

Tetens' Refutation of Idealism and Properly Basic Belief

Tetens endorses two seemingly incompatible theses in his refutation of idealism. On the one hand, he claims that judgements about the existence of external objects are no more problematic than judgements about the contents of our own minds: Both are perfectly natural and both are justified by experience independently of philosophical argumentation. On the other hand, he claims that judgements about the existence of external objects are threatened by the sceptical idealism of Berkeley and Hume: Philosophical argumentation is needed to back knowledge claims about the existence of objects outside us. I want to suggest that the tension here is only apparent. Drawing a distinction between first-level immediate justification and higher-level epistemic justification will not only eliminate the appearance of conflict; if I am right, it will also show that Tetens' argument contains an important philosophical insight that is otherwise obscured.

The distinction between first-level immediate justification and higher-level epistemic justification comes from William Alston. I doubt if Alston ever read Tetens (or even heard of him), but the fact that Thomas Reid was the most significant historical influence on both thinkers may help to explain the aptness of Alston's distinction for clarifying Tetens' position.¹ Tetens is too remote a figure to have influenced Alston himself – he's hardly known outside of Germany – but, like Alston, his basic approach to epistemology is firmly rooted in Scottish common sense philosophy. That we find broad agreement on certain points is therefore unsurprising, and the attempt to read levels of justification into Tetens' refutation of idealism is more a matter of refining, than of revising, ideas that Tetens himself was struggling to express.

The paper has three sections. In Section 1, I explain the notion of proper basicity, which will be central to my interpretation of Tetens. In Section 2, I outline Tetens' argument. In Section 3, I indicate how Alston's distinction between levels of justification can help explain why Tetens offers a philosophical defence of our belief in the existence of external objects when, according to his own theory, such beliefs are justified independently of all reasoning and argumentation.

¹ Alston's indebtedness to Reid is well known. For some indication of the importance of Reid to Alston's thinking, see his *Thomas Reid on Epistemic Principles*. In: *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 2.4 (1985), pp. 435–452. For the influence of Reid on Tetens, see Manfred Kuehn: *Scottish Common Sense in Germany, 1768-1800*. Kingston, Montreal 1987, specifically Chapter 7.

1. Proper Basicity

My goal in this section is to explain what a properly basic belief or proposition is.² Many of the things we believe, we believe on the basis of other things we believe. I believe that my sister has lungs, for instance, because I believe that she is a mammal and I believe that mammals have lungs. I also believe that I am tired. But I don't believe that I am tired because of any other beliefs that I hold. My grounds for believing that I am tired are entirely non-propositional. They do not include any further beliefs, say, about my not having slept much last night or about my not having had enough tea. Propositions about the likely effects of lack of sleep or lack of tea could reinforce my belief that I am tired, but that's not the case right now – or at least it wasn't a moment ago before I started thinking about them. Propositions held to be true independently of any further beliefs are called *basic*. Propositions held to be true at least partly on the basis of other beliefs are called *nonbasic*. The distinction between basic and nonbasic beliefs can be expressed as follows:

S's belief that P is basic for S if and only if S's grounds for holding that P do not include any other beliefs of S.

S's belief that P is nonbasic for S if and only if S's grounds for holding that P do include other beliefs of S.

According to this characterization, my belief that I am tired right now is basic for me because my grounds for holding that I am tired do not include any other propositions that I believe.

But that does not imply that my belief is groundless. If someone were to ask me, ›Why do you believe that you are tired?, I wouldn't cite any other proposition. But I also wouldn't say, ›For no reason at all. Though I might not know exactly how to describe or point to the grounds of my belief, I do have grounds, and so the belief is not held arbitrarily. There is a characteristic experience I am undergoing that not only *causes* the belief that I am tired. It also *justifies* it. By contrast, if I were to form the belief that everything will turn out for the best on the basis of a hunch or some other indeterminate feeling, my belief, though *caused* – by the hunch – would not be *justified*. My belief that everything will turn out for the best would be basic, but it wouldn't be *properly* basic, since its ground would have no justificatory force. The characteristic experience that grounds my belief that I am tired, on the other hand, does possess justificatory force. Let's say that a basic belief whose grounds have justificatory force is *properly basic*.³

- 2 It will not be necessary for our purposes to draw a clear distinction between beliefs and propositions. Very roughly, a proposition is the object of a belief. I will also alternate between the language of judgement and the language of belief, since judging that P seems to be equivalent to forming the belief that P for Tetens.
- 3 The term ›properly basic‹ comes originally from Alvin Plantinga, another reformed epistemologist who was influenced decisively by Reid. My formulation differs from Plantinga's, but it is meant to be consistent with it. See Alvin Plantinga: *On Taking Belief in God as Basic*. In: John Hick (ed.): *Classical and Contemporary Readings in the Philosophy of Religion*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey 1990, pp. 484–499.

S's belief that P is properly basic for S if and only if (1) S's grounds for holding that P do not include any other beliefs of S, and (2) S's belief that P is justified for S.

A belief is properly taken to be basic only if certain conditions are met. It is not easy to spell out in a general way what those conditions are, but, as we have just seen, that does not prevent us from identifying certain beliefs as having proper basicity (such as the belief that I am tired) and others as lacking it (such as the belief that everything will turn out for the best).

Commitment to the existence of properly basic beliefs distinguishes foundationalist from non-foundationalist theories of knowledge. Foundationalism comes in many forms, but the core principles are these:

F1: There are properly basic beliefs.

F2: All justified nonbasic beliefs are justified by virtue of standing in some appropriate relation to properly basic beliefs.⁴

It seems to me that Tetens accepts F1, but since I'm unsure about F2, I won't call him a foundationalist. Nevertheless, our account of proper basicity will be enhanced by a brief consideration of two ways in which foundationalists differ with respect to F1.

Restricting our attention to F1, we can generate different versions of foundationalism by offering different answers to the following two questions:⁵

(1) What *kinds* of propositions can properly be taken as basic?

(2) What is the *epistemic status* of properly basic propositions?

Starting with (1), we'll use Triplett's term ›psychological foundationalism‹ for the view that only propositions describing a person's mental states can be properly basic for that person: ›I am appeared to greenly‹ will be properly basic for me if I believe it in the appropriate epistemic circumstances.⁶ Psychological foundationalism provides a poor platform for combating idealism, since no conjunction of propositions describing a person's mental states entails the existence of the objects those mental states are ostensibly about. But a more liberal understanding of proper basicity is also possible.

External-world foundationalists hold that ordinary propositions about everyday objects are properly basic for a subject when relevant conditions obtain. In my current epistemic circumstances the proposition ›There is a table in front of me‹ is properly basic. The characteristic perceptual experience I am having right now justifies my belief that there is a table in front of

⁴ See Richard Feldman's similar account of foundationalism in Chapter 4 of *Epistemology*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey 2002, specifically p. 52.

⁵ Additional questions can be asked in order to generate yet further versions of foundationalism, but they won't play any role here. For an exhaustive taxonomy, see Timm Triplett: *Recent Work on Foundationalism*. In: *American Philosophical Quarterly* 27.2 (1990), pp. 93–116. I rely heavily on Triplett in this and the next two paragraphs.

