

How To Be Conservative: A Partial Defense of Epistemic Conservatism

By Paul Silva Jr.

Conservatism about perceptual justification tells us that we cannot have perceptual justification to believe p unless we also have justification to believe that perceptual experiences are reliable. There are many ways to maintain this thesis, ways that have not been sufficiently appreciated. Most of these ways lead to at least one of two problems. The first is an over-intellectualization problem, whereas the second problem concerns the satisfaction of the epistemic basing requirement on justified belief. I argue that there is at least one Conservative view that survives both difficulties, a view which has the further ability to undercut a crucial consideration that has supported Dogmatist views about perceptual justification. The final section explores a tension between Conservatism and the prospects of having a completely general account of propositional justification. Ironically, the problem is that Conservatives seem committed to making the acquisition of propositional justification too easy. My partial defense of Conservatism concludes by suggesting possible solutions to this problem.¹

Key words: conservatism, dogmatism, perceptual justification, propositional justification, doxastic justification, epistemic basing, grounds, entitlements, easy justification

Introduction

Conservatism about perceptual justification tells us that we cannot have perceptual justification to believe p unless we also have justification to believe that perceptual experiences are reliable. Conservatism seems to face one with two insuperable difficulties. First, Conservatism seems to imply that only thinkers in robust cognitive conditions can have justified beliefs, thus robbing young children, cognitively impaired humans, and “smart” animals of justification. Second, Conservatism seems to imply that even we who are in robust cognitive conditions have very few justified perceptual beliefs because we typically do not epistemically base our perceptual beliefs, even partly, on the fact that we have justification to believe that perceptual experiences are reliable. In what follows I argue that there is at least one Conservative view that survives both difficulties, a view which has the ability to undercut a crucial consideration that has supported Dogmatist (non-Conservative) views about perceptual justification. The final section explores a tension between Conservatism and the prospects of having a completely general account of propositional justification. Ironically, the problem is that

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Conservatives seem committed to making the acquisition of propositional justification too easy. I end by suggesting possible solutions. Hence, my defense of Conservatism is only partial.

1 Kinds of Conservatism

When one has a *perceptual belief* in p one holds that belief because one has (or had) a perceptual experience whose (representational) content included p ; that is, one's belief in p is based, at least partly, on one's perceptual experience as of p . When one has *perceptual justification* to believe p one's justification to believe p , in some way, depends on one's having a perceptual experience as of p . In what follows I limit my concern to the relationship that obtains between perceptual beliefs, perceptual justification, and one's having justification to believe that perceptual experiences are reliable. This is primarily for convenience, and the conclusions I draw will naturally extend to, at least some, non-perceptual domains of belief and justification.

Minimally, *Dogmatism* about perceptual justification is the view that perceptual experiences are able to provide one with justification to believe their contents even if one lacks justification to believe, or any other positive epistemic status for, the claim that:

(PEAR) Perceptual experiences are reliable.²

In contrast, *Conservatism* about perceptual justification tells us that we cannot have perceptual justification to believe p unless we also have justification to believe (PEAR).³ There are many ways to be a Conservative about perceptual justification, but at a minimum Conservatism commits one to:

Generic Conservatism. Necessarily, S has perceptual justification to believe p *only if* S has a perceptual experience as of p and S has justification to believe that (PEAR).⁴

² Alston [1989], Goldman [1979], Huemer [2001], Pollock and Cruz [1999], and Pryor [2000]. The disjunct in my characterization of Dogmatism “or any other positive epistemic status for” is to keep conservative views, like Wright's [2004] theory of entitlements, from counting as a Dogmatist view.

³ This is not a suitably general characterization of “Conservative” (or “Dogmatist”) views for many paradigmatic Conservative views focus not simply on the reliability of perceptual experience but more generally on the denial of any skeptical alternative consistent with one's perceptual experiences (Pryor [2000], Neta [2010], Silins [2007], White [2006], and Wright [2004] and [2007]). These details will not affect our discussion for much of what follows will generalize to these alternative Conservative views, so for convenience I write as though (PEAR) were the sole concern of Dogmatists and Conservatives.

