

Experience, Evidence, and Externalism

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Can anything other than a belief confer epistemic justification on a belief? In particular, can nondoxastic experiential states do so? According to the standard taxonomy, *doxasticism* is the view that only beliefs can justify beliefs; *nodoxasticism* is simply the denial of this. The distinction between doxastic and nondoxastic theories is central to epistemology, but much of the debate surrounding it has been marred by an unnoticed ambiguity concerning the key concept of justification. Sorting out the ambiguity reveals an important division between externalist and internalist varieties of nondoxasticism and points the way toward a new argument for nondoxasticism of the externalist sort.

One of the best known arguments for doxasticism is the so-called Sellarsian dilemma,¹ which argues that nondoxastic experiential states cannot justify basic beliefs.² A familiar variant goes as follows: an experiential state is either propositional or it is not. If the state is propositional, then it would have to be itself justified before it could confer justification on the beliefs in question, but then those beliefs would not be basic after all, and the experiential state

¹ By following the contemporary literature in calling the ensuing argument ‘the Sellarsian dilemma’ I do not thereby intend to make any claims about whether Sellars himself endorsed any part of this. The Sellarsian dilemma has appeared in many forms, perhaps the clearest and most influential of which is in BonJour (1985), who claims to find it or something like it in Sellars (1956).

² The beliefs would not be self-justifying, but they would still count as epistemologically basic, a basic belief being one whose justification does not rely on evidential support from other *beliefs*.

hasn't terminated the regress. If the state is not propositional, then it couldn't confer justification, because it couldn't stand in the appropriate logical relations to the basic beliefs.³ So in neither case can an experiential state serve as a terminal source of justification. It can be a terminator or justifier, but not both.

Although I don't find the standard formulations of the Sellarsian dilemma compelling, there is more to the argument than is generally recognized. It is not, however, what the argument's doxasticist proponents think. In fact, I want to use the Sellarsian dilemma—or something like it—as part of an argument for a strong form of externalism. Disambiguating the operative notions of justification allows for a reformulation of something like the Sellarsian dilemma which is in a way stronger and in way weaker than the standard formulations. It is stronger in that it really does make a good case against nondoxastic internalism, but weaker in that it makes no case at all against an important class of externalist theories. Thus, the externalist can forge an unholy alliance with Sellars in an attempt to limit the playing field to doxastic theories and externalist theories. Given the notorious difficulties with doxastic theories, this should leave externalism as the only genuinely viable option. I lack the space here to argue against doxastic theories, but the widespread exodus from doxastic theories in recent years suggests that the famous isolation argument, coupled with the fact that any belief can be held for bad reasons, have convinced most that doxasticism cannot be maintained.⁴

³ The version of the argument treated here begins with the question of whether experiential states are propositional, though other variants ask whether they are conceptual, others whether they are cognitive. These differences will not affect the main points of this paper.

⁴ It is worth pointing out in this connection that the recent renaissance of old-fashioned foundationalism (see DePaul, 2001) has been a renaissance of *nondoxastic* foundationalism.

1. Evidential and Metaphysical Justifiers

The distinction between doxastic and nondoxastic theories concerns the sorts of things that can serve to justify beliefs. Discussions of doxasticism and nondoxasticism typically begin with a stipulative definition of a “justifier” as anything that serves to make a belief justified, and set the stage by asking the question: “what sorts of things can serve as justifiers?” The question, however, is ambiguous. We might be asking, ‘what sorts of things can serve as justifying grounds for beliefs?’ Alternatively, we might be asking, ‘on what sorts of things can justification supervene?’ These are very different questions.

Consider by way of illustration a kind of Cartesian foundationalism, according to which all and only what we clearly and distinctly perceive is justified.⁵ Suppose it is not immediately clear and distinct to me that someone exists, until I realize that I exist and on this basis conclude, and now clearly and distinctly perceive, that someone does. What, according to Cartesian foundationalism, justifies my belief that someone exists, the belief that I exist (coupled perhaps with the knowledge that if I do, someone does), or the fact that my belief that someone exists is clear and distinct? Both are correct answers, but answers to different questions. The sense in which the belief that I exist justifies the belief that someone exists is quite different from the sense in which the clarity and distinctness of the latter justify it. Either could be said to *make* the target belief justified, but in very different senses of ‘make’. My belief that I exist serves as evidence; it is what grounds, what *evidentially justifies*, the belief that someone exists, while the clarity and distinctness are not (necessarily) *evidence* for anything but are the properties on which

⁵ As is usual in epistemology, I won’t be concerned with whether this is the view of the historical Descartes.

the justification of the belief supervenes; they are what *metaphysically justify* the belief.

