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On Having Reasons for Perceptual Beliefs: A Sellarsian Perspective

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Abstract

I interpret and defend Sellars' internalist view of perceptual justification which argues that perceivers have evidence for their perceptual beliefs that includes a higher-order belief about the circumstances in which those beliefs arise, and an *epistemic* belief about the reliability of beliefs that are formed in those circumstances. The pattern of inference that occurs in ordinary cases of perception is elicited.

I then defend this account of perceptual evidence against (1) Alston's objection that ordinary perceivers are not as critical and reflective as this view requires them to be, and (2) the charge that internalism leads to various forms of infinite regress and circular reasoning. It is granted that subjects must have further grounds for their justifying reasons, and an attempt is made to identify these second-order reasons. In particular, I argue that epistemic beliefs are grounded in the perceiver's awareness that his present experience-cum-conditions fits into a larger pattern of similar past experiences that were reliably connected with their objects.

Our question is whether ordinary perceivers have reasons that justify their perceptions. Drawing on the account of perceptual justification developed by Wilfrid Sellars in his later papers on the subject, I will argue that they do, and will attempt to elicit the pattern of inference that occurs in ordinary perceptual awareness.

I begin with some preliminary definitions and an attempt to locate my position within the current internalism/externalism debate. I will take for granted a certain way of understanding and describing ordinary perceptual consciousness. When Seymour is perceiving visually that there is a green glass in front of him, I will say that a thought or propositional content characterizes his subjective state, and that this propositional content somehow corresponds to what he perceives, namely that there is a green glass there. Further, Seymour's propositional attitude is one of believing this proposition. Thus when he perceives that there is a green glass there, he is occurrently thinking and believing that there is a green

glass there. I will refer to these propositional states, when they occur in a perceptual setting, as *perceptual beliefs*, or *pb's*.¹

I take it that in normal circumstances perceiving is a form of knowing about the things that exist outside of us. Seymour's perceiving that there is a glass in front of him is a way of acquiring information about the glass, of gaining knowledge of the glass and some of its properties. And if his pb is an instance of knowledge, then it is *justified* for him. Moreover, I assume that his knowledge of this object and its properties is *direct*, in the sense that he does not reach his state of justified belief by any inference from a prior awareness of sensory input. To say that ordinary pb's are *noninferential* then involves two claims: the psychological one that pb's are not arrived at by inferential reasoning from any prior belief about how one is sensing, and the epistemological one that the knowledge one has in these cases is not based upon a prior knowledge of one's subjective sensory state.² Yet the thrust of the present argument is that even if ordinary pb's are not products of *these* sorts of inferences, nevertheless perceivers do have justifying reasons for them, though as we shall see of a very different sort.

What is it for a person S to be *justified* in believing some proposition p? I will accept an account of justification according to which if S justifiably believes that p, then S has *adequate evidence, reasons, or grounds* for p.³ A great deal of controversy has surrounded the question of what it is for one to *have a reason* for some (occurrent) belief, and to base one's belief on that reason. Clearly we do sometimes speak of S's having a reason for his belief when S merely possesses evidence e for p, but does not utilize that evidence. (Indeed, S may have a reason to believe p even if S does not believe p.) But it seems that any evidence that S has in this weaker sense can only be S's reason for p—the *reason for which S believes p*—if S relies on that evidence and bases his belief on it.⁴ Although some epistemologists have maintained that a belief can be justified for someone by another belief (or mental state) as long as the subject has access to that belief or state, and thus as long as it can become the reason for which S believes p,⁵ it seems intuitively clear that unless S somehow utilizes e as evidence for p, then it is strictly only a potential reason for him to believe p.⁶

I will argue then that perceptual beliefs (pb's) stand in an inferential relation to some evidence or grounds that S has, and I will refer to the inference schema that formulates this evidence as a *justificatory argument*. Further, I make the assumption that if S justifiably believes p, then p is reasonable or justified for S in a sense which implies that S is likely to have gotten closer to the truth, to have taken possession of a truth. Thus I assume a fundamental link between the reasonableness of a proposition and its (probable) truth.⁷

Recently epistemologists have been divided over the sorts of things that can be justifiers for beliefs. *Internalists* argue that beliefs can only be justified by other beliefs that lie within the subject's perspective, while *externalists* maintain that what justifies a belief lies (at least partially) outside the subject's perspective in the reliable mechanism that produces the belief. Consider these three possible internalist requirements for justification:

- Int₁ If S's belief that p is justified for S, then it is justified by some other belief(s) that S has.
- Int₂ S justifiably believes p on the basis of some evidence e only if S is aware of e as his evidence for p.
- Int₃ S justifiably believes p on the basis of some evidence e only if S believes that e is adequate evidence for p.

These three requirements determine three increasingly strong internalist positions. The first position maintains that only beliefs (or awarenesses, or apprehensions)—all of which I take to be cognitive states—can justify other beliefs.⁸ Int₂ asserts that S must in some sense grasp the evidence on which he bases his belief, and believe that it makes the belief reasonable. And Int₃ requires that S has the further belief that this evidence is good or sufficient evidence for p.

In the account of perceptual justification that follows, I will adopt the strong internalist position that includes all three requirements. However we will see that this strong position must allow that the evidence that perceivers have includes significant *descriptive* elements, thus opening the door for saying that a *source* of their justification lies in external factors. Thus I am proposing a mixed account of justificatory evidence.