⁴ An anonymous referee has pointed out to me that Conservatives may wish to maintain a weaker condition for having perceptual justification. For one may have justification on the basis of one's perceptual experience as of p even if one lacks justification to believe (PEAR) provided one has justification to think that one's specific perceptual experience as of p is accurate. We can accommodate this insight by distinguishing between two

Generic Conservatism marks the baseline for Conservative views, indicating that one cannot have perceptual justification to believe *p* *unless* one also has justification to believe (PEAR). But many Conservatives think that whenever one has perceptual justification it's not just a happy accident that one also has justification to believe (PEAR). Rather, when one has perceptual justification it's in part *because* one has justification to believe (PEAR), i.e., one's perceptual justification in some way *depends on* one's justification to believe (PEAR).⁵

Yet to claim that perceptual justification depends on one's justification to believe (PEAR) is to leave much unsaid. Here are, for instance, three Conservative theses that make one's perceptual justification depend on one's justification to believe (PEAR) in three *different* ways:

Knowledge Conservatism. Necessarily, S has perceptual justification to believe *p* *only if and because* S has a perceptual experience as of *p* and S knows that (PEAR).

Doxastic Conservatism. Necessarily, S has perceptual justification to believe *p* *only if and because* S has a perceptual experience as of *p* and S justifiedly believes that (PEAR). Knowledge that (PEAR) is not required to have perceptual justification to believe *p*.

Propositional Conservatism. Necessarily, S has perceptual justification to believe *p* *only if and because* S has a perceptual experience as of *p* and S has justification to believe that (PEAR). Neither knowledge nor justified belief in (PEAR) are required to have perceptual justification to believe *p*.

I assume the usual view that one's *knowledge that p* depends on one having a *justified belief in p* (= doxastic justification for *p*), and that justified belief in *p* depends on one having *justification to believe p* (= propositional justification for *p*). Thus, each of these theses make one's perceptual justification to believe *p* depend on one's having justification to believe (PEAR). But both Knowledge and Doxastic Conservatism make the dependence relation that holds between one's perceptual justification to believe *p* and one's having justification to believe (PEAR) *indirect* since they say that it's *because* one has knowledge or justified belief in (PEAR) that one has perceptual justification to

kinds of perceptual justification. *General* perceptual justification, i.e., justification one has (at least partly) on the basis of a perceptual experience only if one has justification to believe (PEAR); and *specific* perceptual justification, i.e., justification one has (at least partly) on the basis of a perceptual experience only if one has justification to believe that that specific perceptual experience is accurate. My concerns are only with general perceptual justification, though the problems, observations, and conclusions drawn have obvious parallels in the case of specific perceptual justification. Accordingly, my use of the term 'perceptual justification' will always refer to general perceptual justification.

⁵ See Silins [2007] and Neta [2010] for interesting blends of Dogmatist and Conservative convictions.

believe p; if justification to believe (PEAR) were not required for knowledge or justified belief in (PEAR), then one would not need justification to believe (PEAR) in order to have perceptual justification to believe p. By contrast, Propositional Conservatism makes one's perceptual justification *independent* of one's knowledge or justified belief in (PEAR); for on this view it is not *because* one has knowledge or justified belief in (PEAR) that one has perceptual justification to believe p.

Both Knowledge and Doxastic Conservatism face a difficult problem. They both imply that in order to have perceptual justification to believe p one must have a *belief* in (PEAR) which in turn requires one to have the concepts necessary to form such a belief. But it's hard to imagine that young children, or those severely mentally handicapped, or even “smart” animals have such beliefs much less possession of the concepts necessary for forming those beliefs. So if Knowledge or Doxastic Conservatism is right, then such thinkers lack perceptual knowledge as well as perceptually justified beliefs. This is rather counterintuitive. Call this *the over-intellectualization objection*. This is a good reason to reject both versions of Conservatism.⁶ Propositional Conservatism does not obviously face the over-intellectualization objection for it only requires one to have justification to believe (PEAR), and thus does not require one to form any beliefs in (PEAR) whatsoever. This is a strong reason to prefer Propositional Conservatism over its rivals.⁷

Now, advocates of Propositional Conservatism owe us an explanation of how it is possible for young children as well as the rest of us to have justification to believe (PEAR). For present purposes let's simply grant that there is such an explanation. My aim in what follows is to compare two ways of being a Propositional Conservative, one fraught with difficulty and the other rich with advantage.

