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The dark side of clarity

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Abstract

We all have experiences in which it "seems clear" to us that something is true. This kind of clear experience can play significant roles in determining whether we believe something to be true. But what are the significant roles? So far, the literature has focused on optimal cases where a person's clear experience might provide prima facie justification for their belief. This article will develop the hypothesis that, in less optimal cases, these clear experiences can be epistemically damaging. Specifically, it will argue that, in certain cases, such experiences may causally compel belief even in the face of counterevidence.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Seemings are a kind of experience in which things seem to subjects in certain ways.[1] They come with a rich variety of phenomenal characters and have different values. For example, Monica may have a pleasant experience in which a dish seems delicious to her; Ross may have a romantic experience in which Rachel seems to be attracted to him; and Phoebe may have an unbearable experience in which it seems to her that old Christmas trees suffer tremendously when they are thrown into a chipper.[2]

In epistemology, many philosophers are interested in a distinctive kind of seeming in which it seems *clear* to the subject that P.[3] Let us call it *clear experience*. Clear experiences are everywhere. Many, though not all, of our perceptual experiences are clear experiences. For example, right now I have a visual experience in which it seems clear to me that a squirrel is hiding nuts in the yard and an auditory experience in which it seems clear to me that my neighbor is playing Chopin on her piano. Some of our intellectual experiences are clear experiences too. For example, when I consider whether 2 plus 3 is 5, I often have an intellectual experience in which

[1]For defense that seemings are experiences, as opposed to beliefs or inclinations to believe, see McAllister (2018) and McCain and Moretti (2021, chap. 3).
[2]*Friends*. 1994–2004. Created by David Crane and Marta Kauffman.
[3]I use the term "clear" or "phenomenal clarity" as a placeholder to refer to the unique phenomenal character of seemings that provide prima facie justification (and, as I will explain later, they causally compel belief, too). Alternative terms used in the literature include, but are not limited to: "felt veridicality" (Tolhurst, 1998, p. 298), "forcefulness" (Huemer, 2001, p. 71), and "presentational phenomenology" (Chudnoff, 2013, p. 37).

it seems clear that 2 plus 3 is 5; and when I consider, say, Fermat's Last Theorem, I sometimes find myself entertaining an intellectual experience in which it seems clear to me that Fermat's Last Theorem is true.

Clear experiences are epistemically valuable. Proponents of phenomenal conservatism have argued that a clear experience that P provides the subject with prima facie justification for believing that P (for reviews, see Huemer, 2019; Moretti, 2020; Tucker, 2013). Proponents of the phenomenal reading of Descartes have argued that, according to Descartes, a completely clear experience of something being true may be a guarantee that it is true (Patterson, 2008; Paul, 2020). A shared motive for Descartes and phenomenal conservatives is to rebut external world skepticism, according to which knowledge of contingent facts about the external world cannot be legitimately inferred from one's experiences. While it is important, especially in philosophy seminars, to investigate the question of to what extent clear experiences may or may not help us rebut external world skepticism, this investigation tells us little about the epistemic roles of clear experiences in our daily lives, in which, for better or worse, people rarely concern themselves with external world skepticism.

What are the epistemic roles of clear experiences in our daily lives? The discussion in the current literature has captured some *benign* roles played by clear experiences. Consider phenomenal conservatives' thesis that clear experiences provide prima facie justification. In the examples above, my clear visual experience that a squirrel is hiding nuts in the yard provides me with prima facie justification for believing that a squirrel is hiding nuts in the yard; my clear auditory experience that my neighbor is playing Chopin provides me with prima facie justification for believing that my neighbor is playing Chopin; and my clear intellectual experience that Fermat's Last Theorem is true provides me with prima facie justification for believing that Fermat's Last Theorem is true.

More often than not, these prima facie justified beliefs are indeed true. Or, if I see the evidence that a certain belief is not true (say, it is not my neighbor but her student who is playing the piano), the prima facie justification provided by my clear experience will be defeated (Pryor, 2000, pp. 537–538), and I will update my belief accordingly. In these optimal cases, clear experiences are *epistemically benign* in two senses: they are often truth-conducive (BonJour, 1998), and they are not barriers to our pursuit of the truth. If only these were all what clear experiences do in our epistemic lives.

In this article, I shall argue that, in some less optimal cases, clear experiences can be *epistemically damaging*. It is not uncommon that a person may obstinately believe that P in the face of counterevidence. This kind of obstinate belief may be found in cases of delusional beliefs, akratic beliefs, superstitious beliefs, and beliefs in conspiracy theories. According to the intuition of a notable line of philosophers dating back to Hobbes, sometimes a person's obstinate belief could be explained by their experience in which it seems clear to them that the content of their belief is true. In his comment on Descartes's clear and distinctive experience, Hobbes writes:

> Anyone who is free from doubt claims he has such 'great light' [i.e. great clarity] and has no less strong a propensity of the will to affirm what he has no doubt about than someone who possesses real knowledge. Hence this 'light' can explain why someone obstinately defends or holds on to a given opinion. . . . ("Thirteenth objection," in Descartes, 1984, p. 134)

In my reading, Hobbes's basic idea is that, in some cases, a person's clear experience that P may be a key factor in the etiology of their obstinate belief that P.[4] Let us call it *the Hobbesian hypothesis*.

