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EVIDENCE, EXPERIENCE, AND EXTERNALISM

Jack C. Lyons

The Sellarsian dilemma is a famous argument that attempts to show that nondoxastic experiential states cannot confer justification on basic beliefs. The usual conclusion of the Sellarsian dilemma is a coherentist epistemology, and the usual response to the dilemma is to find it quite unconvincing. By distinguishing between two importantly different justification relations (evidential and nonevidential), I hope to show that the Sellarsian dilemma, or something like it, does offer a powerful argument against standard nondoxastic foundationalist theories. But this reconceived version of the argument does not support coherentism. Instead, I use it to argue for a strongly externalist epistemology.

A central and longstanding debate in epistemology concerns the question of whether anything other than a belief can confer epistemic justification on a belief. Coherentism insists that only beliefs can confer positive epistemic status on beliefs, that nondoxastic experiential states can serve perhaps as causes, but not as reasons. Standard internalist versions of foundationalism, on the other hand, invoke these nondoxastic experiences to serve as the epistemological foundation, as the unmoved movers that allow for a foundationalist solution to the famous regress problem.¹

One of the best known arguments for coherentism is the so-called Sellarsian dilemma, which aims to show that experiential states cannot serve as justifiers and as regress terminators at the same time. It is concluded that only beliefs can justify beliefs. The surrounding debate concerning the epistemic role of nondoxastic states has been marred by an ambiguity concerning the key concept of justification. Disambiguating the operative notions of justification allows for a reformulation of the Sellarsian dilemma—or something like it—which is at once stronger and weaker than the formulations typically found in the epistemological literature. The new argument is stronger in that it really does make a good case against standard foundationalist theories. But it is weaker in that it does not suggest a coherentist conclusion, for it now clearly offers no argument at all against *externalist* theories.

¹Standard versions of foundationalism might not be *traditional* versions. The traditional view may have been that basic beliefs are self-justifying, but few or no foundationalists hold that today. Instead, most hold that the basic beliefs (whether beliefs about external objects or about one's own current mental states) are justified by nondoxastic appearance states. The beliefs would still count as epistemologically basic, a basic belief being one whose justification does not rely on support from other *beliefs*.

In fact, I want to use this revamped Sellarsian argument as a new argument for a strongly externalist theory. The tactic is to forge an unholy alliance with coherentist arch-rival Sellars in an effort to limit the playing field to coherentist theories, which hold that only beliefs can justify beliefs, and externalist theories, which hold that beliefs are justified by factors outside the agent's perspective. With the choices thus restricted, the notorious problems facing coherentism leave externalism as the only viable theoretical option.² An argument that is sometimes called 'the Master Argument for Coherentism' [Pryor 2004] is instead an argument for reliabilism.

In Section I, I invoke a standard epistemological conception of evidence and use it to distinguish two importantly different justification relations. The distinction I draw, between evidential and nonevidential justifiers, is one that is already implicit in the literature, though I think that important epistemological consequences follow from making it explicit. In Section II, I use this distinction to dismantle an argument that is often taken to show that nondoxastic states can serve the requisite justificatory role. This is a step towards the Sellarsian alliance; at the same time, the discussion further illustrates the distinction of Section I. Section III shows how to reconcile the coherentist's claim that only beliefs can justify beliefs with the externalist's claim that beliefs are justified by factors external to the agent. What the coherentist is claiming, and what the Sellarsian dilemma hopes to show, is that only beliefs can serve as evidence, not that justified belief requires (doxastic) evidence. In Section IV, I treat the Sellarsian dilemma as having the more modest aims just mentioned and try to show that it's a better argument than generally recognized. The claim here will be that standard versions of foundationalism require nondoxastic experiential states to serve as evidential justifiers, and roughly Sellarsian arguments show that they cannot do so. In Section V, I tie the various strands together and provide a sketch of how the Sellarsian arguments embraced by internalist, evidentialist, coherentists are better suited to externalist, nonevidentialist, reliabilists.