⁶ I adopt Mark Nelson's definition of ›epistemic circumstances‹: »Our epistemic circumstances are, roughly, those aspects of our circumstances that count in favour of the truth or falsity, probability or

me, and since I haven't inferred it from any propositions describing my mental states – nor from any other propositions – it is properly regarded as basic.

The second question concerns the degree of justification that basic propositions admit of. Classical foundationalists such as Descartes insisted that the foundations of knowledge must be justified to the very highest degree: Basic propositions were supposed to be indubitable, incorrigible and absolutely certain. Triplett calls this stringent view ›superior basics foundationalism‹. Few epistemologists today require such ›high performance‹ foundations for a theory of knowledge. Modest basics foundationalism – by far the dominant view – requires only that the basic propositions have some degree of justification, but they needn't be invincible.

Suppose for a moment that external-world foundationalism is correct. Given my current sensory experiences, the proposition ›There is a table in front of me‹ is justified. But that doesn't mean that I couldn't be mistaken about it – a belief needn't be indefeasible in order for me to be ›modestly‹ (that is to say, *prima facie*) justified in holding it. If it turns out that I was hallucinating and I had no reason to think that I was, the qualitative features of my table-like experience still made it more reasonable than not for me to suppose that there was a table in front of me.

My idea is that Tetens is committed to the foundationalist understanding of proper basicity in the external-world, modest basics sense, and that his argument against idealism turns on it. Here is what I have in mind: According to some external-world, modest basics foundationalists, propositions such as (1) and (2) can be properly basic for a person in the appropriate epistemic circumstances:

- (1) There is a tree in front of me.
- (2) There is a house in front of me.

The truth of either of these propositions immediately and self-evidently entails the truth of propositions (3) and (4):

- (3) There are external objects.
- (4) The external world exists.

Of course the truth of either (3) or (4) entails the falsity of (5) and (6), which are the central theses of Berkeleyan and Humean idealism, respectively:

- (5) The only things that exist are minds and ideas.
- (6) The only things that exist are ideas.

If propositions (1) and (2) are properly basic, then we are *prima facie* justified in believing that (5) and (6) are false. And if we are *prima facie* justified in believing that (5) and (6) are false, then we have, if not a disproof of idealism, then at least a good bet against it. This is more or

improbability, of certain propositions.« Mark Nelson: *We Have No Positive Epistemic Duties*. In: *Mind* 119 (2010), pp. 83–102, specifically p. 86.

less the argument that I think Tetens wants to give. I will make a case for this interpretation in Section 2.

2. Philosophical Psychology

Tetens' refutation of idealism occurs in the fifth *Philosophical Essay*, »On the Origin of our Knowledge of the Objective Existence of Things«.7 The argument opens with a remark on the signifying role of representations:

Representations are for themselves signs of other things to which they refer themselves. But this is what they are for us as well. We represent things (*Sachen*) to ourselves through them. They are a script by which we distinguish not only the letters and words, and read them, but we also understand them, and underlay them with a sense in that we don't just regard them as changes in ourselves but as things (*Dinge*) and qualities (*Beschaffenheiten*) which have an objective existence. Some ideas represent us and our modifications; others are representations of our body and its modifications; others show us objects (*Objekte*) outside of us and properties of them.⁸

Tetens seems to think that every experience is representational and that representations are natural signs for us: some representations refer to external objects, some refer to the body and some are associated with the mind. Like a script that is scarcely noticed when it is being read, they suggest their objects without reflection and provide immediate evidence of their existence. A feeling of joy is attributed to my mind, a certain odour is attributed to my nose and a certain colour is attributed to the sky.⁹ The existence of the mind, the body and the external world are taken as given when we undergo experiences – that is to say, when we have representations – of certain kinds.

The question that most concerns Tetens is how we come to judge that external objects exist on the basis of representations in us:

How, in which way, by which means, according to what laws, does the understanding pass from representations to objects, from the ideational (*Ideellen*) in us, to the objective outside of us, and how do we attain to the thought that there are external things, which we recognise in us through our representations?¹⁰

In keeping with the empiricist tradition of Locke and Hume, and in sharp contrast to the rationalist tradition of Wolff and Kant, Tetens' approach to the question of idealism is clearly psychological:

⁷ Johann Nikolaus Tetens: *Philosophische Versuche über die menschliche Natur und ihre Entwicklung*, 2 Bde. Leipzig 1777 [in the following: *PV*, Vol., page]. (All translations are my own.) In this section I am reworking some material that I presented in two earlier papers: Reid, Tetens and Kant on the External World. In: *Idealistic Studies* 37.2 (2007), pp. 87–104; *A Refutation of Idealism from 1777*. In: *Idealistic Studies* 40.1-2 (2010), pp. 139–146.

⁸ *PV* I, p. 373.

⁹ *PV* I, p. 373.

¹⁰ *PV* I, p. 373.

The correctness or incorrectness of our judgements concerning the existence of external objects is not actually the question in the present investigation, but rather the manner in which these judgements come to be and the order in which they arise.¹¹

From the rationalist perspective of Tetens' better-known German contemporaries, an exercise in descriptive psychology is not going to be of much service in overcoming sceptical doubts. But Tetens, whose affinity with the British empiricists is exhibited on almost every page, clearly considers the practice of mental geography to be an indispensable component of conscientious philosophical investigation. By mapping the basic laws of thought and referring them back to the first principles covering them, the philosophical psychologist provides a justificatory framework that is grounded in the actual workings of the human mind, rather than the meta-physical fictions of a priori speculation. In the fifth *Essay* in particular, Tetens will try to show that judgements about the existence of objects outside of us issue from a fundamental faculty (a *Grundvermögen*) of the power of thinking (*Denkkraft*) in accordance with a first principle – one capable of conferring justification on judgements falling under it, but which cannot itself be justified. As naturally necessary laws of thought, the first principles of human knowledge mark the limits of philosophical explanation and can therefore be cited in defence of particular judgements whose legitimacy has been called into question by the sceptic. If Tetens can identify the highest principle covering judgements about the existence of objects outside us, he will have provided a satisfactory explanation of their origin and to that extent validated our confidence in their grounds.¹²

The principle Tetens invokes rests on an elaborate psychological theory purporting to explain the genesis of conscious experience – the cognition of ourselves as mental-physical beings located in a world of numerically distinct sensible objects – out of the raw material of sensation. Order is originally conferred on the sensory manifold by means of a pre-theoretical sorting mechanism:

Since at first the sum total (*Inbegriff*) of sensations and sensory representations [...] was present almost like one whole sensation, the first effect of the soul upon them must therefore have consisted in this: that they were distributed (*vertheilet*) and sorted into different heaps.¹³

Tetens conjectures that at the earliest stages of cognitive development we are confronted with an undifferentiated sensory mass that the mind must somehow convert into an intelligible form. The first level of cognitive processing involves ›distribution‹: clusters of representations that exhibit relevantly similar qualitative features are sorted into one of three classes: ›This occurred such that inner sensations were assigned to one class, outer ones arising from our body to another, and those from foreign objects to a third, and were then perceived as distinguishable

¹¹ *PV* I, p. 403. Tetens speaks of judgements concerning the existence of external objects as well as judgements concerning the objective existence of things. I take these to be equivalent. Likewise, by judgements concerning ›subjective existence‹ I take it he means judgements concerning existence within the mind.