2 Two Kinds of Propositional Conservatism

Propositional Conservatism says that perceptual justification depends on one's having justification to believe (PEAR), but this implies nothing about *how* it is that perceptual justification depends on one's having justification to believe (PEAR). There are, after all, many ways in which one thing can depend on another; so however informative it is to be told that x depends on y, there remains the question of just how x depends on y. This section contrasts two views on the nature of the dependence relation that holds between perceptual justification and one's justification to believe (PEAR). Appreciating these different views has much to offer Conservatives.

⁶ Alston [1989: chapter 3] inveighs against higher-level requirements on the same grounds. Schmitt [2001] discusses Doxastic Conservatism, or something much like. Against it, he offers the over-intellectualization objection [2001: 184-185], and even marshals some evidence from empirical psychology in support of the claim that young children actually lack a concept of reliability and thus cannot form beliefs involving it. Zalabardo [2005: 49-50] likewise finds the over-intellectualization objection a serious problem for views that, like Doxastic and Knowledge Conservatism, require beliefs about reliability.

⁷ Endorsements of Propositional Conservatism, or something very close to it, can be found in Cohen [2010: 153-156], White [2006: 552-553], and Zalabardo [2005: 34, 49-50].

2.1 Grounds Conservatism

To understand the first kind of Conservatism it helps to consider the matter in terms of having perceptually justified *beliefs*, rather than solely in terms of having perceptual justification *to believe*.⁸ A Propositional Conservative might maintain that one's perceptually justified belief in *p* depends on one's justification to believe (PEAR) in this way:

(Grounds) Necessarily, when one has a perceptually justified belief in *p* the *ground* of one's belief is constituted by one's perceptual experience as of *p* and one's justification to believe (PEAR).⁹

Notice that *having justification to believe* (= propositional justification) and *having a justified belief* (= doxastic justification) are importantly different. To have a justified belief in *p* its not enough that one believe *p* and that one have justification to believe *p*: at the very least, one must also *base* their belief in *p* on an epistemically appropriate ground (or reason) for belief in *p*. This raises further questions: what is a *ground*, what is an *epistemically appropriate* ground, and what is it to *base* one's belief on a ground?

One's *actual* grounds for one's belief in *p* are whatever one actually bases one's belief in *p* on. But one's belief might have been based on something else. Anything else one may have based their belief on is a *possible* ground for that belief. Might there be (metaphysically) *impossible* grounds for belief, i.e., grounds one has to believe something which one cannot base one's belief on? If not, then because all actual grounds are possible grounds we can characterize 'ground for belief' functionally as follows:

(Funct) *x* is a ground for belief in *p* =df one is able to base one's belief in *p* on *x*.

For reasons not pertinent to the present discussion, I don't think there are (metaphysically) impossible grounds, and so I find (Funct) adequate. For those who think there are such grounds, they may simply interpret my use of the term 'ground' in what follows as an abbreviation for 'possible ground'. Nothing substantial turns on this issue because to have a perceptually *justified belief* one's belief must be based on some possible perceptual ground, even if one could have impossible perceptual grounds.

Familiar candidates for one's grounds are beliefs and perceptual, memorial, introspective, and intuitive experiences. But these are not the only things that can be grounds; anything can be a ground so long as one is able to base a belief on it. Hence, fears, hopes, desires, and imaginings may also constitute one's grounds for belief. What is

⁸ For convenience I use 'perceptually justified belief' to abbreviate 'perceptually justified perceptual belief'. I am not concerned with cases where one has a non-perceptual belief that nevertheless enjoys perceptual justification.

⁹ Silins [2007: 110-111] thinks Conservatives are committed to (Grounds). It is not immediately obvious that this is his view of Conservatism, but it must be given his objection that if Conservatism is right, then we typically *fail* to base our beliefs on *epistemically appropriate* grounds because we typically do not base our beliefs on our justification to believe propositions like (PEAR). For the objection see his [2007: 118-119].

needed in a complete account of what constitutes one's grounds is an interpretation of the kind of modality involved in the claim that one's grounds are whatever one is *able to* base a belief on. Importantly, that interpretation should likely range somewhere between one's metaphysical possibilities and one's actual psychological abilities. We need more than mere psychological ability because one can be, say, brainwashed or otherwise impaired so that one is not psychologically capable of taking advantage of one's grounds.¹⁰ We likely need something less than metaphysical possibility because this would make every metaphysically possible ground an actual ground, which is probably overkill. But specifying the relevant kind of modality involved is unnecessary for present purposes; for we can allow for more or less strict views about what constitutes one's grounds while still holding to the above functional characterization of one's grounds.