I. Evidential and Nonevidential Justifiers

According to the standard taxonomy, *doxasticism* is the view that only beliefs can justify beliefs; *nodoxasticism* is simply the denial of this. Discussions of doxasticism and nodoxasticism typically begin with a stipulative definition of a 'justifier' or 'J-factor' as anything that is relevant to the justificatory status of a belief. J-factors can be either positively relevant or negatively relevant, depending on whether they contribute to or detract from the justifiedness of a belief, though it is convenient to

²I lack the space here to argue against doxastic theories, which hold that only beliefs can serve as justifiers. However, the widespread exodus from such theories in recent years suggests that the famous isolation argument, coupled with the observation that any belief can be held for bad reasons, have convinced most epistemologists that doxasticism is a lost cause. It is worth pointing out in this connection that the recent renaissance of old-fashioned foundationalism [DePaul 2001] has been a rebirth of *nodoxastic* foundationalism, which allows experiential states a crucial epistemological role.

concentrate on justifiers, i.e., positively relevant J-factors. Epistemologists have proposed a number of such positively relevant J-factors. Coherence, reliability, infallibility, and clarity and distinctness are controversial but well-known candidates. The fact that my belief is held on the basis of good evidence is something that can serve as a justifier; this is uncontroversial, even if not very informative. Some hold that nondoxastic experiential states can serve as justifiers, and virtually no one denies that justified beliefs can do so.

This class of putative J-factors makes up a diverse lot, however, and I want to distinguish two importantly different kinds. The sense in which justified beliefs confer justification is quite different from the sense in which reliability is said to do so. Justified beliefs justify other beliefs by serving as evidence for them; the former are *evidential justifiers* for the latter. Reliability, coherence, and the like are not taken to serve as *evidence* for beliefs; their purported role is one of being that in virtue of which a belief is justified, by being that on which justification supervenes, or to which justification reduces, or the like; their putative role is that of *nonevidential justifiers*. This distinction between evidential and nonevidential factors is well known; anyone who knows what evidentialism [e.g., Feldman and Conee 1985; Conee and Feldman 2005] is, is quite familiar with the distinction. Nonetheless, and as I illustrate in Section II, this distinction is often forgotten when the topic is not explicitly evidentialism, and I want to say more to explicate the relation between the concept of evidence and the more general concept of J-factors.

I will assume somewhat controversially that evidence is positively relevant to the justificatory status of a belief only if the belief is in some sense based on, i.e., held on the basis of, that evidence. This notion of basing, though itself subject to certain controversies, is a familiar one.³ 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). This same distinction, or one very much like it, is sometimes formulated in terms of 'propositional' versus 'doxastic' justification [e.g., Kvanvig 2003b], or even in terms of 'justification' versus 'well-foundedness' [e.g., Feldman and Conee 1985].⁴

My concern at this point is not with the basing relation per se, but with the notion of reasons operative in these discussions, which is that of an epistemological *ground*: that on which a belief is (at least partly) based.

³For discussions of the basing relation and the controversies surrounding it, compare Korcz [1997; 2000], Pollock [1986], Kvanvig [2003b].

⁴Thus, the controversy surrounding the assumption that opens this paragraph is likely more terminological than substantive. Evidentialism as Feldman and Conee see it [1985; Feldman 2003] is perhaps primarily a theory of what I am calling justifiability rather than justifiedness. (Others [e.g., Haack 1993] use 'evidentialism' differently.) Feldman and Conee use 'justification' to refer to a belief's fitting all the evidence *S* possesses and 'well-foundedness' for a belief's being based on appropriate evidence. What they call justified but not well-founded, I call justifiable but not justified. The dispute here is largely, perhaps entirely, terminological. I define evidential justifiers as justifying grounds, rather than, say, potential justifying grounds, because my focus is an justifiedness rather than justifiability. I believe that the major theses of this paper could be translated into Feldman and Conee's language, though I won't pursue this.

'Reason' is notoriously ambiguous. To say that *S* has some reason for believing *p* could be to say (a) that there is a cause of *S*'s believing that *p*, (b) that *S* is justified to some degree in believing that *p*, or (c) there is something on which *S*'s belief that *p* is based. It is only 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, one's actual reasons are not always good reasons. However, when a ground does contribute to the justification of a belief, we can say that the ground evidentially justifies the belief, that the ground serves as an evidential justifier for that belief. An *evidential justifier* for a belief is any state that serves as part or all of the agent's justifying grounds, i.e., evidence, i.e., reasons, for that 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 not a statement of internalism but merely an indication of 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 kinds of 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 nondoxastic sensory/experiential states can serve as grounds is the overarching question, and I return to it below. Another 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.