Let me explain. The *ground* of a belief, as I will use the term, is the putative evidence on which the belief is based. This notion of basing, though subject to certain controversies, is quite familiar.⁶ I may believe that *p* and that *p* entails *q*, but when deliberating about whether to accept *q*, I fail to notice these reasons and instead accept *q* on the basis of my psychic's telling me that *q*. In such a case, my belief would be *justifiable* (since I possess good reasons for it) but not *justified* (since my belief is not based on these reasons).

My concern at this point is not with the basing relation *per se*, but with the notion of reasons presupposed by these discussions. 'Reason' is notoriously ambiguous. To say that *S* has some reason for believing *p* could be to say (a) that *S* is justified to some degree in believing that *p*, (b) that there is a cause of *S*'s believing that *p*, or (c) there is something on which *S*'s belief that *p* is based. It is this last sense that I am concerned with here; in this sense of 'reason', to say that *S* has a reason *r* for believing that *p*—better: that *r* is *S*'s reason for believing that *p*—is to say that *r* is *S*'s ground for believing that *p*, equivalently, that *S* believes that *p* on the basis of *r*, or that *r* is *S*'s (putative) evidence for her belief that *p*. Having a ground or grounds for a belief does not imply that the belief is justified, as, for one thing, putative evidence isn't always good evidence. However, when a ground does confer justification on a belief, we can say that the ground *evidentially justifies* the belief.

For something to be the ground of a belief, it must be the sort of thing that the believer can take into account. This is intended not as a statement of internalism, but as an indication of

⁶ For discussions of the basing relation and the controversies surrounding it, compare Korcus 1997, 2000; Pollock 1986; Kvanvig (forthcoming).

how I'm using the term 'ground'. A ground must also in some sense explain the belief's being held, though there are typically a number of different explanations for the existence of a given belief, many of which do not invoke grounds. Compare the following:

- (i) *S* believes that *p* because *S* believes that *q* and that *q* entails *p*.
- (ii) *S* believes that *p* because *S*'s desire that *p* causes *S* to form the belief that *p*.
- (iii) *S* is being subjected to a strong magnetic field, which produces brain state #773291, which (in *S* at *t*) realizes the belief that *p*.
- (iv) *S* is in brain state #773291, which (in *S* at *t*) realizes the belief that *p*.

(i) is the only item on the list that clearly offers one of *S*'s grounds or reasons for believing that *p*. *S* doesn't hold the belief that *p* *on the basis of* the magnetic field or being in brain state #773291. Nor, presumably, does *S* believe that *p* *on the basis of* wishful thinking—as *the result of* wishful thinking perhaps, but not on the basis of it. Still less does *S* believe that *p* on the basis of the reliability of cognitive processes that produce the belief—though belief in *p* may well be based on the (meta)*belief* that the processes that initially produced it were reliable.

There are a few classes of possible grounds whose status is controversial. Whether or not sensory/experiential states can serve as grounds is an important question and one to which I return below. An even more controversial class of potential grounds would consist of certain nonmental, though still highly accessible, facts. One might claim, with some plausibility, that the fact that I exist is the sort of thing that could serve as a basis for my belief that I exist. Even among mental states, some claim that only conscious and occurrent mental states can serve as grounds (Feldman, 1988), while others deny this (Harman, 1973). Finally, even if we were to admit of self-justifying beliefs, it is unclear that this would commit us to anything more than the

claim that some beliefs are justified whenever held. Perhaps a belief can literally be its own ground, though perhaps ‘self-justification’ is just a convenient shorthand for something else.

Sometimes when we ask what justifies a belief we are asking for the ground of the belief; i.e., we are asking what if anything evidentially justifies the agent in holding the belief. This is especially true in nonphilosophical contexts and when speaking in the second person, e.g., “what justifies you in believing that p ?”

At other times, however, we are not asking for the agent’s (putative) evidence but are asking what it is in virtue of which the belief is justified. We are asking not for the evidential basis of justification but the metaphysical basis of justification; we are not offering a challenge to provide evidence but are asking for a theory of justification. The answer to this latter question about metaphysical justifiers is not exhausted by giving a complete answer to the question about evidential justifiers. In addition to the whole of the agent’s evidence, there will be the fact that it is good evidence and certain factors in virtue of which this is so. Epistemic properties are presumably not fundamental features of the world; they must supervene on, reduce to, or somehow be cashed out in terms of something deeper—one hopes nonnormative, or at least nonepistemic, properties. (I’ll formulate the following in terms of supervenience, rather than the preceding disjunction, but this is only for expository convenience.)