Obviously, not all grounds are epistemically appropriate. Suppose one's belief that *p* is based on the fact that one is having an imaginative experience as of *p*. This imaginative experience is not an epistemically appropriate basis for one to believe *p* in the sense that it fails to give one justification to believe *p*, and thus basing one's belief in *p* on that imaginative experience would fail to yield a *justified* belief. Let us say, then, that an *epistemically appropriate* ground for belief in *p* is any ground for *p* one has which (a) gives one *prima facie* justification to believe *p*, and (b) is such that one is able, in some suitable sense, to base their belief in *p* solely on that ground and thereby form a justified belief in *p* (provided one lacks defeaters). We will refer to such epistemically appropriate grounds as *justifying grounds*.

We have characterized both grounds and justifying grounds in terms of the basing relation. What, then, does the basing relation consist in? The most prominent theories of the basing relation have it that what it takes for a belief to be based on some ground, *g*, is (very roughly) either (1) one's belief in *p* being non-deviantly caused by *g*,¹¹ or (2) it being the case that one's belief in *p* would have been so caused by *g* in appropriate circumstances,¹² or (3) one having a meta-belief to the effect that *g* is a good reason to believe *p*,¹³ or (4) some combination of (1)-(3).¹⁴ Fortunately, we needn't settle this matter to proceed with our discussion of Conservatism.

So, any Propositional Conservative who maintains (Grounds) is committed to the following:

Grounds Conservatism. Necessarily, *S* has a perceptually justified belief in *p* *only if and because* (i) *S* has a perceptual experience as of *p*, (ii) *S* has justification to believe (PEAR), and (iii) *S* has based her belief in *p* on both her perceptual experience as of *p* and on her justification to believe (PEAR). *S*'s perceptual experience as of *p* alone cannot be a justifying ground for *p*, so, her belief in *p* could not be perceptually justified unless (iii) obtained.

¹⁰ Feldman and Conee [1985: 17] and Alston [1989: 95-96].

¹¹ Alston [1989: 227-230] and Turri [2011].

¹² Swain [1985] develops this but maintains it only as a sufficient condition for basing.

¹³ Tolliver [1982] and Leite [2008].

¹⁴ Audi [1986], Karcz [2000], Swain [1985], and Moser [1989: 157].

Grounds Conservatism, then, is the view that whenever one has a perceptually justified belief in *p*, one's justifying ground for *p* is jointly constituted by (i) and (ii).

But Grounds Conservatism faces two related problems. First, even if it's in principle possible, it's not at all clear that we typically, if ever, base our perceptual beliefs on our justification to believe (PEAR) in addition to our perceptual experiences themselves. Thus, because Grounds Conservatism makes the existence of perceptually justified beliefs depend on their being based on one's justification to believe (PEAR), Grounds Conservatism appears to imply that we have very few, if any, perceptually justified beliefs.¹⁵

Second, Grounds Conservatism involves a rather puzzling feature; it tells us that perceptually justified beliefs must be based on *epistemic facts* such as (ii). Just how puzzling this feature is depends on one's account of the basing relation as well as one's metaphysics of epistemic facts. But without getting too bogged down in the details, just notice that when epistemologists discuss grounds for belief, the *grounds* themselves are, at least typically, not epistemic facts. Rather, they are things like beliefs or experiences of certain sorts.¹⁶ The role of epistemic facts in a discussion of one's grounds usually concerns the *epistemic appropriateness* of one's grounds. For example, it is the epistemic fact *that a belief B1 is justified* that can make basing certain other beliefs on it epistemically appropriate, but the epistemic fact itself is not thought to be a ground. So there is a general question, is it even possible for one to base a belief, even partly, on an epistemic fact? That is, can an epistemic fact be a (partial) ground for belief?¹⁷ If not, then Grounds Conservatism implies that we cannot have any perceptually justified beliefs. Let us call these two general worries facing Grounds Conservatism *the basing problems*.

In response to the basing problems (non-skeptical) Grounds Conservatives owe us two explanations. First, they must explain how is it possible for beliefs to be based on epistemic facts such as (ii). Second, they must explain how is it that our perceptually justified beliefs typically turn out to be partly based on (ii) despite the fact that they do not seem to be. Providing such explanations is a difficult and, possibly, unnecessary task. For there is another way to be a Propositional Conservative, a way that does not saddle one with the basing problems nor these explanatory burdens.¹⁸

¹⁵ Silins [2007: 118-119].