[4]This article does not claim that clear experiences are present in all cases of obstinate beliefs. Instead, this article only aims to develop the view that clear experiences can be an important factor in some cases of obstinate beliefs. This is compatible with the possibility that other cases of obstinate beliefs might be explained by some different factors.

I think this hypothesis is intuitively appealing. An examination of the literature shows that it is independently and sporadically mentioned in the discussion of various phenomena of believing against the evidence. In the recent literature on epistemic akrasia, Scanlon briefly suggests a similar view. Speaking of his own akratic belief that Jones is a loyal friend despite the fact that he knows Jones is merely an artful deceiver, Scanlon (1998, p. 35) suggests that a key factor is his experience in which Jones seems to be a loyal friend. In the recent literature on the phenomenological approach to delusions, many phenomenologists emphasize that, in some cases, a patient may suffer from a distinctive kind of seeming experience with the phenomenal character of hyperclarity (Ritunnano et al., 2022, p. 11; see also Feyaerts et al., 2021), and the hyperclear experience is a key factor in the development of the patient's delusion. According to this approach, a patient with a paranoid delusion may suffer from a hyperclear intellectual experience in which it seems very clear to her that people are out to get her.[5]

Despite the intuitive appeal of the Hobbesian hypothesis, there has been scarce philosophical discussion of what exactly clear experiences' damaging role is. Regarding epistemic akrasia, Scanlon's (1998, p. 35) brief further suggestion is that his seeming experience *somehow acts as his reason* for the akratic belief, despite the fact that he knows it is not a good reason. This further suggestion strikes many philosophers as implausible or even impossible (Raz, 2009, p. 42; see also Nie, forthcoming). Regarding delusional beliefs, although phenomenologists emphasize that hyperclear experience is very "compelling" (Feyaerts et al., 2021, p. 795), they have not provided much explanation of the nature of the compellingness. It is, therefore, unclear how much progress this emphasis has made in shedding extra light on the Hobbesian hypothesis.[6]

I believe the Hobbesian hypothesis deserves more serious philosophical discussion and development than it has received. To fully develop this hypothesis, one needs to address three key questions: (1) What causes and sustains a person's clear experience in the face of counterevidence? (2) How can we get a better grasp of the phenomenal character of clear experience? So far, we only have a rough idea that clear experience is distinctive in its phenomenal clarity. The notion of phenomenal clarity needs significant qualifications so that we do not confuse it with other phenomena. (3) Given a person's persistent clear experience, how can it explain the person's belief in the face of counterevidence? Put another way, when we say that clear experience compels belief, how should we understand the compellingness of clear experience?

In this article, I will set aside the first question, the answer to which may vary greatly from case to case. For example, regarding Scanlon's clear experience that Jones seems to be a loyal friend, one contributing factor could be Jones's deceptive behaviors as a loyal friend. Regarding the patient's hyperclear experience that people are out to get her, certain malfunctioning salience-attribution mechanisms at the subpersonal level could be one of the contributing factors (cf. Howes et al., 2020; Kapur, 2003).

With the assumption that, in some cases, the subject does have a persistent clear experience, this article's main concerns are the second and third questions. Section 2 will elucidate the nature of phenomenal clarity by comparing it with other phenomena that are more familiar in

[5]This approach differs from Maher's one-factor theory, according to which a delusion is a normal explanation of an intensely anomalous experience (for a critical review, see Nie, 2023).

[6]The unclarity about the epistemic role of hyperclear experience might also be a reason why the notion of hyperclear experience has received little attention in the literature on the cognitive approach to delusions (for review, see Connors & Halligan, 2020). Davies and Egan (2013) have highlighted the need to combine the phenomenological approach and the cognitive approach (see also Brar et al., 2021). Their endorsement account of delusion developed the idea that, in some cases, the content of a delusion may have already been encoded in the patient's experience. In this aspect, the patient's experience is similar to the hyperclear experience proposed by phenomenologists. However, like other versions of the endorsement account, the phenomenal character of the patient's experience was not discussed.

the literature. Section 3 will begin by outlining a line of thought to support the possibility that clear experience can compel belief even in the face of counterevidence. Given that it is possible, I will develop an epistemological account of how exactly clear experience can compel belief in the face of counterevidence. The result will be a quadruple-force framework, according to which (obstinate) beliefs may be understood as the results of the interaction between the justificatory force and causal force of clear experience and the justificatory force and causal force of other independent evidence.