Reliabilism is a prime example of a theory aimed at specifying these deeper properties, claiming, roughly, that the epistemic status of a belief supervenes on the reliability of the processes that produced or sustain it.⁷ The sense in which reliability justifies beliefs is quite

⁷ This is, of course, too simplified a version of reliabilism to be taken seriously, but that won’t affect the present point.

different from the sense in which justified premise beliefs justify beliefs. As we saw above, process reliability *per se* does not figure into the agent's evidence and thus does not ground, or *evidentially* justify, belief. But if reliabilism is correct, reliability can still *metaphysically* justify the belief, by being that on which the justification supervenes. It is useful here to proceed in terms of "evidential justification" and "metaphysical justification". However, such terminology might misleadingly suggest two different properties, rather than two different relations. There's just one property of being (epistemically) justified, but two relations things can stand in to justified beliefs: the relation of metaphysically justifying, and the relation of evidentially justifying. If something stands in either of these relations to a belief, then that belief has the property of justification, i.e., is justified.

It may help to keep in mind that the relation of evidential justification is at least in certain instances a causal relation. If my belief that q is causally based on my belief that p , then the belief that p causes the belief that q to be justified. Metaphysical justification, on the other hand, is constitutive, rather than causal. The belief's being justified *just is* its being the result of a reliable process (similarly for supervenience and the like). The relations here are far too intimate (and necessary) to be causal.

The distinction between evidential and metaphysical justifiers does not require that there be no overlap between the two. Certainly, if the belief that p evidentially justifies my belief that q , then the former will be part of what metaphysically justifies the latter. (More strictly speaking, the *fact* that I believe that p will be part of what metaphysically justifies my belief that q .) This, of course, is perfectly compatible with the claim that the relation of metaphysically justifying is distinct from the relation of evidentially justifying. If a belief is evidentially justified, then it is

justified, and hence metaphysically justified. The converse may not be true; in fact, I argue below that it is not true. The fact that a belief is metaphysically justified does not obviously imply that the belief is evidentially justified. Some beliefs might be justified in the absence of grounds.

Theories of evidential and metaphysical justifiers will thus be mutually constraining; they are nonetheless different theories. Reliabilism is primarily a theory of metaphysical justifiers; it starts with a theory of metaphysical justifiers and lets the theory of evidential justifiers fall where it may. Foundationalism, on the other hand, is concerned with evidential justifiers and has little or nothing to say about metaphysical justifiers. It posits a class of basic beliefs, whose justification does not depend on being grounded in other beliefs, and claims that all other justified beliefs are ultimately grounded in these. Foundationalism *per se* says little or nothing about metaphysical justification (though of course, some foundationalists have done so).

Coherentism combines a theory of metaphysical justifiers with a theory of evidential justifiers.

The standard coherentist theory of evidential justification claims that (a) only beliefs can serve as (justifying) grounds, and (b) that no belief can either serve as its own ground or be justified in the absence of any ground.⁸ Such a theory goes hand in hand with the standard coherentist account of metaphysical justifiers: that justification supervenes on coherence among a set of beliefs.

Evidentialism (Feldman and Conee, 1985) *sounds* like the view that evidential justifiers are the only justifiers there are. Surely, however, the evidentialist recognizes that there is always the additional, extra-evidential fact that the whole of the agent's evidence is good evidence or not.

⁸ It is possible to be a coherentist yet claim that nondoxastic sensory states justify some beliefs, so long as you deny that *all* justified (empirical) belief ultimately derives from this. Standard versions of coherentism, however (e.g., Lehrer 1990; BonJour 1985), are predicated on doxasticism.

Rather, evidentialism is the claim that one's evidential justifiers fix the metaphysical justifiers, in the sense that any two agents with all the same evidential justifiers cannot differ with respect to metaphysical justifiers.⁹

Thus the Cartesian foundationalist examined above need not decide whether it is my belief that I exist that justifies my belief that someone exists or the latter's clarity and distinctness. The belief that I exist evidentially justifies it, while the clarity and distinctness metaphysically justify it. Clarity and distinctness is not evidence; it is not even putative evidence; it is—on the view under discussion—what makes putative evidence good evidence: since a justified belief is just one that is clear and distinct, a ground evidentially justifies a belief just in case the former confers clarity and distinctness on the latter.

2. The Supervenience Argument

To illustrate the distinction further and to set the stage for the argument to follow, consider a well-known argument that infers the possibility of nondoxastic justification from the claim that epistemic properties supervene on nonepistemic properties. I call it the Supervenience Argument (SA):¹⁰

1. Epistemic properties supervene on nonepistemic properties (perhaps, e.g., reliability,

⁹ Formally, the statement of evidentialism is equivalent to the claim that metaphysical justifiers supervene on evidential justifiers. However, evidentialism would certainly reject the implicature that metaphysical justifiers are in any sense “higher level” than evidential justifiers. The formal supervenience is a mere artifact of the evidentialist contention that metaphysical justification is an intrinsic property of sets of grounds and beliefs.