¹⁶ Of course a *belief* that an epistemic fact obtains can be a ground, but that's not what Grounds Conservatism says--nor could it be without re-introducing the over-intellectualization objection.

¹⁷ Notice that a positive answer to these questions raises a further question: if the epistemic fact (ii) is, along with (i), to constitute one's ground for belief, what is it that makes (i) and (ii) a justifying ground? Presumably, it will be some further epistemic fact. But what fact is it, and can we in a principled way resist the thought that that further epistemic fact is not itself to join with (i) and (ii) in being one's grounds? A regress may threaten at this point.

¹⁸ To illustrate the difficulty of providing the needed explanations consider two views of the basing relation as it regards perceptual justification and (ii): (A) one that requires (ii) to be part of the (non-deviant) cause of one's perceptual beliefs (at least in certain counterfactual circumstances), and (B) one that makes having the meta-belief *that (ii) is a*

2.2 Metaphysical Conservatism

The basing problems are challenging enough that it should come as a relief to Conservatives that there is a second way to uphold Propositional Conservatism. On this view, one's justification to believe (PEAR) need not partly constitute one's justifying grounds, rather it's one's justification to believe (PEAR) that *makes* one's *perceptual experiences* themselves justifying grounds. That is:

Metaphysical Conservatism. Necessarily, S has a perceptually justified belief in p *only if and because* (i) S has a perceptual experience as of p, (ii) S has justification to believe (PEAR), and (iii*) S has based her belief in p on her perceptual experience as of p. Necessarily, it is S's having justification to believe (PEAR) that makes S's perceptual experience as of p a justifying ground for belief in p.¹⁹

Metaphysical Conservatism says that it's one's justification to believe (PEAR) that makes one's perceptual grounds *justifying* grounds, it is what gives perceptual experience its justificatory power. Put differently, one's perceptual experience as of p is a justifying ground for p *in virtue of* or *because of* one's justification to believe (PEAR); or, more illustratively, it is one's justification to believe (PEAR) that *transforms* or *forges* one's perceptual experience from a mere ground into a justifying ground. Thus, in order to take advantage of one's perceptual justifying grounds for the purposes of having a perceptually justified belief one needn't base their belief even partly on the epistemic fact that one has justification to believe (PEAR). To acquire a perceptually justified belief in p all one must do is base one's belief on their perceptual experience as of p itself. By not requiring one to base their perceptual beliefs on one's justification to believe (PEAR), Metaphysical Conservatism nimbly circumvents the basing problems Grounds Conservatism faces.

good reason to believe the contents of one's perceptual experiences sufficient for a perceptual belief to be based partly on (ii). On the first view, epistemic facts must play a causal role in the formation of one's beliefs. Those who put epistemic facts outside the causal nexus will be unable to allow for this, and those who reduce epistemic facts to natural facts must provide a plausible reduction of (ii) to some causally efficacious fact, and then show that that fact plays a causal role in the formation of perceptual beliefs. On the second view, it does not matter if epistemic facts have causal powers, for all that is needed is a meta-belief that (ii) is a good reason to believe the contents of one's perceptual experiences. The trouble with this option is that it returns us to the over-intellectualization objection, for there are thinkers who have perceptually justified beliefs but lack any such meta-belief.

¹⁹ To clarify: in my view (ii) does not make the perceptual experience a ground for belief, rather (ii) makes perceptual experience a justifying ground for belief. What makes something g a ground has to do with one's ability to base a belief on g, and, quite clearly, having justification to believe (PEAR) is not the sort of thing that can account for such an ability.