2 | PHENOMENAL CLARITY

The notion of clear experience is central to Descartes's work. Famously, Descartes (1984, p. 45) writes: "The nature of my mind is such that I cannot but assent to these things, at least so long as I clearly perceive them." According to the phenomenal reading of Descartes (Patterson, 2008; Paul, 2020), Descartes's idea is that our experiences may have a distinctive kind of phenomenal character, that is, phenomenal clarity, that compels belief. Phenomenal clarity can be present in different kinds of experiences, including *intellectual* experiences, such as when we consider the proposition that 1 plus 1 is 2, and *sensory* experiences, such as when we look at this page (Paul, 2020, p. 10). Phenomenal clarity comes in degrees, and phenomenal clarity can compel belief. And the degree of its compelling force is positively correlated with the degree of phenomenal clarity.

It is, however, not an easy task to articulate what the distinctive phenomenal clarity is. Paul (2020, p. 2) writes:

> Like phenomenal qualities in general, clarity is (epistemically) primitive in the sense that we cannot come to understand what clarity is by analyzing it or defining it in terms of other properties. Instead, we come to understand what clarity is by reflecting on examples, within our own experience, of clarity itself.

I agree that phenomenal clarity is primitive in the sense that it cannot be defined in terms of other phenomenal qualities such as redness. I also agree that reflecting on examples is a helpful way to understand what phenomenal clarity is. But, apart from what appears to be a hopeless attempt to search for a reductive definition of phenomenal clarity, and apart from merely reflecting on cases in which phenomenal clarity is present, we may get a better grip on what phenomenal clarity is by considering what phenomenal clarity is not. This section aims to shed some extra light on what phenomenal clarity is by distinguishing it from some phenomena that might be confused with phenomenal clarity to various extents.

2.1 | Psychological confidence

Talking about the phenomenal clarity of an experience in which it seems clear to the subject that P could be confused with talking about the subject's confidence that P. Phenomenal clarity is a source of, but not identical to, psychological confidence. Other things being equal, the clearer it seems to a person that P, the more confident the person is that P. But phenomenal clarity and psychological confidence are dissociable. For example, in an illusory experience, it can seem clear to us that P, but if we know that it is an illusion, we will not feel confident that P. Moreover, we can also feel confident that P when we do not have a clear experience that P. For example, we are usually quite confident in the truth of scientific theories we read in reputable journals, but rarely do we have an experience in which it seems clear to us that a scientific theory is true, especially when it is beyond our expertise.

2.2 | Sensory information

The term *clear* is sometimes used to talk about the sensory information provided by an experience rather than the phenomenal clarity of the experience. To see the difference, let us consider the following case:

> TWO PIEBALD HORSES: Kate is standing in Port Meadow on a sunny day. A few steps in front of her there is a piebald horse. While looking at the piebald horse, Kate also sees that far away from her there is another piebald animal, but she cannot really tell whether it is another piebald horse or a dairy cow. Unbeknown to her, it is indeed another piebald horse.

There is a use of the term *clear*, according to which Kate's visual experience of the nearby piebald horse is much *clearer* than her visual experience of the faraway piebald horse. What exactly does this mean? A plausible interpretation, I think, is that Kate's visual experience of the nearby piebald horse provides her with *more visual information* than does her visual experience of the faraway piebald horse: the former provides her with the visual information about a piebald horse while the latter provides her with the visual information about a piebald animal.

This sense of being clear, which is about the sensory information provided by an experience, is different from the notion of phenomenal clarity this article is concerned with, which is about the phenomenal way the information is presented in the experience. Though Kate's visual experience of the nearby piebald horse and her visual experience of the faraway piebald animal provide her with different visual information, it seems plausible that both experiences have the same degree of phenomenal clarity. At least, there is no obvious reason that there is a difference between the degree to which it seems clear to Kate that there is a piebald horse nearby and the degree to which it seems clear to her that there is a piebald animal far away. In other words, there is no obvious reason that in Kate's experiences it is more real that there is a piebald horse nearby than that there is a piebald animal far away.

This distinction between the sense in which the term *clear* is used to talk about the sensory information provided by experience and our notion of phenomenal clarity can also help us distinguish phenomenal clarity from the phenomenal character that concerns *some* phenomenal conservatives, who might appear to talk about phenomenal clarity but are actually talking about the sensory information provided by experience. Consider the following example that Koksvik (2011, p. 187) uses to illustrate what he means by clear perceptual experience:

> BLIZZARD: Ann is standing stationary on a flat, snow-covered plain in a blizzard. The wind is whipping snow around in all directions, and no features of the landscape are visible. Ann can barely see her own knees, and she cannot see the tips of her skis.
>
> Someone approaches very slowly from the direction in which Ann is looking. At first she is completely unable to distinguish the approaching person from patterns randomly forming and dissipating in the snow. As the person approaches, Ann's perceptual experience changes, the human figure gradually appears more and more clearly.