¹⁰ Versions of this argument have been endorsed by Sosa 1980, van Cleve 1985, and Steup 1996, 2000.

incorrigibility, coherence, etc.).

2. So beliefs ultimately receive their justification from something which does not itself have justification.
3. Therefore, there is something which makes beliefs justified but is not itself a justified belief.
4. Unjustified (or nonjustified) beliefs cannot confer justification on other beliefs.
5. Therefore, there is something which makes beliefs justified but is not itself a belief.
6. Therefore, not all justification is doxastic, so doxastic theories are false.

The most sophisticated formulation of SA is due to van Cleve (1985), who invokes an important distinction between two kinds of epistemic principles: transmission principles and generation principles. The former tell how justified beliefs give rise to justified beliefs, while the latter tell how something that is not itself a justified belief gives rise to justified beliefs. The point of the supervenience thesis (that epistemic properties supervene on nonepistemic properties) is that it guarantees the existence of true generation principles. And if there are true generation principles, then it is possible—indeed perhaps necessary—for something nondoxastic to confer justification on beliefs.

A closely related argument is sometimes offered as an *ad hominem* against coherentists, the chief proponents of doxasticism: coherentists claim that justification supervenes on coherence. But this is the claim that coherence justifies beliefs, and coherence isn't a belief, so coherentism is committed to nondoxastic justification after all (Sosa 1980; Steup 1996).

The problem with all of this, however, is that such phrases as 'confers justification',

‘makes beliefs justified’, ‘gives rise to justified beliefs’, and the like are ambiguous between evidentially justifying and metaphysically justifying. Supervenience implies that something nondoxastic metaphysically justifies beliefs, but it does not follow from this that nondoxastic things can evidentially justify beliefs. The Cartesian foundationalist discussed above could endorse a doxastic theory of grounds by claiming that only beliefs can evidentially justify beliefs. This would be perfectly compatible with the claim that a belief is justified iff it is clear and distinct, even though, patently, neither clarity nor distinctness is itself a belief. If the Cartesian foundationalist were to claim that nothing can justify a belief except a belief, we should read this as the claim that only beliefs can *evidentially* justify beliefs, not as a repudiation of the epistemic role of clarity and distinctness. This is presumably what coherentists are doing when they claim that only beliefs can justify beliefs.¹¹ They are not denying that coherence metaphysically justifies beliefs; they are insisting that evidential relations obtain only among beliefs and thus that only beliefs can serve as justifying grounds for beliefs.

Doxasticism is best viewed as a theory about evidential justifiers rather than metaphysical justifiers. For one thing, there are few if any *prima facie* constraints on what sorts of things can serve as metaphysical justifiers: reliability, coherence, clarity and distinctness. The right theory of metaphysical justifiers will be the one that gets the cases right; if doxasticism were the claim that only beliefs can metaphysically justify beliefs, there would be very little reason to take doxasticism seriously. Additionally, no one has ever endorsed such a view. All extant theories of metaphysical justifiers have been nondoxastic theories, including coherentism and Cartesian

¹¹ This sort of point generalizes to all so-called doxastic theories, but I will restrict my attention to coherentism here to simplify matters.

foundationalism, though these are paradigm instances of ‘doxastic theories’ as the term is generally used.

So if doxasticism is to be taken seriously, it must be read as a thesis about evidential justifiers. But this is where SA falls flat. The fifth step of SA claims that there is something which is not itself a belief but which makes beliefs justified. To refute doxasticism, however, the premise needs to claim that this nondoxastic thing *evidentially* justifies beliefs, but this is not something the supervenience premise supports. Supervenience does imply that there are nondoxastic justifiers, but it does not imply that there are nondoxastic *evidential* justifiers. What SA needs to refute doxasticism is a thesis about evidential justifiers; what it offers is a thesis about metaphysical justifiers.

A detailed theory about metaphysical justifiers would have implications concerning evidential justifiers, but SA only claims that justification supervenes on *something or other*. This generic claim, however, is compatible with any theory whatsoever about grounds. The fact that there are true generation principles indicates that there must be justifiers that don’t themselves have justification, but that doesn’t yet tell us whether there must be—or can be—justifying *grounds* that don’t themselves have justification.