Metaphysical Conservatism is a strong view, entailing that whenever one's perceptual experiences are justifying grounds it is always because one has justification to believe (PEAR) *and* that one's justification to believe (PEAR) accomplishes this independently of any other factors. But there are weaker “metaphysically conservative” views one could adopt. For example, one might hold that what makes perceptual experiences justifying grounds are (a) one's justification to believe (PEAR) acting in concert with (b) certain other factors (e.g., perhaps the *fact* that perceptual experiences are reliable). On such weaker views (a) and (b), individually, are only *partly* that in virtue of which perceptual experiences are justifying grounds. Such weaker views are still versions of Conservatism for they entail that one cannot have perceptual justification to believe *p* unless one also has justification to believe (PEAR). It is an interesting question whether Conservatives should prefer Metaphysical Conservatism over weaker metaphysically conservative views. But this is an in-house debate for Conservatives, and the pressing question is whether there is any version of Conservatism that can avoid the basing problems. I have argued that Metaphysical Conservatism does not face the basing problems because it recognizes a difference between one's justifying grounds and what it is that makes one's grounds justifying grounds. Weaker metaphysically conservative views can also take advantage of this insight and thereby avoid the basing problems also, thus opening up further space for disagreement within the Conservative ranks.

Now, Metaphysical Conservatism is not tied to any particular view about how it is one can acquire justification to believe (PEAR). Thus are at least as many ways of being a Metaphysical Conservative as there are views about how we can come by justification to believe (PEAR). For example, Cohen has argued that coherence can yield knowledge of, and thus justification to believe, (PEAR);²⁰ Cohen has more recently argued that we have a priori justification for (PEAR);²¹ and Enoch and Schechter have argued that pragmatic features of one's situation can afford one justification to believe (PEAR).²² But there are other possible, though perhaps less plausible, explanations: one could maintain that it's a brute fact that we have justification to believe (PEAR), or one could maintain that it's the actual reliability of our perceptual experiences that grounds our justification to believe (PEAR), or one could maintain we have justification to believe (PEAR) by divine fiat. In this way Metaphysical Conservatism shares a common project with Conservatism generally for every (non-skeptical) Conservative must explain just how it is that we come by our justification to believe (PEAR) irrespective of whether and how our perceptual justification depends on justification to believe (PEAR). But this explanatory question faces not just Conservatives, but anyone who maintains that we have justification to believe (PEAR). Since this is such a general issue and there is no unique burden on Metaphysical Conservatives to provide an answer I will leave this issue open. However, in the next section I will flag a problem that seems to beset Conservatives (and not Dogmatists) in their attempt to answer the question of how we come by justification to believe (PEAR). But before noting this problem let's highlight Metaphysical Conservatism's significant advantages.

²⁰ Cohen [2002: 322ff].

²¹ Cohen [2010: 153-156].

²² Enoch and Schechter [2008]. Cp. Wright [2004].

First, because it's a version of Propositional Conservatism it avoids the over-intellectualization objection. Second, it explains both *why* Propositional Conservatism is correct and *how* one's perceptual justification depends on one's justification to believe (PEAR). Third, it avoids the basing problems because it does not require one's beliefs to be based on the epistemic fact (ii). Finally, Metaphysical Conservatism neutralizes a significant consideration that has been thought to favor only Dogmatism. To see this consider the following two claims:

- (1) We have very many perceptually justified beliefs.
- (2) The vast majority of our perceptually justified beliefs are based *solely* on our perceptual experiences.

In order for both of these to be correct, perceptual experiences must themselves be justifying grounds. Thus, some have thought that Dogmatism alone could account for both (1) and (2) because Dogmatism alone can have it that perceptual experiences are justifying grounds. Accordingly, this consideration has been taken to give anti-skeptics not only a reason to endorse Dogmatism but also a reason to reject Conservatism.²³ Although this consideration dramatically diminishes the plausibility of Grounds Conservatism, it utterly fails as an objection to Metaphysical Conservatism, which makes perceptual experiences *themselves* justifying grounds for their contents. Thus Dogmatists *and* Metaphysical Conservatives are able to maintain the following thesis about perceptual justification:

Immediacy. If one has a perceptual experience as of p (and lacks defeaters for p), then one's perceptual experience as of p makes it the case that one has *prima facie* justification to believe p.

Immediacy is highly intuitive, telling us that perceptual experiences themselves have the power to bring about *prima facie* justification to believe their contents--an intuition that Dogmatists have often capitalized on. But because Immediacy does not tell us *why* perceptual experiences have that power, Dogmatists have no unique purchase on it.²⁴

3 Conservatism, Propositional Justification, and Easy Justification

Conservatism entails that there is no perceptual justification where there is no justification to believe (PEAR). So Conservatives of any stripe who are not skeptics about perceptual justification owe us an explanation of how it could be that:

(JtB) We (including young children, the mentally handicapped, etc.) have justification to believe (PEAR).