In line with Koksvik's description, Berghofer (2020, p. 165) writes: "The closer the person in front of Ann gets, the more clearly this person appears to Ann." What exactly is it that has changed or become "clearer" in Ann's perceptual experience? Neither Koksvik nor Berghofer provides an answer. They seem to assume that the answer is obvious and move on to discuss whether, as the person approaches, Ann's perceptual experience pushes her toward believing that

there is a person in front of her. Here, let us take a closer look at what has changed in Ann's perceptual experience. A plausible answer, I think, is that what has changed is the visual information provided by Ann's perceptual experience. As the person approaches, Ann gets more and more visual information: from perceiving a vague object to perceiving that particular person.

This phenomenon is, however, not what we are talking about when we talk about phenomenal clarity. Like the case of TWO PIEBALD HORSES, there is no obvious reason to think that the phenomenal clarity of Ann's perceptual experience changes as the person approaches. Compare the moment at which Ann only recognizes an object moving toward her and the moment at which Ann recognizes that the object is Cecily; there is no obvious reason to think that at the former moment the degree to which it seems clear to Ann that there is an object moving toward her differs from the degree to which it seems clear to Ann that it is Cecily at the latter moment. That is, as the person approaches, the phenomenal clarity of Ann's perceptual experience may remain the same.

It is worth noting that, while the analysis above focuses on perceptual experiences, Ann might have a series of intellectual experiences with the same content but different degrees of phenomenal clarity. Suppose Ann is expecting Cecily and constantly asks herself whether it is Cecily. When Cecily is far away, Ann might have an obscure intellectual experience in which it does not seem clear that it is Cecily; when Cecily moves closer, Ann might have an ambiguous intellectual experience in which it seems somewhat clear that it is Cecily; finally, when Cecily is right in front of her, Ann might have a clear experience that it is Cecily.

2.3 | Asserting that P

In the literature on phenomenal conservatism whose primary concern is justification, it is argued that our experiences can have a distinctive assertiveness phenomenology—such experiences "assertively represent propositions" (Siegel & Silins, 2015, p. 793). What is asserted by an experience with the assertiveness phenomenology is the truth of the content of that experience. Is the notion of assertiveness phenomenology the same as our notion of phenomenal clarity?

There are several reasons why one might take them to be the same. First, both arguably involve the fact that the content of the experience is presented as true. Second, both are gradable. Third, the examples that phenomenal conservatives use to elucidate the assertiveness phenomenology overlap with the example we use to elucidate phenomenal clarity. These points are evident in the following quotation by Tucker (2010, p. 530):

> The phenomenological character of assertiveness comes in degrees. Some seemings are very weak, i.e. they are not very assertive. Other seemings are so assertive that they make their contents feel utterly obvious. Right now it seems to me that 2 + 2 = 4, that there is a desk in front of me, that I have a slight headache, and that dogmatism is true, but the latter seeming is far weaker than the former ones.

Despite these similarities, it could be misleading, however, to equate phenomenal clarity with the assertiveness phenomenology. What exactly is the assertiveness phenomenology conceived by phenomenal conservatives? In his proposal, Pryor (2004, p. 372n23) writes: "I called this the 'phenomenal force' of perceptual experience, thinking of it on analogy with the assertoric force of a public utterance." In a similar vein, in her critique of phenomenal conservatism, Teng (2018, p. 641) writes that the assertiveness of perceptual experience is "analogous to the assertiveness of testimony." A reading of these remarks might be that the assertiveness phenomenology of perceptual experience is analogous to the assertiveness phenomenology of testimony; in both cases, P is *assertively* presented to S as true.

It seems to me, however, that a potential problem with this reading is that the assertiveness phenomenology of testimony is not associated with phenomenal clarity; no matter how

strongly a person asserts that P in their testimony, it is unlikely that it would hence become clear to the hearer that P. To see this point, consider Fermat's Last Theorem, which is proved by Andrew Wiles. It is fair to say that it does not seem clear to many people that Fermat's Last Theorem is true (though it may have seemed clear to Fermat and a few other mathematicians as true). If by a strong assertion we mean that a proposition is asserted with a tone of confidence by a trustworthy person, then let us suppose that we have the privilege to hear Wiles himself telling us that Fermat's Last Theorem is true. By hearing Wiles's assertion, we entertain the assertiveness phenomenology. The question is: Would this strong assertion make it clear to us that Fermat's Last Theorem is true? It is doubtful that there would be such an effect. (By contrast, it may become clear to us that Fermat's Last Theorem is true with the help of Wiles's proof.)

Given that the assertiveness phenomenology of testimony is not associated with phenomenal clarity, if the suggestion were true that the assertiveness phenomenology of perceptual experience is the same as the assertiveness phenomenology of testimony (cf. Pryor, 2004, p. 372n23; Teng, 2018, p. 641), then the assertiveness phenomenology of perceptual experience would not be associated with phenomenal clarity either. Is this the kind of phenomenology that concerns phenomenal conservatives?