3. Doxasticism and Nondoxasticism

We can now see the debate between doxasticism and nondoxasticism in a clearer light.¹²

¹² Standard characterizations of doxasticism tend to run together several distinct theses. See Pollock (1986, p. 19); Pollock & Cruz (1999, p. 22), where one of the two formulations of doxasticism includes the view that no two doxastically identical agents can differ epistemically. Not only does this overlook the evidential/metaphysical justifier distinction, but it leaves no room for the notion of basing/grounding at all. Surely two agents can share all their beliefs even

The rallying cry of doxastic theories is that nothing can justify a belief but a belief. Viewing doxasticism as a thesis about evidential justification, however, requires us to go beyond the traditional slogans. Doxasticism must be more than the claim that only beliefs can evidentially justify beliefs, since this is something reliabilists can accept, and reliabilism is a paradigmatically nondoxastic theory. Instead, doxasticism must be viewed as a conjunction of two claims:

The Belief Principle: only beliefs can evidentially justify beliefs,

and

The Grounds Principle: all justified beliefs have grounds, i.e., evidential justifiers.

Although the Belief Principle is usually the only one mentioned in standard formulations of doxasticism, the discussion thus far reveals the Grounds Principle to be more than just the trivial claim that all justified beliefs have justifiers. All justified beliefs have metaphysical justifiers, but the Grounds Principle makes the stronger claim that all justified beliefs have evidential justifiers. Doxasticism claims not only that no nonbeliefs evidentially justify beliefs, but also that every justified belief has a belief that justifies it.

A nondoxastic theory is simply one that is not a doxastic theory, and there are at least two important kinds. An *experientialist* nondoxasticism agrees with doxasticism in accepting the Grounds Principle but rejects the Belief Principle in allowing nondoxastic experiential states to

though some of their beliefs have different bases (especially given Pollock & Cruz's endorsement of a causal theory of the basing relation). Pollock & Cruz also seem to equate doxastic foundationalism with physical object foundationalism: that version of foundationalism according to which some beliefs about ordinary physical objects are basic (though Pollock 2001 rectifies this). Steup (2000, especially p. 76-78) seems to make this last mistake as well, though in a different terminology. Most traditional foundationalists, however (e.g., Chisholm 1977, 1989; BonJour 2001, 2002; and Fumerton 1995, 2001), are nondoxastic foundationalists who nonetheless reject physical object foundationalism.

serve as justifying grounds. If there is a standard view in contemporary epistemology, it is probably this. An *externalist* nondoxasticism is one that denies the Grounds Principle. I mean here externalist externalisms of the sort Goldman (e.g., 1979, 1986) has defended. Alston's (1988) "Internalist Externalism" offers an experientialist nondoxasticism, since he explicitly endorses the Grounds Principle and allows nondoxastic experiential states to serve as grounds. Other versions of reliabilism, however, make no such requirement on grounds and thus are instances of externalist nondoxasticism; so long as the relevant processes are suitably reliable, the belief will be (*prima facie*) justified, whether or not it is based on a ground.

A reliabilist—in fact, any externalist nondoxasticist—can accept the Belief Principle without compromising nondoxasticism. So long as one denies that every justified belief has a ground, one can avoid doxasticism by admitting, even requiring, that only beliefs can evidentially justify beliefs. Later, in fact, I will use the Belief Principle as part of an argument *for* reliabilism.

A number of theorists, not all of whom count as experientialists on the present taxonomy, claim that experiential states are epistemically relevant. Alston (1988), Feldman & Conee (1985), and Pollock & Cruz (1999), for example, are all fairly explicit about conceiving experiential states as grounds, evidence, reasons; i.e., evidential justifiers. One could, however, claim that having the corresponding experiential state is a necessary condition for justification (for a certain class of beliefs), even though the experiences serve as metaphysical, rather than evidential, justifiers. Michael Huemer (2001, especially p. 182) *seems* to endorse this view, though it is hard to be sure. I am here classifying such views as externalist nondoxastic theories, although this is not the kind of externalism I want to endorse. The main motivation for experientialism is the intuitive plausibility of the Grounds Principle, but it is not obvious what the motivation might be

for an externalism which denies that experiences are evidentially relevant but yet requires them for justification nonetheless. I won't argue against such a version of externalism here, however; my target is experientialism.

Since externalism (i.e., externalist nondoxasticism)¹³ is gotten merely by denying the Grounds Principle, an externalist can accept the Belief Principle without compromising nondoxasticism. So long as one denies that every justified belief has a ground, one can insist that only beliefs can evidentially justify beliefs.

This brings us back to the Sellarsian dilemma. Just as doxasticism is to be viewed as a claim about evidential justifiers, the Sellarsian dilemma, being an argument for doxasticism, must be concerned with evidential justifiers as well. The Supervenience Argument cannot provide a response to the Sellarsian dilemma, because the former deals only with metaphysical justifiers and the latter only with evidential justifiers. However, this limited scope of the Sellarsian dilemma reveals that the famous argument does not show what doxasticists have claimed on its behalf. In emphasizing that there is no apparent way to understand nondoxastic experiences as evidential justifiers for belief, the dilemma only provides an argument for half of doxasticism, namely, the Belief Principle. But this is a principle the externalist can cheerfully accept. The Sellarsian dilemma provides an argument for doxasticism only on the further assumption that the Grounds Principle is true. By denying the Grounds Principle, externalism is immune to the Sellarsian dilemma.