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 makes a belief justified 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 and about a particular belief token, e.g., ‘what justifies you in believing that p ?’ At other times, however, we are not asking for the agent’s evidence (or not merely for that) but are asking what it is in virtue of which the belief is justified. This is especially true in epistemological contexts, when it is an epistemologist who is asking the question. Here we are asking not for the evidential basis of justification but for the metaphysical basis of justification; we are not offering a challenge to provide evidence but are asking for a theory of justification. To specify fully what it is in virtue of which a given belief is justified, we will need to advert not only to evidential justifiers, but to nonevidential justifiers as well. In addition to the whole of one’s evidence, there is the fact that that evidence is good evidence, and presumably some further, deeper fact in virtue of which this is true. Epistemic properties are likely not fundamental features of the world; they presumably supervene on, reduce to, or can somehow be cashed out in terms of something deeper—one hopes something nonnormative, or at least nonepistemic. Even if one holds that such epistemic facts are really fundamental, there is still a distinction to be drawn between S ’s total evidence for p and the fact that S ’s belief that p is supported by this evidence. Similarly, a part of what makes some belief justified is the ground on which it is based, and another part is the fact that it is based on that ground. Thus, there are often three significant J-factors for a justified belief: the evidence on which it is based, the fact that it is based on this evidence, and the fact that this evidence is good evidence.

There is, in this sense, more to justification than evidence. A *nonevidential justifier* is any positively relevant J-factor that is not an evidential justifier, i.e., anything else that makes it the case that the belief is justified, or contributes towards making it the case that the belief is justified. Though nonevidential justifiers are by definition relevant to the justification of a belief, they are not themselves evidence, and their relevance to justification is constitutive rather than evidential.⁵

Consider by way of illustration B , my belief that someone exists, a belief which I have inferred from my belief that I exist. What justifies B , my belief that I exist (coupled perhaps with the knowledge that if I do, someone does), or the fact that B was deduced from a justified belief? It is obvious that both are correct answers, though answers to different questions. The sense in which the belief that I exist justifies the belief that someone exists is quite

⁵One might hold, as a matter of substantive doctrine, that a justified belief must be grounded in an at least tacit awareness of all the factors relevant to that belief’s justification; though I think such a view is mistaken, I am not denying it here but merely clarifying the conceptual distinction between evidential and nonevidential justifiers.

different from the sense in which its being the result of a deductive argument justifies 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 deductive relation is not (necessarily) *evidence* for anything but is one of the underlying properties in virtue of which the belief is justified; the relation nonevidentially justifies the belief.⁶

It is useful to look at major sorts of epistemological theory in terms of the evidential and nonevidential justifiers they posit. Reliabilism, for example, is primarily a theory of nonevidential justifiers; it specifies that in virtue of which beliefs are justified and lets the theory of evidential justifiers fall where it may. Process reliability per se does not figure into the agent’s evidence and thus does not ground, or *evidentially* justify, belief (though, again, beliefs about reliability might do so). But if reliabilism is correct, reliability can still *nonevidentially* justify the belief, by being that on which the justification supervenes.

Foundationalism, on the other hand, is mainly concerned with evidential justifiers rather than nonevidential justifiers. It posits a class of basic beliefs, which are not evidentially justified by other beliefs, and claims that all other justified beliefs are ultimately evidentially justified by these. Foundationalism per se says little or nothing about what the nonevidential J-factors are (though of course, some foundationalists have done so).

Coherentism combines a theory of nonevidential justifiers with a theory of evidential justifiers. The standard coherentist theory of evidential justifiers claims that (a) only beliefs can serve as evidential justifiers, and (b) that no belief can either be evidentially justified by itself or be justified in the absence of any ground.⁷ Such a theory goes hand in hand with the standard coherentist account of the underlying nature of justification: that justification is a matter of coherence among a set of beliefs. Coherence is thus a nonevidential justifier; it is relevant to the justification of some belief but it is not necessarily part of the justifying evidence for the belief.