It is far from obvious to me how phenomenal conservatives would respond. I shall not attempt to discuss possible answers on behalf of phenomenal conservatives who are primarily concerned with justification. By contrast, my present concern is how the discussion of assertiveness phenomenology can help us get a better grip on phenomenal clarity. For simplicity, I assume that when phenomenal conservatives talk about the assertiveness phenomenology, they are talking about phenomenal clarity, but I suggest that phenomenal clarity is not the same as the assertiveness phenomenology of testimony. Though in both cases P is presented as true, they are distinct ways in which P is presented as true: in a testimony, P is presented as true by virtue of its assertiveness phenomenology, whereas, in a clear experience, P is presented as true by virtue of its phenomenal clarity.

In this section, I explained what phenomenal clarity is by distinguishing it from some phenomena that might be confused with it to various extents. I hope this discussion helps narrow down the phenomenon that concerns us as we move on to discuss the central thesis that clear experience compels belief in the next section.

3 | HOW DOES CLEAR EXPERIENCE COMPEL BELIEF?

According to the phenomenal reading of Descartes, it is evident that Descartes thinks that clear experience compels belief (Patterson, 2008; Paul, 2020). But apart from being said by Descartes, why should we think that it is even possible that when a person has an experience in which it seems very clear to them that P, they will be compelled to believe that P? The possibility, I think, is based on two basic ideas. Very roughly, the line of thought is as follows:

1. We have a natural tendency to believe that P if it seems clear to us that P.
2. The clearer it seems to us that P, the stronger our tendency to believe that P becomes.
3. Therefore, it is possible that a person may have an experience in which it seems very clear to them that P, and their tendency may hence increase to the point where they are compelled to believe that P, even in the face of counterevidence.[7]

Regarding (1), it is obvious that we tend to believe that P if it seems clear to us that P; so obvious that it might strike some as if the claim about our tendency to form a belief and the claim

[7]I do not consider this line of thought to be a deductive argument. However, I do find it intuitively attractive, and this section will provide reasons for thinking that this line of thought is on the right track.

about the phenomenal clarity of our experience are nothing but different descriptions of the same thing. This latter idea is, of course, not true. Among other reasons, it is not hard to conceive of cases in which a creature's tendency to believe that P has nothing to do with the way P is presented to them in their experience. For example, for this kind of creature, their clear experience that the sky is blue may have no impact on their tendency to believe that the sky is blue (and their belief that the sky is blue may be solely based on their independent scientific evidence).

(2) is a claim about the relationship between the degree of phenomenal clarity and the degree of the tendency to believe. It is also intuitive. Besides being evident in the literature on the phenomenal reading of Descartes, it is also widely accepted in the literature on phenomenal conservatism. Michael Huemer (2005, p. 100), for example, writes: "We are more inclined to accept what more strongly seems to us to be true."

The combination of (1) and (2) suggests that (3)—it is possible that a person may have an experience in which it seems very clear to them that P, and their tendency may hence increase to the point where they are compelled to believe that P, even in the face of counterevidence. This possibility is, admittedly, not as intuitive as (1). One main reason may be that, while (1) is well illustrated by familiar optimal cases, (3) is about less optimal cases that have not received adequate discussion in the literature and have not been properly recognized in our daily lives. Another reason may be that, while we have quite a few explanations of (1), these explanations do not immediately help us get a grip on why (3) is true. For example, regarding (1), one may argue that it is because we are rational animals, and it is a rational requirement that rational animals tend to believe what seems clear to them. But, regarding (3), it does not seem to be a reasonable explanation that there is a rational requirement that we are compelled to believe what seems very clear to us, even in the face of counterevidence. The rest of this section aims to explain why (3) is true.

3.1 | The justificatory force

In Section 2.3, we discussed the similarities between phenomenal clarity and the assertiveness phenomenology concerning phenomenal conservatives, and I suggested an interpretation according to which, when phenomenal conservatives talk about the assertiveness phenomenology, they are talking about phenomenal clarity. Like our present concern about the relationship between phenomenal clarity and belief, phenomenal conservatives are also concerned with the relationship between the assertiveness phenomenology and belief. This makes phenomenal conservatives' view on the relationship between the assertiveness phenomenology and belief a natural candidate for explaining why clear experience compels belief.

On the face of it, phenomenal conservatives may have an explanation of why (1) we tend to believe that P if it seems clear to us that P. According to phenomenal conservatives, this is because such an experience provides "immediate (*prima facie*) justification for believing P" (Pryor, 2000, p. 532).[8]

Phenomenal conservatives may also have an explanation of why (2) the clearer it seems to us that P, the stronger our tendency to believe that P becomes. According to phenomenal conservatives, this is because the degree of justification provided by an experience is positively correlated with the degree of its assertiveness phenomenology. Berghofer (2020, p. 163) writes: "Experiences do not either have or not have a justification conferring phenomenology, they can have it in a more or less pronounced way. The more pronounced, the more justification they provide." If it is true that the clearer it seems to us that P, the more justification we have

[8]Following phenomenal conservatism, this article is concerned with propositional justification rather than doxastic justification. Propositional justification is the justification a person has for believing that P, regardless of whether the person actually believes that P or whether the person's belief that P is properly based on their propositional justification. In contrast, a person's belief is doxastically justified when it is properly based on the person's propositional justification.

for believing that P, then it might make sense that with more justification for believing that P, we have a stronger tendency to believe that P.