¹³ In what follows, I will use 'externalism' as an abbreviation for 'externalist nondoxasticism', as defined above. Note that this is a highly restricted use of the term. Alston, and other reliabilists who hold the Grounds Principle, will not count as externalists in the present restrictive sense, though they very well might in the ordinary sense.

Things are even better for the externalist than this suggests. Assuming the falsehood of doxasticism, any argument for the Belief Principle is an argument for externalism. This is where the aforementioned strategy of enlisting aid from Sellars comes in. We can use the Sellarsian dilemma to force a new dilemma: either accept doxasticism or reject the Grounds Principle. And since doxasticism is unacceptable, the Grounds Principle must be rejected.

4. What is Right About the Sellarsian Dilemma

The basic point behind the Sellarsian dilemma is that the experientialist requires the impossible: that experiences serve as evidential justifiers and justification generators at the same time. It is quite understandable that the standard formulations of this argument have failed to garner many adherents, but the argument acquires a new strength when couched explicitly in terms of evidential justification. The Sellarsian dilemma, thus construed, argues that nondoxastic experiential states cannot serve as terminal evidential justifiers: if they are belief-like enough to serve as evidential justifiers, then they won't be suitable for halting the regress; yet if they are unbelief-like enough to terminate the regress, then they won't be the sorts of things that can serve as evidential justifiers.

Standard responses to the Sellarsian dilemma are hampered by a failure to distinguish claims about evidential justification from claims about metaphysical justification. A comparison of Steup's and Alston's recent discussions of the Sellarsian dilemma is instructive. Steup (2000) tries to evade the dilemma by claiming that experiential states are propositional, Alston (2002) by claiming that they are nonpropositional.

Steup argues that despite their being propositional, experiences don't need to be justified

in order to justify beliefs, because the justificatory relation in question is one of generation rather than transmission of justification. ‘Justificatory generation’, however, is still ambiguous between metaphysical and evidential readings, and Steup never explains how evidential generation could be possible. His view that the supervenience thesis favors nondoxastic justification, endorsed here and elsewhere (e.g., Steup 1996) bears only on metaphysical generation. But if metaphysical justification is what he has in mind, the states’ being propositional is irrelevant; metaphysical justifiers obviously needn’t bear any logical relations to their justificanda.

Alston (2002) insists that the states are nonpropositional, and thus need not be justified in order to justify beliefs. He admits that being nonpropositional prevents them from bearing logical or probabilistic relations to beliefs, but claims that justifiers need not bear such relations to their justificanda—as the plausibility of reliabilism illustrates. Though it is clearly true that metaphysical justifiers need not bear logical or probabilistic relations to their justificanda, this doesn’t begin to show that the same is true of evidential justifiers. Citing reliabilism as an existence proof is little use, for reliabilism is a theory about the metaphysical justifiers and thus has nothing directly to say about constraints on evidential justifiers. But if Alston intends experiential states to serve only as metaphysical justifiers, then their being nonpropositional is irrelevant; metaphysical justifiers—propositional or not—needn’t be justified in order to justify beliefs.

Steup’s insistence that experiential states have propositional content suggests that he is after evidential justification, but his appeal to supervenience only establishes experiences’ role as metaphysical justifiers. Alston’s enlisting reliabilism as showing that nondoxastic justification is possible suggests that his concern is with metaphysical justification, but then he has not

responded to the Sellarsian objection to his own (1988) experientialist theory of evidential justification. Like the Supervenience Argument, both of these responses offer claims about metaphysical justifiers where what is needed are claims about evidential justifiers.

Whether the nondoxastic experiential states are propositional or not matters only if the Sellarsian dilemma is concerned with evidential justifiers, but a response to such an argument requires an explicit account of how nondoxastic states can serve as *evidence*, not merely how they can serve as justifiers. This brings us to what I take to be the heart of the Sellarsian dilemma: there is no apparent way for something that is not a justified belief to serve as justifying *evidence* for a belief.