Evidentialism may seem to be the claim that there are no nonevidential justifiers—that nothing is relevant to justification but evidence. However, nothing about evidentialism precludes the claim that the adequacy of the evidence (i.e., the fact that the whole of the agent’s evidence is good evidence) is a nonevidential justifier, even if the adequacy of a body of evidence vis-à-vis some belief is a necessary property of that body of evidence. On such a view, adequacy is nonetheless a property of the evidence, rather than a piece of the evidence.⁸

⁶Though it may be uncontroversial that the deductive relation nonevidentially justifies the belief, epistemologists with different theoretical commitments will certainly disagree about why this is true. That is, we will disagree about what the deeper nonevidential justifiers are: does deductive inference justify because it is reliable? because it increases overall coherence? because it exemplifies intellectual virtue? etc.

⁷Standard versions of coherentism [e.g., Lehrer 1990; Bonjour 1985] endorse (a). One might count as a ‘nondoxastic coherentist’ either by embracing a more standard coherentism about only some beliefs (and a nondoxastic foundationalism about the others), or by allowing experiences a justificatory role, but only in the presence of other beliefs [e.g., Kvanvig 2003a; Gupta 2006]. Most, though perhaps not all, of the present discussion of nondoxastic foundationalism will apply to nondoxastic coherentism as well.

⁸Conee and Feldman [2005], for example, hold a doctrine of ‘strong supervenience’, a.k.a. ‘cognitive essentialism’ [Pollock 1986], according to which evidential relations hold necessarily. This is presumably compatible with their mentalism: the view that only mental states can serve as evidence. Yet the fact that my

It is useful to proceed in terms of ‘evidential justification’ and ‘nonevidential 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 might stand in to justified beliefs: the relation of nonevidentially 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., the belief is justified.

The goal up to this point has merely been to elucidate the distinction between evidential and nonevidential justification. I do not presuppose that there in fact are any nonevidential justifiers. A very strong kind of internalism might insist that nothing can be relevant to justification unless it is taken into account by the cognizer, that not even the adequacy of the evidence contributes to justification unless this adequacy is itself part of the cognizer’s evidence. I think this view is mistaken, and I argue against it below, but I have been careful to be neutral up to this point, discussing *candidate* nonevidential justifiers and *theories about* nonevidential justifiers.

The distinction between evidential and nonevidential justification is quite familiar, and I have perhaps belaboured the obvious for too long. Perhaps everyone at least tacitly recognizes the distinction between evidence and nonevidence. The import of this distinction, however, has often gone unnoticed, both in arguments for and against doxasticism.

II. The Supervenience Argument

Let us begin with an argument that purports to show that doxastic theories, i.e., theories according to which only beliefs can justify beliefs, are false. Consider the following well-known argument, which infers the possibility of nondoxastic justification from the claim that epistemic properties supervene on nonepistemic properties. I call it the Supervenience Argument (SA):⁹

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

evidence is good evidence is not itself a mental state; nor is the fact that I possess said evidence. Thus, even on this strongly evidentialist and internalist view, there are things that are relevant to justification but do not serve as evidence; i.e., there are nonevidential J-factors.

⁹Versions of this argument have been endorsed by Sosa [1980], van Cleve [1985], and Steup [1996, 2000].

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 non-epistemic 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 nonevidentially justifying. Suppose that supervenience does imply that something nondoxastic justifies beliefs; it does not follow from this that nondoxastic things can *evidentially* justify beliefs. A Cartesian foundationalist, for example, could endorse a doxastic theory of grounds by claiming that only beliefs can evidentially justify beliefs. This would be perfectly compatible with the Cartesian 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 say that nothing can justify a belief except a belief, we should read this as an infelicitous way of claiming 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. They are not denying that coherence nonevidentially justifies beliefs; they are insisting that evidential relations obtain only among beliefs and thus that only beliefs can evidentially justify, can serve as justifying *grounds* for beliefs.¹⁰

Doxasticism is best viewed as a theory about evidential justification rather than justification more generally. For one thing, there are few if any *prima facie* constraints on what sorts of things can serve as nonevidential justifiers: reliability, coherence, clarity and distinctness, even perhaps the right sort of un- or non-justified beliefs about epistemic principles. The correct theory of nonevidential justifiers will be the one that gets the cases right; if doxasticism

¹⁰This sort of point generalizes to all so-called doxastic theories, but I will restrict my attention to coherentism here to simplify matters.

were the unrestricted claim that only beliefs can be relevant to the justification of beliefs, there would be very little reason to take doxasticism seriously. Additionally, it is not obvious that anyone has ever endorsed such a view. Most extant theories of nonevidential justification have posited something nondoxastic as that in virtue of which beliefs are justified. Witness coherentism and Cartesian foundationalism, which 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 argument needs to show that this nondoxastic thing *evidentially* justifies beliefs, and this is not something the supervenience premise supports. Supervenience may imply that there are nondoxastic justifiers, but it does not begin to imply that there are nondoxastic *evidential* justifiers.¹¹ What SA needs to refute doxasticism is a thesis about evidential justifiers; what it offers instead is a thesis about nonevidential justifiers.