¹² It will become clear in Section 3 that it is our confidence in the grounds of our judgements about the existence of external objects that is validated through appeal to a highest principle rather than the judgements themselves. I missed this important distinction entirely in my previous papers on Tetens (see note 7). The two preceding sentences in the main body of the text are ambiguous on this point. The ambiguity will be eliminated once we have applied a levels distinction to Tetens' analysis.

¹³ *PV* I, p. 380.

kinds.«¹⁴ The sorting mechanism – Tetens refers to it mysteriously as the *Unterscheidungskraft* – operates on a principle of association (»nach dem allgemeinen Gesetz des Unterscheidens«),¹⁵ assigning representations to different locations in the sensory field based on their internal, qualitative features. The upshot is a phenomenology of the inner (comprising representations belonging to the mind), the relatively outer (sensations experienced in the body), and the absolutely outer (perceptions of external objects).

Much of Tetens' investigation is devoted to speculating on the probable criteria of distribution. Visual and auditory sensations are generally experienced as occurring outside of us.¹⁶ Tetens reasons that they are distributed outwards on account of their fleetingness and variability: they »arise without inner preparation« and »fade away again without noticeable consequences«,¹⁷ leaving minimal traces in the mind. He offers the example of a man on the verge of fainting while viewing a dizzying prospect. If he closes his eyes, the disorienting scene vanishes; if he looks the other way, it is replaced with a different, perhaps steadier perspective. The example is meant to illustrate how easily visual representations are detached from the mind and the body. Bodily sensations, especially painful ones, are anchored more securely and focus the attention more acutely:

But the pain in the body, its disturbance in the soul, was present to it [the mind] for longer, however much the scene changed itself. His active power was more occupied here, and more strongly; and he noticed in this case more, and more diverse, circumstances and consequences.¹⁸

Representations arising from the »inner feeling of the self« are also stronger and more absorbing than most visual and auditory sensations and are therefore distributed to the inside.¹⁹ »This alone suffices«, Tetens assures us, »to distinguish both of these great clusters (*Haufen*) of inner and outer sensations from each other.«²⁰

Bodily sensations and purely mental representations are not always fully separated from each other, and the criterion for distinguishing them when they are is somewhat difficult to make out. My sense is that Tetens has something like the following in mind. When I am experiencing a sharp pain in my side, or a bad burn on my finger, there is no distinction between the mental representation and the bodily sensation – they are blended together and experienced as one. By contrast, the feeling of hopefulness belongs to my mind alone, while the tactile sensations of a handshake are associated primarily with the hand. The reason that handshake sensations have been distributed to the body and the feeling of hopefulness to the mind is that perceiver and perceived are less intimately connected with each other in the former case than they are in the latter. More generally, where bodily sensations and purely mental representations are separable, it is easier to be self-reflexively aware of the bodily ones while they are occurring

¹⁴ *PVI*, p. 380.

¹⁵ *PVI*, p. 386.

¹⁶ *PVI*, p. 416.

¹⁷ *PVI*, pp. 384–385.

¹⁸ *PVI*, p. 385.

¹⁹ Tetens is inconsistent in his classification of bodily sensations: He regards them as both outer and inner depending on whether the contrast is with representations of the mind or perceptions of external objects. In any case, the important distinction is between the mental and the non-mental.

²⁰ *PVI*, p. 385.

than it is of the mental ones.²¹ I can perceive the handshake sensations in my hand and at the very same moment be self-reflexively aware of myself as having them. But the feeling of hopefulness is associated with my mind alone, since it is difficult to be self-reflexively aware of my having a feeling of hopefulness at the very moment in which I am hopeful:

By contrast, the sensations of our ego – particularly our representations and thoughts, which first distinguish themselves as belonging to this particular class – are so intimately mixed with the power which perceives them that one cannot perceive them in the moment when they occur (*wenn sie da sind*), but rather must recognise them only from behind, when they are [already] over, in the traces they leave behind.²²

Distribution is also facilitated by the tendency of representations belonging to the same sensory modality to appear and disappear *en masse*: »As soon as the eyes are closed, for instance, the entire mass of visual sensations disappears at once; were they opened again, an entire scene of infinite variety restores itself.«²³

Tetens' presentation is cluttered and confusing, but the crucial point for his argument against idealism is relatively clear: The sensory field is divided – representations are distributed to the inside and the outside – independently of volition and conscious thought, »before the power of thinking begins to compare and perceive differences.«²⁴ As we shall see, the status of perceptual beliefs as basic depends essentially on the prior distribution of the sensory data.

The spontaneous division of the field of experience into the inner, the relatively outer and the absolutely outer is a cognitively necessary condition of acquiring the concepts of the mind, the body and an external object: »And before such a separation had occurred, how could the idea of a real thing, and of our ego as a thing have arisen?«²⁵ Possession of these concepts is itself a necessary condition of making judgements about the existence of our minds and bodies, of mental and physical states in us, and of objects and their properties outside of us:

These common concepts must [...] already be present before any one of our judgements about the objectivity of representations and about the subjective and objective reality of objects can come about. The thought: That which I see is a tree which stands before me, a particular thing, or a real object that is not identical to me; and »The motion and figure, which I perceive, is a property of this external thing«, and other expressions of that kind, require that ideas of these general predicates [...] are in us.²⁶

So equipped, the power of thinking learns to make judgements about the existence of itself as a thinking thing with an inner mental life as well as a body, and about the existence of external objects and their properties:

From here on the power of thought went further. It framed for itself an idea of itself and its inner life (*Ibrem Innern*), it acquired another of its body, and a third of an external object. And because it now re-

²¹ *PV I*, p. 386.

²² *PV I*, p. 386.

²³ *PV I*, pp. 386–387.

²⁴ *PV I*, p. 387.

²⁵ *PV I*, p. 412. *Cf.* pp. 413–14.

²⁶ *PV I*, p. 388.

ferred particular sensations to the concepts of itself, of its body and of the external object, judgements pertaining to the subjective and objective existence of sensed objects (*empfundenen Objekte*) arose.²⁷

These are the second and third levels of cognitive processing required for the production of conscious experience: acquisition of the concepts of mind, body and object, plus activation of the capacity for making judgements about their existence.

The relevant concepts are »abstractions [...] from sensations«, according to Tetens, which the power of thinking has »processed« (*bearbeitet*), »prepared« (*zugerichtet*), and worked up into »ideas and common concepts«.²⁸ Tetens is confident he can run his argument against idealism, though his theory of abstraction lacks detail and precision. The question of how we acquire the concepts of mind, body and external object is »difficult, and, if answered in its full extent, lengthy«. Tetens does little more than »sketch the terrain of this fruitful investigation«, referring the reader to Locke and Leibniz for the rest.²⁹ The essential thing is to recognise that the concepts of inner (subjective) and outer (objective) existence arise only in conjunction because they are grounded originally in the same cognitive act:

Could the representation and the concept of subjective existence be set apart, without also the concept of objective external existence being so? Could the person know his \mathcal{I} , and learn to distinguish it, without at the same time acquiring a concept of an actual object that is not his \mathcal{I} ?³⁰

Division of the sensory field between the inner and the outer also gives rise to the concept of the subject's own body:

[W]hen reflection was already so far along that it could connect with this totality of inner sensations the thought: Our ego is a real thing for itself, it must have also found in itself the representations of its body, and the external objects – prepared in the same manner – such that it could likewise make them into ideas of external things.³¹

Their joint dependence on a prior act of distribution implies a formative link between the concepts of mind, body and external object: If the conditions are in place for one to appear, they are there for the other two. What remains to consider is the origin of judgements concerning the subjective and objective existence of things:

When the general classification is once established, it [the soul] judges in particular cases [that] the sensed thing [*Sache*] is either in itself, or in its body, in this or that part of it, or outside of itself. According to which general laws of thought is it determined in these judgements?³²

Once the incoming sensory elements have been distributed to suitable locations in the sensory field, the power of thinking is activated and begins to make judgements about the existence of particular objects and their states. The question of epistemological importance is what determines us in making such judgments and forming the corresponding beliefs. What makes us judge that this thing is outside of us and this other thing a property of our mind or our body? What rule do we follow in making these judgements? Tetens' answer is elegant in its simplicity:

²⁷ *PV*I, p. 380.