An experiential state without propositional content would not be able to stand in logical, probabilistic, or any other evidential relations to beliefs, and thus stands outside “the logical space of reasons”. It cannot serve as justifying grounds for beliefs, any more than a rock or my dog can. At the very least, if such a state can evidentially justify beliefs, it is mysterious *how*, and the theorist who insists on the possibility owes us an explanation. Though it is false that justifiers *tout court* must stand in evidential relations to their justificanda, it is more or less analytic that evidential justifiers must do so, and it is difficult to see how they could do so without propositional content.¹⁴

Such a line of argument has always led to a standoff, with the Sellarsian insisting on an account of how nonpropositional states could justify beliefs and the antiSellarsian insisting that

¹⁴ Recall that experiential states are being invoked here to explain the justification of basic beliefs. Thus they must evidentially justify these beliefs in the absence of any other beliefs. It is this that makes their nonpropositional status troublesome; otherwise, they might serve as evidence in the way that, say, smoking guns—which obviously lack propositional content—do.

even if no such explanation could be given, it wouldn't show that such states cannot serve as justifiers. If we are at a standoff here (and I realize the antiSellarsian will continue to resist), it is at least a new standoff, for the issue now is one of evidential justification, and here the Sellarsian claim has a good deal more intuitive plausibility. The insistence that all justifiers have propositional content is little more than Sellarsian dogma,¹⁵ but there is nothing dogmatic about the claim that *evidential* justifiers must be propositional.¹⁶ What seems dogmatic now is the assertion that nonpropositional states can serve as evidence, in the absence of any theory about which states can do so (my being 6' tall, e.g., cannot) or how they can do so.

As important as I think this Sellarsian point is, it only gets at part of the problem for experientialism. Insisting that experiential states have propositional and conceptual content may be one way to evade the Sellarsian charge, but it remains doubtful that these states could evidentially justify beliefs. Experiences with propositional content could perhaps stand in (broadly) logical relations to beliefs, but much more than this is required to actually serve as justifying evidence for beliefs. My desire that *p*, my fear that *q*, and my wondering whether *r* all have propositional content and thus can stand in logical relations to my belief that *p* or *q* or *r*. But it is quite clear that none of these states can serve as evidence for this belief. Neither can the proposition that *p* by itself or *your* belief (of which I have no idea) that *q*. Standing in logical relations to beliefs may be necessary, but it is not nearly sufficient, for evidentially justifying

¹⁵ Thanks to correspondence with James Montmarquet for this phrase.

¹⁶ At the very least, the state must have a content, and this content must be in some sense commensurate with the content of the justificandum belief in order for the relation to be an evidential one. Perhaps those variants of the Sellarsian dilemma that proceed in terms of conceptuality rather than propositionality fare better in this regard, though sorting out those differences is not my concern here.

those beliefs.

It is worth asking on this score what it is that makes justified *beliefs* capable of evidentially justifying beliefs. The answer, I assume, has something to do with the fact that if p entails q , then anything that makes p probable also makes q probable. Moving to the agent's perspective, if I know that p entails q , then—*ceteris paribus* and within limits—anything that justifies me in believing that p should justify me in believing that q , since my knowing that p entails q results in my rightly treating any evidence for p as *ipso facto* evidence for q . Similarly with nonevidential justifiers: whatever metaphysically justifies my belief that p will—*ceteris paribus* again—at least partially justify my belief that q , if I know that the former implies the latter. Since it is in some sense or other the agent's perspective that matters, we might expect that S 's being justified in believing that p implies q should have much the same effect. The same will hold, though to a lesser degree and within tighter limits, when p doesn't entail, but merely renders probable, q .

On this view, it is not that one belief literally transmits justification to another belief as if justification were some kind of caloric-like fluid—that would be taking the transmission metaphor too seriously. On the present view, the inferred belief derives its justification not from the premise beliefs themselves, but from whatever justified them.¹⁷ If we suppose that this is the only way for something to evidentially justify beliefs, we can explain why unjustified beliefs

¹⁷ The justifiers of the premise beliefs may not suffice for the justification of the inferred belief, of course; other necessary conditions might well hold. E.g., the agent may need to believe or be justified in believing that the premises support the conclusion, etc. Even these conditions, however, seem to serve as metaphysical rather than evidential justifiers. My belief that *modus ponens* is valid may not be part of my evidence for q in the way that my belief that p and that p implies q are.

cannot evidentially justify other beliefs. It is because what justifies a conclusion belief is whatever justified the premise belief, in this case, nothing. Analogous reasoning explains why desires, fears, bare conceptions, and the like cannot evidentially justify beliefs. It is not so much because they aren't *beliefs* but because they aren't *justified*. Of course, since only beliefs can be justified, only beliefs can serve as evidential justifiers, but this is a conclusion of the argument, not a premise. Unfortunately for the experientialist, this very same reasoning also implies that nondoxastic experiences cannot evidentially justify beliefs—regardless of whether these experiences are propositional or not.

Some formulations of the dilemma (e.g., Bonjour 1985) suggest that if a state is propositional then it is *ipso facto* in need of justification, and that is why propositional states must be justified in order to justify beliefs. But the present point is that, as far as we can understand, only things that are justified can evidentially justify beliefs. This reveals the standard claim that nondoxastic states are not in need of justification, because they aren't susceptible to justification (e.g., Steup 2000) as a non sequitur. Perhaps they don't "need" justification for their own sake, but they do need it if they are to evidentially justify beliefs.