A detailed theory about nonevidential justification might have implications concerning evidential justification, but the supervenience thesis only claims that justification supervenes on *something or other* that is non-epistemic. This generic claim, however, though plausible for its generality, 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.

III. Doxasticism and Nondoxasticism

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

¹¹It is unclear that supervenience implies even this much. Premise 4 of SA is only obviously true if we read ‘confer justification on’ as ‘evidentially justify’.

¹²Standard characterizations of doxasticism tend to run together several distinct theses. See Pollock [1986: 19], Pollock & Cruz [1999: 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/nonevidential justifier distinction, but it leaves no room for the notion of basing/grounding at all. Surely two agents can share all their beliefs even though some of their beliefs have different bases (especially given Pollock and Cruz’s endorsement of a causal theory of the basing relation). Pollock and Cruz also seem to equate ‘nondoxastic foundationalism’ with a view I call external object foundationalism: that version of foundationalism according to which some beliefs about ordinary physical objects are basic (though Pollock [2001] rectifies this). Steup [2000: 76–8] 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 external object foundationalism.

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 the only one mentioned in standard formulations of doxasticism, the discussion thus far reveals the Grounds Principle to be far more than just the trivial claim that all justified beliefs have justifiers. All justified beliefs do have justifiers, of course, 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 (evidentially) justifies it.

A nondoxastic theory is simply one that is not a doxastic theory, and there are at least two important kinds: one that endorses a more liberal conception of grounds than doxasticism does, and one that rejects the need for grounds altogether. An *experientialist* nondoxasticism ('experientialism' for short) agrees with doxasticism in accepting the Grounds Principle but rejects the Belief Principle in allowing nondoxastic experiential states to serve as justifying grounds. If there is a standard view in contemporary epistemology, it is probably this. It is hard to be sure, however, since many authors fail to specify whether they see experiential states serving as evidential or as nonevidential justifiers. Alston [1988], Feldman and Conee [1985], and Pollock and Cruz [1999] are all quite explicit in characterizing experiential states as grounds, evidence, reasons. These authors thus conceive of experiential states as evidential justifiers and thus count as endorsing the view I am here calling experientialism.¹³ Such a view is not restricted to fully internalist theories; Alston's [1988] 'Internalist Externalism', for example, explicitly endorses the Grounds Principle and views nondoxastic experiential states as grounds.

Other versions of reliabilism, however, make no such requirement of grounds. This second sort of nondoxastic theory, *nonevidentialist* nondoxasticism ('nonevidentialism') denies the Grounds Principle, thereby allowing beliefs to be justified even if they are not evidentially justified. Primary examples are externalist theories of the sort Goldman [e.g., 1979; 1986] has defended: 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; thus grounds are not necessary for justification. A nonevidentialist theory need not be a reliabilist theory, but, as far as I can see, the only attractive versions of nonevidentialism are externalist theories. Thus nonevidentialist theories

¹³Other adherents to experientialism likely include Alston [2002], Audi [1998], BonJour [1999; 2001; 2002], Brewer [1999], Chisholm [1966; 1977; 1989], Fumerton [1985; 2001], Haack [1993], Huemer [2001], Pollock [1986], Pryor [2000], Quinton [1966], Reynolds [1991], and Steup [1996; 2000].

carry with them a commitment regarding the internalist/externalist debate in a way that the broadly evidentialist theories of doxasticism and experientialism do not.¹⁴

Since nonevidentialism is obtained merely by denying the Grounds Principle, a nonevidentialist can admit the Belief Principle without compromising her view. So long as one denies that every justified belief has a ground, one can insist that only beliefs can evidentially justify beliefs. In fact, if we can defend the Belief Principle, we can use it as part of an argument for externalism.