Given that the combination of (1) and (2) suggests that (3), we might expect that, by appealing to the justification provided by clear experience, phenomenal conservatives can explain (3) as well. It is, however, doubtful that this could work. This is because our experience that P only provides us with prima facie justification for believing that P, and this prima facie justification will be defeated by the counterevidence (Pryor, 2000, pp. 537–538). Therefore, appealing to the prima facie justification provided by clear experience fails to explain why clear experience compels belief in the face of counterevidence.

3.2 | The causal force

The justificatory relationship is, however, not the only relationship between clear experience and belief. Alternatively, we may understand the relationship between them in terms of causation. According to this causal conception, we can explain the transition from a clear experience that P to the belief that P in terms of a form of psychological causation between two mental states. This causal conception has not received adequate attention in the psychological literature and philosophical literature in general. But it could be discerned in the philosophical literature on phenomenal conservatism.

While phenomenal conservatives' primary concern is justification, some appear to have mentioned the causal relationship between clear experience and belief. Recall that Michael Huemer (2005, p. 100; emphasis added) writes: "We are more *inclined* to accept what more strongly seems to us to be true." Similarly, Koksvik (2011, p. 260; emphasis added) writes: "[Perceptual experience] has phenomenology of *pushiness* when its *pushing* its subject to accept its content is itself an aspect of its character." Here, the terms *incline* and *push* seem to be about the causal force of perceptual experience.

Opponents of phenomenal conservatism may accept the causal conception as well. For example, in her critique of phenomenal conservatism, Teng (2018, p. 637) argues that, in some cases, imaginings might "have the distinctive phenomenal character . . . [phenomenal conservatives] have in mind." By the distinctive phenomenal character, she means the phenomenal character that provides justification. She does not explicitly talk about the causal force of the distinctive phenomenal character. Her main point is that, in some cases, imaginings might have similar phenomenal character as perceptual experiences. If it is correct that the distinctive phenomenal character of perpetual experiences has causal force, then Teng's argument also supports the view that, in some cases, imaginings might have the same distinctive phenomenal character with causal force. This analysis is also in agreement with Chasid and Weksler's (2020, p. 733; emphasis added) observation that even opponents of phenomenal conservatism "should be willing to accept the minimal characterization of perceptual assertoricity as the property of *inclining* the perceiver to believe the content of her experience."

The general point is that, though there is disagreement about whether a clear experience that P provides prima facie justification for believing that P, both the proponents and opponents of phenomenal conservatism may accept the causal conception of the relationship between clear experience and belief.

3.2.1 | The causal force of clear experience is independent of its justificatory force

What is the relationship between the causal force of clear experience and its justificatory force? I think that the causal relationship between clear experience and belief is a *primitive*

relationship between two mental states. It is primitive in the sense that whether a person's clear experience that P causes their belief that P does not depend on (the person's consideration of) whether the clear experience provides prima facie justification for believing that P. Call it *the primitive view* on the causal force of clear experience.

This view is arguably in line with a number of philosophers' intuitions, who may disagree about other aspects of the nature of experience. For example, in his argument for naïve realism, Campbell (2014) discusses both the causal force and the justificatory force of perceptual experiences. He (2014, p. 81) writes:

> I will put the causal point by saying that perceptual experiences are decisive in the formation of beliefs about one's surroundings. I will put the normative point by saying that perceptual experiences are authoritative in the formation of beliefs about one's surroundings.

Importantly, Campbell's conception of causation is based on the notion of intervention, rather than on the notion of justification (see also Campbell, 2007). In this sense, Campbell's work can be read as being in line with the primitive view on the causal force of experience.

Furthermore, Campbell (2014, p. 84) also appears to have briefly considered the possible dissociation between the causal force and the justificatory force of perceptual experiences in delusions:

> In the case of certain delusional patients, . . . prior beliefs overwhelm the input from perception. But it does not happen in ordinary humans, just because of the decisive [causal] role played by perceptual experience.

Campbell's main point is that, though, in ordinary cases, perceptual experience plays the decisive causal role in belief formation, it can lose its decisive causal force in some cases of delusions. Would perceptual experience also lose its justificatory force in such cases of delusions? It is not entirely clear what Campbell's view is. But it seems to be a plausible view that perceptual experience may retain its justificatory force even in such cases of delusions; that is to say, the patients are still not justified to hold the delusional beliefs, even though the causal force of perceptual experience is overwhelmed by prior beliefs. If this analysis is along the right lines, then here Campbell is talking about a dissociation between the causal force and justificatory force of perceptual experience in such cases of delusions.[9]

The dissociation between the causal force and justificatory force of perceptual experience is also evident in the following passage by Davidson (1986, p. 310) who is not a naïve realist:

> The relation between a sensation and a belief cannot be logical, since sensations are not beliefs or other propositional attitudes. What then is the relation? The answer is, I think, obvious: the relation is causal. Sensations cause some beliefs and in this sense are the basis or ground of those beliefs. But a causal explanation of a belief does not show how or why the belief is justified.