²⁸ *PV*I, p. 389.

²⁹ *PV*I, p. 388.

³⁰ *PV*I, p. 379.

³¹ *PV*I, p. 414.

³² *PV*I, p. 381.

This rule is as follows: »We posit every sensation in that thing, in the simultaneous sensation of which it is contained like a part in a whole.’ In short, ‘every sensation is posited there where we sense it. For it is sensed there and in that thing, where and in the sensation of which it is itself comprehended (*be-griffen ist*)». ³³

If I understand correctly, the rule is this: We judge that a sensation exists as an object or a property of an object in precisely that location where we perceive it. For example, I judge (and so believe) that a tree exists in the garden outside of me simply because I see it there. ³⁴ A cluster of characteristic colours and figures have been channelled to the outside and saturate a certain portion of my visual field. Given that I possess the concept of an external object – and of a tree – I posit the tree »out there« in the garden, not »in here« in me. I posit the tree outside of me just because I see it there. This is not a matter of inference: My belief that a tree is standing in the garden before me is the direct result of my seeing it there. In other words, the grounds of my belief include only my experience *as of* a tree before me.

Tetens considers applications of the principle in connection with various modalities. I believe that a feeling of joy belongs to my mind because I perceive it there along with many other representations of inner sense. ³⁵ I believe that a certain taste is on my tongue and a certain smell in my nose because I »sense them in the organ«. ³⁶ By contrast, I do not normally believe that sounds of moderate volume occur in my ears. The reason, once again, is that I do not perceive them there: »With the ordinary sensations of hearing we do not feel the organ itself« and »cannot feel the tone in the ears«. ³⁷ Sounds are not invariably distributed to the inside either: »The sensation does not belong in the class of our inner feelings of self. Thus it is not there.« ³⁸ Sounds seem to exist outside of us – I hear a voice right now *in the other room*. But sounds do not have the »completeness« and »persistence« that objects do, and so we look for an object in which to place them. When the sound blends well with other simultaneous sensations of an external object, we experience the sound as a property of that same object: I see my girlfriend talking right now and I hear *her* voice *over there*. When the sound does not blend well with other simultaneous perceptions of an external object – this happens more frequently – we experience it as something mental: The music that I am listening to right now seems to be occurring in my mind. Occasionally, a sound is so loud that it causes pain in the organ and is experienced as a bodily sensation: When the smoke detector goes off, I normally believe that the sound is occurring right there in my ears – even after I shut it off. ³⁹

Visual sensations of colour and figure are normally taken to be properties of external objects, because they are perceived outside of us and because they do not cause any disturbance in the organs. When the eyes are overly sensitive, however, or the light source unusually bright, we

³³ *PVI*, pp. 415–416. Cf. Tetens’ carnation example at p. 418.

³⁴ *Vide PVI*, p. 418.

³⁵ *PVI*, p. 417.

³⁶ *PVI*, p. 417.

³⁷ *PVI*, p. 419.

³⁸ *PVI*, p. 419.

³⁹ This notion of blending (or »uniting») with the »übrigen gleichzeitigen Empfindung des Instruments« is horribly obscure. My examples concerning sound may well misrepresent Tetens’ position. See the discussion at *PVI*, 419–420.

become aware of the instrument rather than the object, and attribute the sensations to the eyes themselves:

To visual sensations of colours and figures we ascribe, almost without exception, a reality outside of us. Why do we not posit these impressions in the eyes or on the retina? The reason is because these soft and delicate impressions go lightly through the organs without producing vibrations. [...] When the weak eye is attacked by the light to the point of blindness, then we feel that we are seeing with the eyes. [...] In the normal cases we thus never see the thing in the eye.⁴⁰

Visual representations also have a tendency to cluster together and cohere. Unlike sounds and smells, they come in highly unified packets of colour and figure – Tetens calls them »*ganze Haufen vereinigter Empfindungen*« (»whole heaps of united sensations«):

The sight of a tree, of its figure, colour, motion, is such a cluster of sensations, which – united – can represent a complete thing. Therefore, every visual sensation appears either itself as a complete substance, which is outside of us and our body – that is, which is really distinct from both – or as a property of such a thing.⁴¹

Appearing outside of us as a unified whole, the sight of a tree is naturally taken to indicate the presence of an external object, numerically distinct from the self.

Tetens lays heavy emphasis on the abnormal cases: When an organ is shaken or disturbed by an unusually intense stimulus – Tetens speaks of »violent« impressions on the nerve endings – or a representation is particularly obscure, the natural doxastic responses are inhibited:

[T]he darker an idea is, the more we become aware that it is a modification of us and [exists] in us. [...] The less clarity there is in a representation, the more confused and dark it is, the more we sense that the representation is an occurrent alteration of us, and the more easily is reflection drawn to consider it in this light, and so we see more the representation in us than an object through it. We see the mirror, not the things whose images are displayed in it; we see the glass of the window, not the external objects from which light is reflected.⁴²

If we just give Tetens his representational theory of perception, then the window metaphor is apt. Looking out a clean window at a tree, I don't often suppose that I am looking at a glass pane. I forget the window and take myself to be looking at a tree directly, though strictly speaking I am looking at a tree *through* a window. Only if the window is very dirty do I focus on the fact (and form the belief) that I am looking at a tree through a window. Similarly, in normal perceptual circumstances, when my representation of a tree is clear, I don't believe that I am perceiving a tree *by way of* a tree-image in my own mind. I believe that I am perceiving a tree. But if I scratch my cornea, or get a »floater« in my eye, my representation will be cloudy and I may form the belief that I am perceiving a tree *through* a tree-image (this actually happened to me). When our vision is good, »when we are only gently touched and the sensation is clear«,⁴³ representations are »pictures of objects for us«⁴⁴ and we form beliefs about the objects, not about the pictures.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ *PV* I, p. 420.

⁴¹ *PV* I, pp. 420–421.

⁴² *PV* I, pp. 99–100.

⁴³ *PV* I, p. 421.

⁴⁴ *PV* I, p. 98.

⁴⁵ See further comments on this at p. 407 and p. 416.

A significant feature of this account is that judgements concerning the inner and outer existence of the objects of perception are instinctively guided by the pre-reflective distribution of the sensory elements. Representations distributed to the outside – and perceived there – are normally regarded as properties of objects. Representations distributed to the inside are normally regarded as properties of the mind.⁴⁶ More simply, where an object is *perceived* to exist determines where it is *believed* to exist.