This brings us back to the Sellarsian dilemma. Although I don't find the standard formulations of the Sellarsian dilemma compelling, there is more to the argument than is generally recognized. Just as doxasticism must be viewed as a claim about evidential justification if it is to be at all plausible, the Sellarsian dilemma, being an argument for doxasticism, must be concerned with evidential justification as well if it is to be taken seriously. The Supervenience Argument cannot provide a response to any such version of the Sellarsian dilemma, because the former speaks only to nonevidential justification, while the latter is concerned with evidential justification. However, the fact that the Sellarsian dilemma has this limited scope reveals that the famous argument cannot show what doxasticists have claimed on its behalf.

A familiar variant of the so-called Sellarsian dilemma goes as follows:¹⁵ 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 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.¹⁶ 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.

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 nonevidentialist 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, nonevidentialism is immune to the Sellarsian dilemma.

The relationship between nonevidentialism and the Sellarsian dilemma is even friendlier than this suggests. Assuming the falsehood of doxasticism,

¹⁴Although doxasticism is usually taken to imply internalism, one could conceivably maintain that what determines whether a given belief counts as evidence for some other belief is some factor external to the agent. Such a view would parallel Alston's externalist yet evidentialist view, mentioned above.

¹⁵By 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], whom I follow roughly here, and who claims to find it or something like it in Sellars [1956].

¹⁶The 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.

any argument for the Belief Principle is an argument for nonevidentialism. 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,¹⁷ the Grounds Principle must be rejected. This provides an argument for nonevidentialism and thus externalism.

IV. 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 un-belief-like enough to terminate the regress, then they won't be the sorts of things that can serve as evidential justifiers.

There is much not to like about the Sellarsian dilemma, but standard responses to it are hampered by a failure to distinguish claims about evidential justification from claims about nonevidential 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 evidential and nonevidential readings, and Steup never explains how evidential generation could be possible. His view that the supervenience thesis favours nondoxastic justification, endorsed here and elsewhere [e.g., Steup 1996] has no obvious bearing on evidential generation, as seen above. But if nonevidential justification is what he has in mind, the states' being propositional is irrelevant, for nonevidential justifiers obviously needn't bear any logical relations to their justificanda; nor does any of this have any bearing on the Sellarsian dilemma, for the dilemma is concerned with evidential justification.

Alston [2002] insists that the states are nonpropositional and therefore 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 again

¹⁷I assume, but do not argue, the unacceptability of doxasticism. See note 2, above.

I agree that nonevidential justifiers need not bear logical or probabilistic relations to their justificanda, we need to know whether the same is true of evidential justifiers. Citing reliabilism as an existence proof is little use, for reliabilism is clearly a theory about nonevidential justification and thus has nothing directly to say about constraints on evidential justification. But if Alston intends experiential states to serve only as nonevidential justifiers, then their being nonpropositional is irrelevant; nonevidential 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 nonevidential justifiers. Alston's enlisting reliabilism as showing that nondoxastic justification is possible suggests that his concern is with nonevidential justification, but then he has not responded to the Sellarsian objection to his own [1988] experientialist theory of evidential justification. Neither Steup nor Alston offers a convincing reply to the Sellarsian dilemma, because neither keeps his attention consistently focussed on evidential justification.

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 a justifying *ground* 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 a matter of definition that evidential justifiers must do so, and it is difficult to see how they could do so without propositional content.¹⁸

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 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 expect the experientialist will continue to resist), it is at least a slightly 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 must have propositional content may be little more than Sellarsian dogma,¹⁹ but there is nothing dogmatic

¹⁸Recall 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, a smoking gun—which obviously lacks propositional content—does.

¹⁹Thanks to correspondence with James Montmarquet for this phrase.

about the claim that *evidential* justifiers must be propositional.²⁰ In fact, what seems dogmatic is the stubborn insistence that some unspecified class of nonpropositional states can serve as direct 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 damaging as I think this Sellarsian point is to certain versions of experientialism, it only gets at part of the problem. Insisting that experiential states have propositional content may be one way to evade the present charge, but it remains doubtful that such states could evidentially justify beliefs either. Again, the emphasis on evidential justification rather than justification *simpliciter* strengthens the argument. Experiences with propositional content could perhaps stand in (broadly) logical relations, and thus evidential relations, to beliefs, but much more than this is required to actually serve as justifying evidence for beliefs.²¹ Standing in the appropriate evidential relation may be necessary for serving as justifying evidence, but it is not nearly sufficient. My desire that *p*, my fear that *q*, and my wondering whether *r* all have propositional content and thus can stand in evidential relations to my belief that *p* or *q* or *r*. But it is quite clear that none of these states can serve as justifying 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 or other evidential relations to beliefs may be necessary, but it is not nearly sufficient, for evidentially justifying those beliefs.²²

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 nonevidentially 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 should 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 admittedly sketchy view, it is not that one belief literally transmits justification to another belief as if justification were some kind of caloric-like

²⁰At 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 cognitive or conceptual content rather than propositionality fare better in this regard, though I won't try to sort out those differences here.