Though it is debatable whether Davidson is correct that experience *cannot* justify belief, I think Davidson's point is in line with the primitive view that the causal relationship between experience and belief is primitive, and it is not dependent on the justificatory relationship between them.

[9]Campbell is concerned with the causal force of veridical perception that constitutes a great part of the evidence against the patients' delusional beliefs. He does not consider the causal force of the patients' deceptive clear experiences in which it seems very clear to the patients that their delusional beliefs are true. I shall focus on the latter kind of experience.

Last but not least, the possibility of the dissociation between clear experience's justificatory force and causal force has arguably been touched upon by Conee, who is usually known for his view that, in many cases, experience might be conceptualized as a form of evidence (cf. Conee & Feldman, 2008). Speaking of the causal force of clear experience, Conee (2013, p. 68) writes:

> The inclinations involved and its occasioning episode need not give evidence. They can exist without having any good evidence for the content of the corresponding claim of seeming truth. This happens when we are inclined to take something to present a truth that does not actually indicate that truth, although we are inclined to think that it does.

In what follows, I shall assume that the primitive view is true. Although the causal force of clear experience is independent of its justificatory force, this is not to deny that, in an optimal case, the causal force of the subject's clear experience often goes hand in hand with the justificatory force of that experience. This is because both are positively correlated with the phenomenal clarity of that experience. For example, when I look at a robin perching in the tree, the clearer it seems to me that a robin is perching in the tree, the more I am prima facie justified by the clear experience to believe that a robin is perching in the tree, and the more I am causally inclined by the clear experience to believe that a robin is perching in the tree.

Nonetheless, the primitiveness of the causal force of clear experience makes it possible that, in a less optimal case where the prima facie justification provided by the clear experience is defeated by counterevidence, the causal force of the clear experience may persist and still causally compel belief.

3.2.2 | The causal force of evidence is dependent on its justificatory force

Now we see that what compels the subject's belief in the face of counterevidence may be the causal force of the subject's clear experience rather than its justificatory force. This is, however, not yet the whole picture because it has not included the causal force related to evidence.

Recall that this article is concerned with cases where a subject holds an obstinate belief that P in the face of the evidence against P. The term "in the face of" suggests that the subject is aware of the evidence and the subject's consideration of the evidence appreciates the justificatory force provided by the evidence. That is to say, the subject does not suffer from familiar cognitive deficits or biases that prevent them from appreciating the justificatory force of evidence. Moreover, the subject's consideration of the justificatory force may causally incline them to believe what the evidence supports. We may call it the causal force of evidence. Unlike the causal force of clear experience, the causal force of evidence is dependent on the subject's appreciation of the justificatory force of evidence. Put another way, the evidence that Q, as a matter of fact, cannot by itself incline us to believe that Q; instead, it is our appreciation of the justificatory force of the evidence that Q that causally inclines us to believe that Q.

Moreover, it is plausible that normally the degree of the causal force of evidence is positively correlated with the justificatory force of evidence, and the latter is positively correlated with the strength of evidence. For example, when Miss Marple tries to find out whether Doctor Sheppard is the killer, the more evidence she collects for the hypothesis that Doctor Sheppard is the killer, the more justified she is to believe that Doctor Sheppard is the killer, and the more she is causally inclined to believe that Doctor Sheppard is the killer (Christie, 1926).[10]

[10]There might be cases where a subject is not moved by their appreciation of the justificatory force of evidence, due to some deficit or performance error (cf. Borgoni & Luthra, 2017; Heil, 1984, pp. 69–70). This article, however, sets aside this further complication.

3.3 | Toward a quadruple-force framework of belief

If the analysis so far is along the right lines, then we may get a *quadruple-force framework*, according to which (obstinate) beliefs may be understood as the results of the interaction between the justificatory force and causal force of clear experience and the justificatory force and causal force of other independent evidence.

In optimal cases, S may have abundant evidence that P, and S may also have an experience in which it seems clear to S that P. S's evidence justifies the belief that P and causally inclines S to believe that P; S's clear experience provides additional justification for believing that P and also causally inclines S to believe that P. Most cases in our epistemic lives, such as your believing that there is an article in front of you, fall within this category.

In cases like the Müller-Lyer illusion, S may have a clear experience in which it seems clear to S that P, but at the same time S may also have some evidence against P. Whether S is justified to believe that P depends on whether the justification provided by the clear experience outweighs the justification provided by the evidence against P; and whether S believes that P depends on whether the causal force of the clear experience outweighs the causal force of the evidence against P.