All of this fits remarkably well with the idea that perceptual beliefs are properly basic when formed in the right perceptual circumstances. To return to the case of vision, when the eyes are working properly and the conditions for visual perception are normal, we take colours and figures to be properties of objects outside us. It is only when the organ is in an unnatural state or the conditions for perception are abnormal that we attribute visual sensations to the eyes themselves, or to the mind, rather than to the objects that cause them. This implies that the natural response to the intake of visual data is the spontaneous formation of belief – specifically, belief in the existence of the objects that appear to be in front of us. When the eyes and the conditions for perception are normal, our grounds for belief do not include any other propositions believed – we are guided by location in the visual field alone – and so perceptual beliefs thus formed are basic.

The point can be generalized. Spatially located representations draw the attention outward, away from the perceiving subject:

Every external sensation of a peculiar strength and duration possesses the force to draw the soul out of itself, at least for a while, to the extent that it forgets itself as [a] counteracting, representing, thinking and willing being, and occupies itself alone with the modification brought to it, without perceiving its own activities thereby. This is experience.⁴⁷

When I turn my head now and look out the window, my perceptual circumstances are such that I form the belief that there is a tree. What grounds my belief is not any act of reflection on the characteristic sensory experience I am undergoing, nor any inference from other propositions I hold to be true. For instance, I do not first form a belief about myself as a thinking being conscious of a mental image resembling a tree, on the basis of which I then infer an external cause of my tree-like sensations. I formed the belief in the existence of a tree naturally and spontaneously as a direct result of undergoing characteristic sensations: »And with such sensations the occasion is lacking altogether to posit them in oneself.«⁴⁸ It would be unnatural in my current sensory environment for me to posit my sensations – more accurately, the object of my sensations – in my own mind. My experience furnishes immediate, non-propositional grounds for

⁴⁶ The rule holds even in dreams: »Our judgements about the subjective and objective existence of sensations stick so firmly to these [sensations] that they also stay bound up with them in reproduction. In dreams we represent the seen things, figures and colours as external objects, never as something in us – and the movements of our mind, by contrast, as something that is in us, never as external objects.« *PVI*, p. 422.

⁴⁷ *PVI*, pp. 407–408.

⁴⁸ *PVI*, p. 408.

positing the existence of objects outside of me: »We posit them all therefore also outside of us, for we must indeed perceive that they are things distinct from our ego.«⁴⁹

Though Tetens claims that the correctness or incorrectness of judgements concerning the subjective and objective existence of things is not the issue in the current investigation, he is concerned with the question of their justification.⁵⁰ That Tetens is concerned with justification is evidenced by the fact that his psychological theory is put forward as an answer to sceptical idealism. Above all, it is the *naturalness* of perceptual beliefs that justifies them, according to Tetens. I do not believe that a completely naturalized epistemology is ultimately capable of answering normative epistemological questions concerning justification, but neither does Tetens. It is true that he tries to account for the psychological origin of our judgements about the existence of objects outside of us and, like Reid, he emphasizes their naturalness. But that's not all. I think he has, in addition, an anti-sceptical argument based on the formative link alluded to earlier. As we shall see in a moment, the naturalness of judgements about the objective existence of things is tied to the naturalness of judgements about the subjective existence of things. Since no one doubts the validity of the latter, no one should doubt the validity of the former.

This requires some explanation. The highest principle covering judgements about the subjective and objective existence of things was formulated above as follows: We judge that an object or property exists in exactly that place where we perceive it. The perceptual location of objects and their properties is determined pre-theoretically by the spontaneous distribution of the sensory elements to the inner and outer regions of the sensory field. Since the act of distribution is a cognitively necessary condition of acquiring the concepts of the inner and the outer in the first place, we are capable of making judgements about the subjective and objective existence of things only if the sensory manifold is already divided. And since in normal cases of perception our judgements about the existence of objects track their location in the sensory field naturally and without reflection, the grounds on which we hold such beliefs do not include any other propositions believed. They are therefore basic.

But does the naturalness and immediacy of perceptual beliefs really justify them? The sceptic worries that outer sensations may not be reliable indicators of the presence of external objects. Given the truth of representationalism – which Tetens accepts as »the fundamental principle of philosophy«⁵¹ – sensations are the very opposite of indicators. They are representational intermediaries that block access to the external world. Since we have no evidence that outer sensations do in fact signal the presence of external objects, perceptual beliefs, though formed naturally, are unjustified.

Tetens' response to this line of reasoning is to insist that the evidence for such beliefs as »I exist« or »I am feeling tired« (which concern subjective existence) is of the same kind and quality

⁴⁹ *PV I*, p. 408. Cf. pp. 420–21 and p. 395: »We do not take sensations and representations to be their [own] objects; rather [we] presuppose something else aside from the representation that is the source of sensation, and could also produce these latter at times when we don't have them [...]. The real is something objective, an object, something that is different from the sensation and representation.«

⁵⁰ Whether or not a judgement is correct is an ontological question concerning truth. Whether we have reason to believe that a judgement is correct is an epistemological question concerning justification.

⁵¹ *PV I*, p. 403.

as the evidence for such beliefs as ›There is a tree‹ or ›That carnation is yellow‹ (which concern objective existence). The reason he rates the evidence for both sorts of belief at the same value is that the principle governing them is identical: Perceptual location guides judgements about the subjective and objective existence of things. Some things and their properties are believed to exist outside of us because they appear externally. Others are believed to exist in the mind because they appear internally. The criterion for ascribing internal or external existence to something is one and the same: immediate perception of its location in our experience. So the two types of judgement rest on the same foundation. And even the idealist admits that we are immediately justified in believing that our minds and mental states exist (Hume is the one exception to the former).⁵² The two types of judgement are therefore justified to exactly the same degree. Tetens asserts the epistemic parity of such judgements in the following passages:

The result of these remarks on the origin of the fundamental concepts of the understanding is evident of itself. First, ›that it is just as natural, just as necessary, and follows in accordance with the same causal laws, when I think: My body is a really existing object, and is not my ego; the tree which I see and touch is a really existing object for itself, and [is] neither my soul nor my body.‹ These judgements are just as natural, so near the first activities of reflection, as when I think: ›I, as soul, am a really existing thing.‹ This conclusion is against Hume and Berkeley.⁵³

[I]t is just as necessary to think: The tree is a real object, as it is to think: I myself am something real.⁵⁴

›Everything contained in the grounds of doubt of these philosophers‹, Tetens asserts confidently, rests on the false assumption that the two types of judgement are dissimilar in some epistemically relevant way. Had they only recognised that the criterion for attributing real existence to external objects and their properties is exactly the same as the criterion for attributing real existence to the mind and its states, ›neither Berkeley nor Hume would raise any objection against the reliability of our judgement.‹⁵⁵ We take judgements about the existence of the mind and its states to be immediately justified by our experience. So, on pain of inconsistency, we ought to take judgements about the existence of external objects and their states to be immediately justified by our experience as well.

