. An analogous position has been defended in the disagreement literature. Permissivists argue that there can be permissive cases where two people who have the same body of evidence can rationally disagree on a proposition. A difficulty that permissivists face is that it is hard to see how someone who accepts permissivism can justify maintaining their confidence in a proposition if they come to believe that they are in a permissive case (see White 2005). While some permissivists have tried to explain how one could both rationally believe that they are in a permissive case and rationally hold on to their belief (e.g. Schoenfield 2014), other permissivists have argued that one is never justified in believing that one is in a permissive case even though one believes that permissive cases are possible (see Smith 2020).

<sup>24</sup> A similar point is made in Schoenfield (2017). She uses this point, plus considerations of accuracy, to argue in favor of a modified form of conditionalization.

Experientialism, while not thinking that the lack of preemption for incorrectly responding to evidence is a defect of fallibilism.

That being said, I do not think that not preemptively accounting for one's fallibilities is tantamount to being certain that one will never make a mistake. The lack of preemption is, I think, similar to the attitude an agent has in the preface paradox. I admit that I am a fallible creature who often forms false beliefs, yet, upon reflecting on this fact, I do not give any of my beliefs up. This does not mean that I am certain that everyone around me might have false beliefs, but I am never like them in having false beliefs. So I think a more charitable way of interpreting the doublethink attitude is the following: 'I know that, in general, I can be wrong about my evidence, and this is worrying. However, I shouldn't preemptively change how I update on evidence because of this worry.'

While I take it that this attitude does not seem as unreasonable as 'everyone around me might wrongly respond to evidence, but I'm certain I will always respond correctly to evidence', one might think that the more charitable attitude is still unreasonable. Why *shouldn't* an agent preemptively change how they respond to evidence? In spite of this, I think that fallibilists should accept it.

Recall the tacit premise in Littlejohn & Dutant's argument I discussed in the previous section.

*Changing Demands*: The demands of rationality can change for reflective agents.

Specifically, the demands of rationality can change for reflective agents who reflect on their fallibilities. Littlejohn & Dutant's argument is essentially that, assuming *Changing Demands*, (E2) is true which introduces a contradiction for Experientialism and rejecting *Changing Demands* commits the Experientialist to a problematic kind of doublethink. Given that even my more charitable interpretation of the doublethink attitude still may seem unreasonable, it may seem obvious that we should accept *Changing Demands*.

While accepting *Changing Demands* might seem innocuous, I think that the resulting position is actually incredible. It is not suggesting that the way the demands of rationality *manifest* are sensitive to the reflective capabilities of agents. Rather, it suggests a fundamental demarcation in the demands of rationality between classes of rational agents; those that are reflective and those that are unreflective. Additionally, it suggests that, while reflective agents are in general fallible, there is some procedure for them to account for fallibilities in precisely the correct way. The challenge becomes especially daunting when we consider that we are fallible regarding *what* our fallibilities are, *how* to account for them

in the right way, and *whether* we have accounted for them in such a way. So I think that accepting *Changing Demands* to the letter is off the table.

That being said, there is a similar reply that maintains what is perhaps the intuitive appeal of *Changing Demands*. To start off with, one would have to reject that ur-conditionalization, the kind of conditionalization endorsed by Experientialism and Factivism, is the right way to conditionalize *in general*. The right kind of conditionalization would have to be a more general version that incorporates an agent's credences about the likelihood that they will respond incorrectly to the evidence. For unreflective agents, this additional structure will not have any effect, since unreflective agents do not have such credences, however, this additional structure *would* have an effect for reflective agents. This modified conditionalization could possibly be stated so that it is compatible with certain fundamental aspects of either Experientialism or Factivism.