In the Müller-Lyer illusion in particular, while it seems, to a certain degree, clear to S that the two lines have different lengths, S is not *ultima facie* justified to believe that the two lines have different lengths when S has sufficient evidence that the two lines are of the same length. This is because the justification of S's evidence outweighs or undercuts the prima facie justification provided by S's clear experience. S eventually holds the belief that the two lines are of the same length because the causal force of the evidence outweighs the causal force of the clear experience.

In some less optimal cases of obstinate belief such as certain akratic beliefs and certain delusional beliefs, S may have an experience in which it seems *very clear* to S that P, such that S is compelled to believe that P even in the face of the evidence against P. In such cases, S is not *ultima facie* justified to believe that P, because the justification of the evidence against P outweighs the prima facie justification provided by the clear experience that P; but S is causally compelled to believe that P because the causal force of the clear experience that P outweighs the causal force of the evidence against P.

Regarding Scanlon's akratic belief that Jones is a loyal friend, we have seen in Section 1 that Scanlon briefly suggested that a key factor is his experience in which it seems that Jones is a loyal friend, but the specific role of the seeming experience was open to question. With the quadruple-force framework, we may understand that Scanlon's seeming experience may have a high degree of phenomenal clarity (perhaps partly due to Jones' deceptive behaviors as a loyal friend) whose causal force outweighs the causal force of his counterevidence and hence causally compels him to believe that Jones is a loyal friend, despite that the justificatory force of his experience is outweighed by the justificatory force of his counterevidence.[11]

Regarding the patient's paranoid belief that people are out to get her, we have seen in Section 1 that phenomenologists suggested that the patient has a hyperclear intellectual experience in which it seems hyperclear to her that people are out to get her, and this hyperclear experience "compels" her to believe that people are out to get her. However, phenomenologists did not tell us how we should understand the nature of the compellingness. With the quadruple-force framework, we may take the compellingness to be the causal force of the patient's hyperclear experience. Specifically, the patient's hyperclear experience compels her to hold the delusional belief in the face of counterevidence, because the causal

[11]For a detailed comparison between this new account and other existing accounts of epistemic akrasia, see Nie (forthcoming).

force of her hyperclear experience outweighs the causal force of her counterevidence, even though the justificatory force of her counterevidence outweighs the justificatory force of her hyperclear experience.

4 | CONCLUSION

In this article, I have introduced the Hobbesian hypothesis that, in some cases, a person's clear experience that P may be a key factor in the etiology of their obstinate belief that P. I have distinguished phenomenal clarity from some phenomena that might be confused with phenomenal clarity to various extents. And, I have developed a quadruple-force framework for understanding how (obstinate) beliefs may be the results of the interaction between the justificatory force and causal force of clear experience and the justificatory force and causal force of other independent evidence.

This framework is immediately useful for philosophers who have already adopted or are attracted to the Hobbesian hypothesis to explain certain obstinate beliefs. While I used Scanlon's akratic belief and the paranoid delusion to illustrate how clear experiences may be an important causal factor, the Hobbesian hypothesis has the potential to explain other obstinate cases too. For example, consider why a person obstinately believes that flying is dangerous despite the counterevidence. With the help of the Hobbesian hypothesis, we may see that, in some cases, the person's fear of flying may contribute to the formation of an experience in which it seems clear to the subject that flying is dangerous, and this experience compels them to believes that flying is dangerous because the causal force of this experience outweighs the causal force of their counterevidence, even though the justificatory force of this experience is outweighed by the justificatory force of their counterevidence.

Another advantage of this framework is that it can explain obstinate beliefs without appealing to familiar factors in the literature, such as cognitive deficits or biases. This is, however, not to say that we should take the Hobbesian hypothesis to be superior to other theories. Instead, I take the epistemically damaging clear experience to be a factor that could complement the existing factors in the literature and take the quadruple-force framework to be a framework that could be compatible with other theories. Together, they may help us get a more comprehensive grip on complex cases.

As an illustration, let us consider a delusional case where the patient suffers from a clear experience that their delusion is true and suffers from an additional cognitive deficit such as a bias against disconfirming evidence (Eisenacher & Zink, 2017; McLean et al., 2017), and the patient may even claim that her delusion is *ultima facie* justified. Without the quadruple-force framework, we might only see that the role of the bias against disconfirming evidence is to prevent the patient from fully appreciating the justificatory force of counterevidence. By contrast, the quadruple-force framework may help provide a more comprehensive explanation. The patient takes her delusion to be *ultima facie* justified not only because of the bias against disconfirming evidence but also because of her clear experience providing prima facie justification; and the patient obstinately holds onto her delusion due to the following reasons: (1) she is causally inclined by her clear experience to hold the belief; (2) since the causal force of the evidence is dependent on the what the subject takes to be the justificatory force of the evidence (Section 3.2.2), by preventing her from fully appreciating the justificatory force of her counterevidence the cognitive bias also weakens the causal force of her counterevidence; (3) her consideration that she is *ultima facie* justified will also exert additional causal force to compel her belief.

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