²³ Silins [2007: 118-119], Neta [2010: 964], and Huemer [2007: 39-42].

²⁴ See Silins [2007: 113-114], who makes a closely related point about mere sufficient conditions for having perceptual justification and their independence of conservative and non-conservative views.

This is a tricky and subtle enterprise. The trouble involves a balancing act between giving a completely general account of propositional justification (= justification to believe) and maintaining (JtB). For there are many things we not only fail to justifiedly believe, but lack justification to believe. So, on the one hand, we need an account of propositional justification that does not permit us to acquire propositional justification too easily. On the other hand, we need an account of propositional justification that permits (JtB). Here's my worry: any account of propositional justification that allows young children, etc., justification to believe (PEAR) will imply that we who are not young, etc., have justification to believe all sorts of things which we intuitively lack justification to believe.

For purposes of illustration consider what Cohen, himself a Conservative, has to say about propositional justification:

Using standard technical vocabulary, we can say that I am *propositionally* justified in believing P just in case I can arrive at P via trivial reasoning. For example, before I considered this very sentence, I was justified in believing that I cannot see the Southern Cross constellation from in front of my house. Though I had not actually reasoned to this conclusion, I was justified in believing it in the sense that I could arrive at it via trivial reasoning (from my justified beliefs that I live in the northern hemisphere and that the Southern Cross is visible only in the southern hemisphere).²⁵

Two points. First, it's plausible to think that on those occasions where one has inferential propositional justification when one is in a position to easily perform some trivial bit of reasoning, it is because one is in such a position that one has inferential propositional justification. Second, this view plausibly generalizes beyond inferential means of arriving at beliefs to any appropriate method of belief formation. Accordingly, Cohen's commentary on propositional justification suggests the following account of propositional justification:

(CPJ) One currently has justification to believe p IFF one currently has justification to believe p BECAUSE one has an appropriate means by which one could easily form a justified belief in p.²⁶

(CPJ), if correct, makes trouble for Conservative views. For (CPJ) makes problems for any form of Conservatism that accords knowledge or justified belief to young children, etc. For it is implausible to think young children, etc., have any means easily available to them by which they could come to justifiedly believe (PEAR). But if, in response, a Conservative loosens the restrictions on having propositional justification so that young children, etc., can have justification to believe (PEAR) despite lacking the ability to easily form a justified belief in (PEAR), they risk making propositional justification too easy for the rest of us.²⁷ For example, there are meaning equivalence claims between

²⁵ Cohen [2010: 154].

²⁶ For a defense of roughly this principle, see Turri [2010].

²⁷ There are three ways in which a justified belief in p could fail to be, intuitively, *easy* to acquire: one can lack the *concepts* needed to form the belief; one can have the concepts

certain expressions of English and certain expressions of Hindi, that I, intuitively, lack justification to believe because I do not understand a lick of Hindi. But if the Conservative lets children who lack the concepts present in (PEAR) have justification to believe (PEAR), then how can they in a principled way prohibit me from having justification to believe these English-Hindi meaning equivalence claims? Call this *the epistemic expansion problem*. This is not an idiosyncratic problem that (CPJ) raises. For, by the lights of many, we can have justification to believe more things than we actually justifiedly believe. If right, any who wish to accord young children, etc., justification to believe (PEAR) despite lacking the ability to easily form a justified belief in (PEAR), will face the epistemic expansion problem in some form or other.

There are three kinds of solution to the epistemic expansion problem for those with a Conservative frame of mind. The first kind of solution is to abandon a full-blown version of Metaphysical Conservatism, allowing that the perceptual experiences of epistemic agents in poorer cognitive conditions can afford them justification *in the absence of* having justification to believe (PEAR), while maintaining a restricted version of Metaphysical Conservatism that holds for sophisticated subjects. Such a move might be justified by something like, what Schechter has aptly named, “the spiderman principle” in epistemology: with greater cognitive power comes greater epistemic responsibility.²⁸ But there is a stability worry here. For such a view will be committed to claiming that there is something, X, in virtue of which the perceptual experiences of unsophisticated cognitive agents afford them justification; something that, presumably, can still be present in the case of sophisticated cognitive agents. But how then, might it be that X is able to forge perceptual experiences into justifying grounds for unsophisticated agents, but not for sophisticated ones? How is it that cognitive sophistication can neutralize X's ability? These questions cannot be answered in the abstract. So I leave it to defenders of the view to answer them.