Having misconstrued the order of priority amongst judgements regarding the existence of the inner and the outer, idealists mistakenly suppose that we need to *infer* the existence of external objects from the existence of our mind and its states:

Was the course of the self-developing understanding such that at first all sensations were taken for properties of our ego and the correct knowledge could only be attained afterwards through a certain process of reasoning? Or was the latter just as natural – and in fact [a sort of] instinct in the understanding – as the judgements about our own existence itself and about what is in this?⁵⁶

⁵² For some reason, Hume's thesis that we have no evidence for the existence of our minds does not feature in Tetens' account. But Hume does at least recognise the existence of ideas, so perhaps Tetens can argue that he should accept the existence of external properties and leave it at that. Tetens would have done better to focus on the Descartes of the first *Meditation* than on Berkeley and Hume.

⁵³ *PV I*, p. 411.

⁵⁴ *PV I*, p. 405. See also p. 401.

⁵⁵ *PV I*, p. 402.

⁵⁶ *PV I*, pp. 403–404.

Because judgements regarding inner and outer existence stem from a single, naturally necessary law, belief in the existence of the mind and its states enjoys no epistemic priority over belief in the existence of external objects and their states. It follows that idealistic doubts about the existence of objects outside of us are an unnatural deviation from normal human psychology. We have immediate, though non-demonstrative, evidence for the existence of outer objects that differs in no essential way from our evidence for the existence of inner objects. Since the available grounds are non-propositional and possess a degree of justificatory force that we take to be sufficient, belief in the existence of external objects is properly basic in the defeasible, modest basics sense.

3. Levels of Justification

What might seem genuinely troubling about the proper basicity reading that I am proposing is that Tetens takes great pains to provide us with grounds for believing that judgments such as ›There is a tree in front of me‹ are justified in the right perceptual contexts. But the grounds he provides are all *propositional* (he produces an *argument*, and arguments contain propositions). So how can such beliefs be properly basic? Recall that a belief is properly basic for me if and only if my grounds for holding it do not include any other propositions believed and I am justified in holding it on the basis of these grounds. If my belief in the existence of a tree is justified for me only to the extent that I can defend it by way of philosophical argumentation, then what sense does it make to call it properly basic? And if I am even vaguely aware of the sceptical scenarios that render such beliefs doubtful, then surely I am not justified in holding any one of them unless I have a ready answer for the sceptic either in the shape of an argument or some less formal line of reasoning. This is the apparent inconsistency that I mentioned at the outset: Tetens wants to show that propositions such as ›There is a tree in front of me‹ are properly basic when the perceptual context is favourable, but showing this seems to nullify their status as basic.

I suggest that this worry is based on a confusion, specifically, the levels confusion first identified clearly by William Alston. Let ›P‹ stand for ›There is a tree in front of me‹ and consider the following two propositions:

- (1) P
- (2) I am justified in believing that P.

It is quite tempting to suppose that I am justified in believing (1) only to the extent that I am justified in believing (2). Many foundationalists have thought so and thereby opened their theories to a seemingly fatal objection. A brief consideration of this objection will facilitate understanding of Alston's levels distinction.

Laurence Bonjour was an early advocate of this particular objection to foundationalism. His version goes something like this. If a belief is properly basic, then it must possess some feature that qualifies it as properly basic. That feature – the one that qualifies a belief as properly basic – must also constitute a *good reason* for thinking that the belief is true. Call this feature ›Φ‹. Bon-

jour claims that if some belief that P is to qualify as basic, then the premises of the following justificatory argument must themselves be at least justified, if not true:

The Feature- Φ Argument:

- (a) Belief P has feature Φ .
- (b) Beliefs having feature Φ are highly likely to be true.
- (c) Therefore, P is highly likely to be true.

For my belief that P to be justified for me, (a) and (b) must be justified for me. But then P is not basic, since it depends for its justification on at least one other belief. This argument holds for any candidate basic belief. So no belief is basic. And if no belief is basic, then no version of foundationalism is correct.⁵⁷

Alston argues convincingly that this objection blurs the distinction between levels of justification. Something along the lines of Bonjour's feature- Φ argument may well be needed in order for me to be justified in believing that (2), but, if Alston is right, no such argument is needed in order for me to be justified in believing that (1). I can be justified in believing (1) without being justified in believing (2). To see that this is so, consider a proposition that I am unquestionably justified in holding right now, say, the proposition that I am tired. Let $\langle Q \rangle$ stand for $\langle I \text{ am tired} \rangle$ and consider the distinction between (3) and (4):

- (3) Q
- (4) I am justified in believing that Q.

My grounds for holding (3) in my current epistemic circumstances are immediate and non-propositional, if any grounds are. What justifies me in holding (3) is a familiar experience that I can't describe adequately, but which I find absolutely compelling. Anyone who has been in epistemic circumstances similar to those in which I find myself now – and I assume that this includes everyone – will agree that my grounds for holding (3) are justificatory and yet non-propositional. They consist solely in my *feeling tired*. But notice this. Proposition (4) concerns, at least in part, the epistemic status of (3). It is a higher-level claim about the epistemic status of a lower-level claim. Alston asks:

[I]s it credible that I should be justified in a belief that is, in part, about the epistemic status of a given proposition [...] *just by virtue of feeling tired*? At the very least, the claim to higher-level truth-justification raises questions that are quite different from the claim to lower-level justification.⁵⁸

The idea that I can be justified in believing that one of my beliefs has a certain epistemic status just by virtue of feeling tired has near-zero plausibility. And we agreed that my justification for

⁵⁷ Laurence Bonjour: *Can Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?* In: *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15.1 (1978), pp. 1–13. The objection occurs in Section 2.

⁵⁸ William Alston: *Level Confusions in Epistemology*. In: William Alston: *Epistemic Justification: Essays in the Theory of Knowledge*. Ithaca, London 1989, pp. 153–171, specifically pp. 158–159. See also: *Two Types of*

(3) consists *solely* in my feeling tired. So if I *am* justified in believing (4), my justifying grounds for that belief must include something more than is included in my justifying grounds for (3) (perhaps they include an act of higher-order reflection on my grounds for (3)). And if my justifying grounds for (4) include more than my justifying grounds for (3), then, presumably, I can be justified in holding (3) without being justified in holding (4).

These reflections cast serious doubt on the cogency of Bonjour's argument against all forms of foundationalism. It appears that I can in principle be justified in holding a belief such as (1) without being justified in holding a belief such as (2). (I may not even have a justification available for (2) and yet still be justified in believing (1)). At best, the feature- Φ argument as employed by Bonjour shows that (2) is not properly basic. But it is powerless to show the same of (1).⁵⁹ The foregoing considerations also clarify the distinction between first-level immediate justification of the sort I have for (1) and (3), and higher-level epistemic justification of the sort I have for (2) and (4).

In order to establish that Tetens is not guilty of inconsistency in offering a refutation of idealism that appeals to the proper basicity of perceptual beliefs it will be useful to introduce a final set of distinctions. The concepts of justification, warrant and knowledge have received an enormous amount of attention in contemporary epistemology. They are doxastic *assets*, signifying some sort of positive epistemic status or evaluation: A belief that is justified or warranted, or which constitutes knowledge, is evaluated positively from an epistemic point of view and it has, by virtue of possessing justification or warrant, or by virtue of constituting knowledge, positive epistemic status. *Defeasibility* is a doxastic *liability*. It consists in the proneness of a belief to *lose* its positive epistemic status or its fitness for positive epistemic evaluation. A *defeater* actualizes the potential of a belief to lose its positive epistemic status or its fitness for positive epistemic evaluation.⁶⁰ Very simply, if I have grounds for believing P – the grounds may be propositional or non-propositional – a defeater *defeats* those grounds.