This response is very tempting, but I do not think that it will adequately address the problem I have described in this paper. It will merely change the form of it. If one is committed to fallibilism, I assume one is committed to thinking that rational and reflective agents ought to take a fallible attitude *toward the fallible attitudes they take toward their epistemic position*, which includes their ability to conform with the demands of rationality. So if one were to modify conditionalization in a way that incorporated the agent's uncertainty toward their ability to correctly conditionalize, then one could simply rerun the reasoning from section I using the fact an agent ought to also think that they are fallible in determining how to correctly calibrate their fallibilities into how they respond to evidence. In other words, we would still have a reflective agent that has a non-zero credence in the proposition 'I should update my credences in way *W*, however, I will incorrectly update my credences.'<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Consider Schoenfield's (2017) argument that conditionalization does not (in general) maximize expected accuracy, but rather accuracy is maximized by a modification of conditionalization that she calls conditionalization\*. Interestingly, one conclusion from Schoenfield is that thinking that rational agents maximize accuracy goes hand in hand with thinking that there exists a privileged, luminous class of propositions relative to every rational agent. Furthermore, she is motivated by an aversion to an attitude very similar to one described in this paper: "every rational agent must antecedently be certain that any proposition P that could be true of her experience (and which it is possible to learn about) is a proposition that she will learn exogenously whenever P is true and that there are no other propositions that she could exogenously learn" (p. 1167). So the considerations of this paper would not be the first to suggest that, perhaps surprisingly, accepting fallibilism *in general* seems to commit one to accepting an unreasonably high level of confidence that, in spite of my fallibilities, things will not go astray for me in the future. In this paper, I am suggesting that we should accept this seemingly unreasonable attitude, whereas Schoenfield suggests that we ought to give up on fallibilism — or, at least, that we give up on a kind of thoroughgoing fallibilism that would reject what she calls Luminous Infallibility: "There is a class of propositions concerning an agent's situation, such that, for any agent S, if S is rational, these propositions will be true of S if and only if she is certain of them" (p. 1180).

Instead of trying to avoid the doublethink attitude, we should own up to it. Recall my charitable interpretation of it: ‘I know that, in general, I can be wrong about my evidence, and this is worrying. However, I shouldn’t preemptively change how I update on evidence because of this worry.’ This seems strange at first — how could you not even *try* to preemptively account for your fallibilities? — but I think that once we consider what a commitment to fallibilism involves, this attitude becomes more palatable. As mentioned in my discussion of *Changing Demands*, an agent aware of their fallibilities would also be aware that adjusting their update procedure would not rid themselves of the possibility of error, but, rather, would simply allow the possibility of error to take a different form. So it would be vain to try to complicate how one responds to evidence in order to account for one’s fallibilities, since that would simply introduce further complications that would have to be accounted for. And accounting for those complications would introduce even more complications, and so on. This is precisely a lesson we are supposed to have learned from Williamson (2000). However, heeding this lesson does not require one to endorse Williamson’s entire epistemological package. Indeed, I think Comesaña’s view is an example of an epistemological account that shares many, but not all, of the aspects of Williamson’s influential view.<sup>26</sup>

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The core thesis of Comesaña’s account is an agreeable one: there is an epistemically relevant gap between being *rational* and being *right*. However, Comesaña accounts for this gap, not in the traditional manner of internalizing or psychologizing one’s evidence, but by allowing that one may possess evidence that is false. He argues that there are a number virtues of understanding evidence this way, yet one might think that this account also invites vices particular to this account. Littlejohn & Dutant argue that it demands a vicious kind of doublethink for reflective agents: ‘while evidence in general can be false, luckily for me I will never have false evidence’. I have argued out that, insofar as Littlejohn & Dutant’s reasoning applies to Experientialism, parallel reasoning applies to fallibilism in general, since it implies that rational agents ought to maintain an analogous attitude of ‘while people in general are mistaken in what their evidence is, I will never be mistaken in what my evidence is’; or, alternatively, ‘while people in general incorrectly conditionalize, I will always correctly conditionalize’. Though I tried to interpret this attitude more charitably as

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<sup>26</sup> This may be surprising given that their disagreement on certain epistemological issues runs deep, but they do share many of the same features, including: evidence is propositional, worldly propositions can be evidence, an agent can permissibly rule out  $\sim P$  possibilities if and only if  $P$  is part of their evidence, the degree of epistemic support for a proposition is determined by an objective evidential probability function, and rational agents are not luminous with respect to their evidence.

a failure to preemptively account for one's fallibilities, I admit that it intuitively seems unreasonable. This means that we either need to make peace with the fact that reflective agents can have, indeed *should have*, the doublethink attitude — philosophers have made peace with worse — or it means we have to reconsider the contemporary dogma of fallibilism. This latter path is dangerous; it involves weaving between pits of skepticism for which there is no return. In philosophy, as in life, a little discomfort is often the price of safety.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Thanks to Juan Comesaña and Timothy Kearl for helpful feedback.

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