²¹This point has also been noticed, I think independently, by Aaron Champene.

²²This point is brought out vividly, though inadvertently, by Steup [2000], who argues that experiential states, though propositional, are not thereby in need of or susceptible to epistemic justification, just as other nondoxastic propositional attitudes, like desires, are not in need of or susceptible to epistemic justification. This analogy does him more harm than good, since it is obvious that desires cannot serve to evidentially justify beliefs.

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 it is that justified them.²³ If we claim that this is the only way for something to evidentially justify beliefs, we can explain why unjustified premise beliefs 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 epistemically justified, it follows that only beliefs can evidentially justify beliefs. This just is the Belief Principle, but now we have this principle as the conclusion of an argument, not a mere dogmatic postulate. We are not *assuming* that something can evidentially justify a belief only if it is itself a belief; we are inferring this from the fact that something can evidentially justify a belief only if it is justified. Unfortunately for the experientialist, this reasoning, which explains why unjustified beliefs cannot serve as justifying evidence, also implies that nondoxastic experiences cannot evidentially justify beliefs—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 claims that nondoxastic states are not in need of justification, because they aren't propositional [e.g., Alston 2002], or because they aren't susceptible to justification [e.g., Steup 2000] as non sequiturs. Perhaps they don't 'need' justification for their own sake, but they do need it if they are to evidentially justify beliefs.

The caloric view, chided above as too literally-minded, has the same result. Here evidential justification is a matter of justification transmission—this is an important difference between evidential and nonevidential justification—and one cannot transmit what one does not already possess. This would explain why unjustified beliefs can't evidentially justify beliefs, but again, the theory implies that experiential states, not having any justification to transmit, cannot evidentially justify beliefs.

The caloric view and the view I have proposed both offer explanations of (i) how justified beliefs evidentially justify other beliefs, and (ii) why it is that unjustified beliefs cannot (evidentially) justify beliefs. Nothing here depends much 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

²³Additional necessary conditions might well hold: the agent may need to believe or be justified in believing that the premises support the conclusion, etc.

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 theory.

Now I realize that there is no shortage in the literature of asseverations that nondoxastic states can evidentially justify beliefs, but this is not what is needed here. What is needed is an *explanation* of how this is possible, one that fits with some explanation of why unjustified beliefs cannot do so. What I am offering is an abductive argument for the claim that only beliefs can justify beliefs. I have offered an explanation for the fact that desires and unjustified beliefs and the like cannot evidentially justify beliefs, and this explanation implies that nondoxastic experiential states cannot do so either. One does *not* get to respond to such an argument by insisting that one still finds it intuitively plausible that experiential states do evidentially justify; to undermine an abductive argument, one must offer a better explanation for the phenomenon in question.

Let me once more reiterate that I am not arguing that experiential states cannot justify beliefs; I am arguing that they cannot evidentially justify beliefs. I don't deny that experiential states can serve as nonevidential justifiers for beliefs. This may seem to offer a way out of the Sellarsian dilemma for the would-be experientialist: admit that experiences don't serve as grounds, but insist that they still play an important role as nonevidential justifiers.²⁴ Such a view would differ significantly from an experientialist view, and not just because I've defined experientialism as the view that experiences serve as grounds. One main point of disagreement between experientialists and nonevidentialists concerns the necessity of nondoxastic experience. Experientialism holds that all justified beliefs have grounds; basic beliefs must therefore have nondoxastic grounds, and this is why experiences are necessary. On a nonevidentialist view, experiential states have no distinctive role to play, and the agent's having them should be optional. Having certain experiences might affect the reliability of, say, visual processes (in much the same way that lighting conditions do), but if a zombie, wholly devoid of experience, nonetheless had reliable visual processes, these would still produce (*prima facie*) justified beliefs.