There are other accounts one might offer of how justified beliefs evidentially justify other beliefs, including the caloric view, and nothing much rides on which account is correct. The present points are merely (a) that there are existing accounts of how justified beliefs can evidentially justify beliefs, and none, so far as I know, of how nondoxastic experiential states can do so, and (b) these accounts imply that nondoxastic experiential states cannot evidentially justify beliefs. So the experientialist has to produce not just one, but two, accounts. The one account has to explain why the evidential justifier's being justified is necessary (if the justifier is a belief),

while the other has to explain why it is not necessary (if the justifier is not a belief), so there's little hope of a unified account.

Note that it won't do simply to claim that what justifies the target belief is the agent's *belief* that there is a ground that adequately supports it. This would make for a unified account, but it would be neither a nondoxastic one (since the experience itself is no longer doing any work) nor a plausible one (for it also ceases, on pain of regress, to require that doxastic grounds be justified). Nor can the experientialist simply drop the claim that experiential states evidentially justify beliefs and substitute for it the claim that they metaphysically justify beliefs. Such a view would no longer be a form of experientialist nondoxasticism as I have defined it, but a kind of externalism. Of course experiences can serve as *metaphysical* justifiers for beliefs, at least in principle; anything can. The question is whether they can serve as *evidential* justifiers.

5. Toward an Externalist Nondoxasticism

Two problems for nondoxastic theories have arisen. The one is a general problem for all nondoxastic theories. This is the problem of explaining how experiential states can serve as justifying grounds for beliefs. The other problem is an additional problem for those theories according to which the experiential grounds lack propositional content. This is the problem of explaining how experiences lacking propositional content can serve as evidence for beliefs.

This isn't quite the textbook Sellarsian dilemma anymore. In fact, the argument against experientialist nondoxasticism no longer takes the form of a dilemma but claims that experientialism faces a big problem, and particular versions of experientialism also face another problem. Nonetheless, this argument seems to capture what was central and plausible about the

Sellarsian dilemma: nonpropositional states cannot stand in evidential relations to beliefs and propositional states can evidentially justify only if they are already themselves justified—not because they are propositional, but because nothing can evidentially justify a belief unless it is itself justified. And since only beliefs can be justified, the Belief Principle is vindicated: only beliefs can evidentially justify beliefs. Thus, for reasons quite different from the traditional ones, a regress terminator of the experientialist sort is ruled out. Nothing can be both an evidential justifier and a justification generator at the same time; all generators of justification are metaphysical justifiers.

Dilemma or no, the present argument is, as promised, both stronger and weaker than the standard Sellarsian dilemma. By presenting the argument explicitly in terms of evidential justifiers, a stronger case is made against experientialism, against the traditional doctrine of the given. Even where the Supervenience Argument has not been explicitly voiced, I think that something like it has lured experientialists into thinking that evading Sellarsian worries is easy. There are few *prima facie* constraints on what sorts of things can count as justifiers, and thus no good reason to think that experiential states couldn't fit the bill; hence the Sellarsian dilemma doesn't even get off the ground. Ironically, the rise of externalism in the last few decades may have contributed to this tendency (as Alston notes), by showing how plausible it is to think that there must be nondoxastic justifiers. If the Sellarsian dilemma is explicitly formulated in terms of evidential justification, however, such dismissals of it are shown to be premature.

On the other hand, the present argument is weaker than the standard Sellarsian dilemma purported to be. I have argued that nothing can evidentially justify a belief unless it is itself justified. This is very different from the claims that nothing can justify a belief unless it is itself

justified or that nothing can evidentially justify a belief unless it is itself evidentially justified.

The kind of externalism I endorse rejects both of these latter claims. Metaphysical justifiers need not be themselves justified, and basic beliefs will be justified—and thus capable of evidentially justifying nonbasic beliefs—though they are not evidentially justified (a situation the Grounds Principle, rejected above, regards as impossible).

The externalist can agree with Sellars that nothing is both an evidential justifier and a justification generator, without conceding doxasticism. What we see now are two regresses, with different termina. The evidential regress terminates with basic beliefs, which are justified but ungrounded. The metaphysical regress terminates with those nondoxastic states of affairs (e.g., process reliability) that metaphysically generate justification.

The distinction between evidential and metaphysical justifiers makes it possible to accept the Belief Principle while rejecting the Grounds Principle. Thus the Belief Principle is compatible with externalism. Doxasticism is the conjunction of the Belief Principle and the Grounds Principle. If we reject doxasticism on independent grounds, a roughly Sellarsian argument for the Belief Principle actually becomes an argument for externalism.

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