Foundationalism, Has Foundationalism Been Refuted? and *What's Wrong with Immediate Knowledge?*, all in the same volume.

⁵⁹ I have set this up in such a way that it may appear that we are simply begging the question against the anti-foundationalist argument insofar as you are asked to just agree that my grounds for holding (3) are justifying and non-propositional. But the point is to appeal to the reader's own intuitions about whether or not she ever has non-propositional, justifying grounds for a belief such as (3). If the reader agrees, then she may begin to suspect that there is something wrong with the anti-foundational argument. Alston's distinction is meant to clarify exactly where the problem lies. Once we introduce a distinction between first-level immediate justification for a perceptual belief and higher-level epistemic justification for a belief about the epistemic status of a perceptual belief, it becomes plausible to suppose that a feature- Φ -type argument is needed to justify beliefs having the form of (2) and (4), but not to justify beliefs having the form of (1) and (3). Moreover, one could just turn this around and say that Bonjour is begging the question against foundationalism insofar as he asks us to just agree that the premises of the feature- Φ argument must be justified in order for my belief that P to be justified. In the end, however, I don't think that any questions are being begged. Rather, intuitions are being called in to provide guidance in selecting our principles.

⁶⁰ See Michael Sudduth: *Defeaters in Epistemology* (*Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*). Available at <http://www.iep.utm.edu/ep-defea>.

John Pollock introduced a distinction between *rebutting* defeaters and *undercutting* defeaters.⁶¹ I will adopt Pollock's distinction here, but with a modification. Where Pollock speaks of the *reasons* for our beliefs getting defeated, I will speak more generally of their *grounds* getting defeated. I assume that grounds can be propositional or non-propositional, whereas reasons are more naturally thought of as being exclusively propositional. This extension will allow us to accommodate Tetens' views more readily. Now for the distinction: If I have grounds for believing some proposition P, a *rebutting defeater* gives me a reason⁶² for holding the negation of P. An *undercutting defeater* gives me a reason for no longer believing P on the basis of these grounds (but without giving me a reason to believe the negation of P).

Next I want to introduce a contrast class for defeaters. Let's call them *confirmers*. If I have grounds for believing some proposition P – again, the grounds may be propositional or non-propositional – a confirmer *confirms* these grounds. And just as there are two types of defeaters, so there are two types of confirmers: *supplementary confirmers* and *stabilizing confirmers*. Suppose I have grounds for believing P. A *supplementary confirmer* gives me a new reason for believing P (it supplements my grounds for so believing). A *stabilizing confirmer* gives me a reason for continuing to believe P on the basis of my original grounds (but without giving me a new reason to believe it). *Supplementers* and *stabilizers* are something like the inverse of *rebutters* and *undercutters*. Examples should make this more intuitive.

Suppose I am looking across the street one night at my neighbour's well-lit garden and I see what appear to me to be a number of yellow carnations. My current sensory experience gives me immediate, non-propositional justification for the belief »There are yellow carnations in my neighbour's garden« (assuming that some version of modest basics, external-world foundationalism is correct). Suppose, further, that when I go back in my house I decide to ring my neighbour and congratulate him on the beautiful yellow carnations. But let's say he tells me in no uncertain terms, »There are definitely no yellow carnations in my garden.« He has given me a rebutting defeater for my evidence that there are yellow carnations in his garden – he has given me a reason to believe not-P (that there are no yellow carnations there).

Now change the story slightly. Suppose that when I ring him my neighbour tells me that he has installed a few yellow bug lights in the garden that cause white flowers to appear yellow.⁶³ He has given me an undercutting defeater for my evidence that there are yellow carnations in his garden. My grounds for believing it are no good, in other words. What I took to be immediate, non-propositional evidence for my belief that there are yellow carnations in my neighbour's garden has been neutralized by his testimony about the bug lights: I no longer have grounds for believing that P.

Let's modify the example once again in order to illustrate the role of confirmers. Suppose I go back inside and my neighbour's wife rings me on the phone to tell me about the beautiful

⁶¹ John Pollock: *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge*. Savage, Maryland 1986. See the section on defeasible reasons, pp. 37–39.

⁶² Defeaters themselves are most naturally thought of as propositional, so there's no objection in speaking more narrowly of defeaters giving us *reasons*, though I don't see any reason in principle why we couldn't have non-propositional defeaters as well.

⁶³ This is a variation on an influential example due to Chisholm. See Roderick Chisholm: *Theory of Knowledge*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 1966, specifically p. 48.

yellow carnations that her husband has just planted in the garden that day. I have my sensory evidence for the belief that there are yellow carnations in his garden, but now I have something else. I have supplementary confirmation of my evidence by way of her testimony. She has given me additional grounds – a new reason – for believing that P.

Finally, suppose that while I am standing there looking at the garden from across the street my neighbour comes over and tells me about the yellow bug lights. My grounds for believing that he has yellow carnations in the garden have been undercut. But suppose that when I go back inside his wife rings to tell me that he was mistaken: The yellow bug lights gave her headaches, so she had them all removed but forgot to tell her husband. The lighting in the garden, she assures me, is normal. Now my sensory evidence, which up until that moment had been neutralized by her husband's claim about the bug lights, has been brought back into play. Her testimony that she removed the bug lights serves to validate the evidence I originally thought I had for believing that there are yellow carnations in my neighbour's garden. She has given me grounds, not for believing that P, but for believing that my grounds for believing that P are good. In my terminology, she has stabilized my evidence for P.

With these distinctions in mind what I wish to claim is that Tetens is perfectly consistent in regarding perceptual beliefs as properly basic in the right conditions and simultaneously offering a defence of them. Here's how it works. Recall that ›P‹ stands for ›There is a tree in front of me.‹ We distinguished the following two propositions:

(1) P

(2) I am justified in believing that P.

I have argued that Tetens thinks propositions having the form of (1) are properly basic for a subject when the subject is in an appropriate sensory environment. I look out my window again and undergo characteristic tree-like sensations. According to Tetens, I am immediately justified in believing (1) on the basis of my experience. But the sceptic comes along and tells me that I am mistaken. My sensations are representations in my mind that may be caused by an evil demon, and there is no tree if I live in the demon world. Or perhaps I am dreaming. Maybe I'm a brain suspended in a vat of nutrient fluids tended by automatic machinery. There are indefinitely many sceptical alternatives consistent with my current tree-like sensations in which there is no tree in front of me. So, according to the sceptic, my grounds for believing that P – for believing (1) – are inadequate. It is important to note that the sceptical argument is not a rebutting defeater of my evidence for P. It doesn't give me a reason to believe not-P, since the sceptic isn't advertising the alternatives as true. He just points out that they are possibly true. And hearing about that possibility gives me a reason to stop believing P, just as hearing about the bug lights gave me a reason to stop believing that my neighbour has yellow carnations.⁶⁴ The sceptic has *undercut* the grounds of my belief.