One could, I suppose, endorse nonevidentialism and yet insist that no basic belief is justified in the absence of the relevant experiential state, but such insistence seems implausible and *ad hoc*. Alston's [1988] experientialism was motivated by a desire to maintain an internalist element in his externalism, to preclude cases of justified belief where the agent wasn't 'going on' something accessible in forming that belief. Any such motivation, however, has been forsworn with the rejection of the Grounds Principle. Thus any internalist element retained by this manoeuvre is more apparent than real.

It has been occasionally suggested to me that my use of the term 'evidence' is excessively narrow, perhaps question-beggingly so. Certainly, broader notions are available. It is frequently noticed (e.g., Kelly [2006]) that common and legal usage are far more liberal with what counts as

²⁴An objection along these lines was offered by an anonymous referee for this journal.

evidence; murder weapons are tagged and labelled as ‘physical evidence’, and so forth.²⁵ But surely the epistemologist’s sense of evidence, which is the sense that concerns us, is narrower than this. If there is a temptation to think that my understanding of evidence begs the question against nondoxastic evidentialist theories, this is only because it is more or less ‘part of the concept’ of an evidential justifier that only beliefs can serve as evidential justifiers. Philosophical arguments frequently and legitimately draw conclusions from concepts in this manner; the present argument, as is common, does not rest on any particularly empirical theses about experiences or evidence. However, the roughly analytic nature of the argument certainly does not show it to be question-begging in the sense of assuming premises that my opponent has already denied. The notion of evidence (and consequently of evidential justifier) that I rely on is one that I take over from Feldman and Conee, from Haack, from Alston—from a host of epistemologists who explicitly deny the Belief Principle. It is *their* conception of evidence that implies the Belief Principle, not my own. If there is a fallacy in my argument, it is certainly not *petitio principii*.

V. Towards an Externalist Nondoxasticism

Two problems for evidentialist nondoxastic theories have arisen. The one is a general problem for all experientialist theories. This is the problem of explaining how experiential states can serve as justifying grounds for beliefs. The other problem is an additional, independent, 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 evidential justifiers for beliefs.

This isn’t quite the textbook Sellarsian dilemma anymore. In fact, the argument against experientialism no longer even takes the form of a dilemma but instead claims that experientialism faces a big problem, and particular versions of experientialism also face an additional 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 (now not because they are propositional, however, but because nothing can evidentially justify a belief unless it is itself justified). And since only beliefs can be justified, the coherentist’s cherished 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 nonevidential justifiers.

Dilemma or no, the present argument is, as promised, both stronger and weaker than the standard Sellarsian dilemma. By casting the argument

²⁵The previous objection might be formulated by employing this broader sense of ‘evidence’. Again, however, if experiences only play the epistemological role that certain distal states of affairs play, then they lose the special status distinctive of experientialism.

explicitly in terms of evidential justifiers, a stronger case is made against experientialism, which requires nondoxastic experiential states to serve not merely as justifiers but as grounds. 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 hardly gets off the ground. Ironically, the rise of externalism in the last few decades may have contributed to this tendency (as Alston demonstrates), 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 completely miss the point.

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 either of the following claims:

- Nothing can justify a belief unless it is itself justified.
- Nothing can evidentially justify a belief unless it is itself evidentially justified.

The nonevidentialist view I endorse rejects both claims. Nonevidential justifiers need not be themselves justified (in fact I doubt that they ever are). And basic beliefs will be justified—and thus capable of evidentially justifying nonbasic beliefs—though they are not evidentially justified.

The present argument is stronger yet weaker than the traditional Sellarsian dilemma because both the proponents (doxasticists) and the targets (experientialists) of the traditional argument have failed to distinguish between evidential and nonevidential justification. The argument is a nonstarter unless it is restricted to evidential justification, but then it provides only an argument for the Belief Principle, and much more is needed to get from there to doxasticism.

The distinction between evidential and nonevidential justifiers makes it possible to separate the Belief Principle from the Grounds Principle. Doxasticism is the conjunction of the Belief Principle and the Grounds Principle, so if we reject doxasticism on independent grounds, a roughly Sellarsian argument for the Belief Principle actually becomes an argument for rejecting the Grounds Principle. It is thus an argument for non-evidentialism and consequently for externalism.²⁶

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