The second kind of solution to the epistemic expansion problem is to provide an account of propositional justification that gives all of us justification to believe (PEAR) without having any of these counterintuitive consequences. One way of pulling this off will involve weakening the “because”-clause in (CPJ) in some manner. Thus a Conservative may argue for an instance of the following schema:

(CPJ*) One currently has justification to believe p IFF: one currently has justification to believe p BECAUSE *either* one has an appropriate means by which one could easily form a justified belief in p *or* X.

The idea here is that there may be a second way of coming by justification to believe p, a way that does not require one to have a means of acquiring a justified belief. A candidate for X that Conservatives may find attractive involves pragmatic considerations, appealing

but lack an epistemically appropriate *means* of forming the belief; and one can have the concepts and an epistemically appropriate means of forming the belief but lack *a sufficiently powerful intellect* to entertain the content to be believed (as when one attempts to consider a very, very long and complicated theorem).

²⁸ Schechter [forthcoming]. I owe consideration of this possibility to an anonymous referee.

to the idea that there are certain things we must take for granted in engaging in any practice and that engaging in an *epistemic* practice can sometimes confer on one *justification* to believe those things that must be taken for granted.²⁹ Investigation of this matter is beyond the scope of the present paper, but I mention it because it seems plausible that pragmatic considerations do sometimes *rationalize* what we take for granted, and thus give rise to a kind of reason for foundational claims (“cornerstones”) regarding our practices. Moreover, it seems that such reasons are also able to rationalize our endorsement of foundational claims in a *controlled* way that does not open the floodgates to innumerable bizarre justifications, such as the aforementioned meaning claims.

However, some may resist solving the epistemic expansion problem through a weakening of the “because”-clause in (CPJ*). They will resist, perhaps, on grounds of simplicity, but perhaps on the grounds that such pragmatic considerations cannot give rise to truly epistemic justification for claims such as (PEAR). A third possible solution, then, to the epistemic expansion problem is to adopt a different version of Conservatism, one that is concerned not with epistemic justification for (PEAR) but some other kind of positive epistemic position with respect to (PEAR).

For example, perhaps something along the lines of Wright's theory of entitlements may help. On Wright's view, an *entitlement* is a low-grade, non-evidential kind of epistemic warrant for acceptance that is grounded in pragmatic elements of a thinker's situation, where *acceptance* is a belief-like propositional attitude akin to trust.³⁰ Wright's idea is that, although we cannot have epistemic justification to believe (PEAR), we can have an entitlement to accept it. Wedding Wright's view to the Metaphysical Conservative's strategy yields something like the following:

Metaphysical Entitlement Conservatism. Necessarily, S has a perceptually justified belief in p *only if and because* (i) S has a perceptual experience as of p, (ii*) S has an *entitlement to accept* that (PEAR), and (iii*) S has based her belief in p on (i). Necessarily, it is S's having an entitlement to accept (PEAR) that makes S's perceptual experience as of p a justifying ground for belief in p.

The upshot of Metaphysical Entitlement Conservatism is its ability to allow one perceptually justified beliefs without requiring one to have *justification* to believe (PEAR). In so doing Metaphysical Entitlement Conservatism will not face the epistemic expansion problem, and for that very reason it will not require adjusting one's account of propositional justification--e.g., (CPJ)--in order to avoid that problem. Moreover, Metaphysical Entitlement Conservatism possesses all of Metaphysical Conservatism's chief advantages: it survives the over-intellectualization objection faced by Knowledge and Doxastic Conservatism, it dodges the basing problems faced by Grounds

²⁹ For development of these ideas see Enoch and Schechter [2008] and Wright [2004]--though Wright's concern is not with justifications to believe but entitlements to accept (see below).

³⁰ Wright [2004: 175-178].

Conservatism, and like Metaphysical Conservatism it too has the ability to undercut a crucial consideration in favor of Dogmatism.³¹

In conclusion, I have argued that some Conservative views can survive certain, familiar objections in addition to appropriating some of Dogmatism's chief insights. So there is tangible hope for Conservatism in epistemology provided there is some acceptable response to the epistemic expansion problem. I have suggested three possible solutions, though I have defended none in detail.

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³¹ For discussion of theories of entitlement see Davies [2004] Jenkins [2007], Pedersen [2009], Pritchard [2012], and Tucker [2009].

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