⁶⁴ Note that hearing about the mere possibility of the bug lights would still have been enough to defeat my evidence for the yellow carnations. If my neighbour told me that he had several bug lights installed alongside the normal lights and that he wasn't sure which set of lights were on now, my grounds for believing that the carnations are yellow would still be undercut. What makes something an undercutter

Inversely, the anti-sceptical argument that Tetens launches in the fifth *Essay* is not a supplementary confirmer of my evidence for P – it doesn't give me a reason to believe (1). It is a stabilizing confirmer of my evidence for P – it gives me a reason to continue believing P on the basis of my evidence. It persuades me that my evidence for (1) arises naturally and is of the same kind and quality as my evidence for the existence of my own mind and its states. It validates my evidence for (1) without giving me any new evidence for it. In other words, it gives me evidence for (2): It gives me a reason to believe that I am justified in believing that P on the basis of my (sensory) evidence for P. To suppose that the anti-sceptical argument gives me a reason to believe (1) – or is required in order for me to be justified in believing (1) – is to conflate higher-level epistemic justification with first-level immediate justification in just the way that Alston thought advocates of the feature- Φ argument against foundationalism had done.

But Tetens is not guilty of this confusion. According to him, my experience of tree-like sensations provides first-level immediate justification for my belief that there is a tree in front of me. But since my evidence for (1) is *prima facie* and defeasible, it is susceptible to sceptical attack. The sceptic does not attack my belief that P. The sceptic attacks my belief that I am justified in believing that P on the basis of my sensory experience. If the sceptic were attacking (1) directly, he would be providing a rebutting defeater for (1), thereby giving me a reason to believe not-P. But that is clearly not his aim. The sceptic is attacking (2), the idea that I am justified in believing (1) on the basis of my evidence. Tetens' naturalistic anti-sceptical argument is an attempt to defeat that defeater – to reinstate or stabilize my evidence for (1) by showing that I have no good reason to hesitate in the face of it. That piece of anti-sceptical reasoning is a distinctively higher-level, epistemological analysis that has no tendency whatever to render my belief that P non-basic. Furnishing grounds for believing (2) is precisely equivalent to justifying the claim that (1) is *properly* basic.

Consider it one last time from a slightly different angle. To know that there is a tree in front of me I don't need reflective knowledge of my knowledge or of the epistemic status of my belief ›There is a tree in front of me.‹⁶⁵ This belief is basic. But I *do* need such higher-level knowledge in order to deal effectively with the sceptic. Tetens' novel strategy is to endeavour to show that a class of beliefs that the sceptic accepts as justified has no epistemic priority over the class of beliefs whose grounds he wants to undercut. Take the proposition ›I am tired.‹ Even the sceptic will admit that in certain epistemic circumstances I am immediately justified in holding it to be true. ›I am tired‹ does not need to be inferred from or to draw support from any other propositions that I believe. It is properly taken as basic when I am *feeling* tired.

Tetens' point is that the same thing is true of the proposition ›There is a tree in front of me‹ when the relevant perceptual conditions obtain. The sceptic wants an argument to show that we are justified in inferring this proposition from our sensations and, given the possibility that one

is that it gives someone a reason to *deny* that the grounds she has would *not* be there unless P were true. Cf. Pollock: *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge* (see note 61), p. 39.

⁶⁵ The distinction between *showing* that a belief is justified (a task for the epistemologist) and a belief's *being* justified (something that may just happen) is explained by Alston in *What's Wrong with Immediate Knowledge* (see note 58), pp. 70–72. As Alston puts it: »[W]e can't require S to have actually gone through the activity of justifying B in order to be justified in accepting B.« In fact, S need not even be *capable* of justifying B in order to *be* justified in accepting B (see p. 71).

of the sceptical scenarios holds, he assumes that no such argument is forthcoming. But this demand presupposes a false starting point. It presupposes that beliefs about our own mental states enjoy some sort of logical or psychological advantage over beliefs about external objects. But this is an entire mistake, according to Tetens. Beliefs regarding the existence of our mental states and beliefs regarding the existence of external objects arise naturally, necessarily and concurrently in accordance with the very same cognitive principle. They are grounded in our immediate experience and are *prima facie* justified by it. But the proposition ›I am justified in believing that there is a tree in front of me on the basis of my sensory experience‹ *does* require justification through philosophical argumentation. That belief is *not* justified by experience alone, since it concerns the justificatory status of another belief and it is completely implausible to suppose that experience, independently of all reflection, could justify me in holding a higher-level belief about the epistemic credentials of a lower-level belief.

A little more abstractly, undergoing the relevant sensory experience for some perceptual belief that P does give me a justification for believing that P. But believing that P on the basis of my experience does not automatically give me the belief, or give me a justification for the belief, that my belief that P is justified. Evidence for that higher-order belief about the epistemic status of my belief that P may be available through simple reflection or subtle argumentation, but such reflection or argumentation is something additional to my perceptual evidence for P. So although P may be properly basic for me – it may be a *justified* basic belief – the higher-level belief *that* P is properly basic – that I am justified in believing that P – is not basic. Its justification requires, minimally, some process of reflection on the nature of my evidence for P. And any such process presupposes a shift in perspective vis-à-vis the evidence, a move from the sensory level of cognition to the rational and reflective. Believing P is therefore not the same thing as believing that I am justified in believing that P. Likewise, *being* justified in believing that P is not the same thing as being justified in believing *that I am justified* in believing that P.

Tetens' refutation of idealism makes no sense if we do not suppose that he was at least vaguely aware of all this. Considered from a purely historical point of view I have gone far beyond what can be attributed to him with any certainty, and I would do well to stress the *vaguely* part of my last claim. But I submit that Tetens had some notion of what he was doing in presenting a reasoned defence of beliefs that he took to be generated and justified without reason. The clearest indication of this is to be found in his comments on Reid:

Reid, in his *Inquiry into the Human Mind* [...] regards these judgements about the objective reality of things as instinct-like effects of the understanding, of which no further ground can be given.⁶⁶

In our ordinary ideas of sensation the thought that we represent other objects is so interwoven, and we are so little aware of any preceding act of reflection, that one does not have to blame Reid [...] and others, if they took the thought of the objective and subjective existence of things for an immediate effect of instinct. In a certain respect they didn't say anything incorrect.⁶⁷

What Mr Reid and Beattie said against him [Hume] is well-known, namely, that this is contrary to human understanding. The answer is not incorrect, just unphilosophical.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ *PV* I, p. 382.

⁶⁷ *PV* I, p. 375.

⁶⁸ *PV* I, p. 393.

Reid's answer to Hume was *not incorrect*, according to Tetens, just *unphilosophical*. My suggestion is that we interpret Tetens' qualified backing of Reid as follows: Reid was right to identify perceptual beliefs formed under appropriate conditions as *basic*. They acquire first-level immediate justification through experience. But Reid's answer was unphilosophical since he failed to provide us with any reason to think that such beliefs are *properly* regarded as basic. The sceptic's doubts seem to neutralize our first-level immediate justification for our perceptual beliefs by undercutting their grounds, and so it falls to the philosopher, who is concerned with higher-level epistemic justification, to validate these grounds through reasoning and argumentation and afford us thereby reflective knowledge of our evidential situation. The non-philosopher may be justified in believing that there is a tree in front of him. But the philosopher can give *reasons for thinking* that he is justified in believing that there is a tree in front of him. That such a distinction matters, or even exists, was more obvious to Tetens than it was to any of his celebrated contemporaries. For this insight he deserves recognition.