In the body of this paper, I will defend these internalist assumptions, first, by applying them to the perceptual case in a way that seems to illuminate what is going on there; and secondly, by rebutting some lines of criticism that have been brought against them. Specifically, I take up William Alston's objection that strong internalism requires too much sophistication on the part of ordinary perceivers. I will then try to deliver my account of perceptual evidence from charges that it leads to several forms of infinite regress and circular reasoning. In order to do this, I will have to consider whether ordinary perceivers have any further *reasons for their justifying reasons*, and will suggest the sort of meta-reasons they can plausibly be said to have.

A Sellarsian View of Perceptual Justification

I will attempt to elicit the justificatory evidence that perceivers have for their perceptions. My account of this evidence builds on Wilfrid Sellars' theory of perceptual justification put forward originally in the seminal 1956 paper, "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," and more recently restated in the third of the Matchette lectures, given in 1971 and published under the title "The Structure of Knowledge." It is this later work that I will use to introduce this theory.⁹

Sellars' formulation of a justificatory argument is put in the context of a perceiver—the illustrious Jones—who is reconstructing his evidence for thinking that he has just seen a red apple in front of him. Jones reasons as follows:

I just thought-out-loud "Lo! Here is a red apple" (no countervailing conditions obtain); So, there is good reason to believe that there is a red apple in front of me.
(p. 342)

We may note that Jones' reasoning is stated in terms of what Sellars calls the Verbal Behaviorist model of thinking according to which thoughts are identified with spontaneous utterances or thinkings-out-loud. Thus in the first premise of his inference, Jones expresses an awareness of the spontaneous thought he had in the previous moment. However Sellars certainly intends that this pattern of inference applies to perceptions in the full-blooded sense in which they involve thoughts as "inner" mental occurrences. Within this mentalistic context, the first premise could be reformulated as:

I just had the visual belief that there was a red apple in front of me.

Commenting on Jones' argument, Sellars writes:

[Jones] did not originally infer that there is a red apple in front of him. Now, however, he is inferring from the character and context of his experience that it is veridical, and that there is good reason to believe that there is indeed a red apple in front of him. (p. 342)

Jones' original pb was not the product of any mental inference. However he subsequently thinks about his evidence and reaches his conclusion by a process of mental reasoning. But it is important to realize that even if Jones formulated his grounds only after his perception occurred, Sellars is committed to saying that Jones had these grounds at the time that he perceived. Moreover, Jones must have been in some sense aware of his grounds, for Sellars explicitly requires that "to be the expression of knowledge, a report must not only have authority, this authority must in some sense be recognized by the person whose report it is" (Sellars, 1963, p. 168).

Turning now to the given justificatory argument, some elaboration and comment is called for. First we should note that Jones' evidence refers to the external circumstances in which his pb is occurring by means of the highly general (negative) premise that "no countervailing conditions obtain." But this claim is compatible with the view that Jones' belief about the circumstances surrounding his pb has a more determinate content than this. Typically it includes a reference to specific factors in the environment (e.g., lighting conditions, position of the object), the sensory apparatus (eyes are working properly and are oriented correctly), and their interrelation (the eyes are being appropriately stimulated by the object). This is how I will interpret Sellars' claim about Jones' awareness of "the context of his experience," but I hasten to add that even if the belief does contain this specific content, it also includes an indefinite *ceteris paribus* clause to the effect that the situation is otherwise normal.

A more important consideration is that when Jones argues that his pb is reasonable because it is occurring in normal conditions, he seems to be relying on an unstated premise, namely the generalization that *pb's of the kind he is having that occur in conditions of the kind he is in are reasonably believed*.¹⁰ Thus Jones has already ascertained the conditions in which certain pb's are reliable and is bringing this general knowledge to bear on his present experience. I will have more to say about this important premise, and what grounds Jones may have for it, in later sections of this paper.

Finally, in another comment on Jones' argument, Sellars states: "Like all justification arguments, it is a higher-order thinking" (p. 342). We are now in a position to see that this

is true in two respects. First, the argument includes a meta-belief about the original pb, namely that it is occurring in a certain physical context. And second, the conclusion of the argument involves the language of epistemic evaluation—the pb is thought to be reasonable or worthy of belief. Furthermore, it may be recalled that Sellars described Jones as inferring that his experience was “veridical,” thus revealing the assumption of a link between the concepts of justification and truth.¹¹

Bearing these points in mind, we can now state more fully the general form of the justificatory arguments that figure in ordinary perceptions.

- JA
1. My pb is occurring in (normal) conditions, a, b, c . . .
 2. Pb’s of this kind (about objects of this type) that occur in such conditions are reasonable (likely to be true)
 3. So, my present pb is reasonable (likely to be true).

Now let us turn to the question of the *source* of the reasonableness of ordinary pb’s. What confers warrant on these beliefs in this Sellarsian account? Initially it can be said that their warrant comes from the subject’s reasons, viz., the beliefs that are formulated in the premises of JA. But this cannot be the whole story. We must not forget that the beliefs in question have a propositional content, and therefore (if true) are bearers of descriptive information from without. Thus we can see the appropriateness of saying that the grounds of ordinary pb’s lie in *objective factors* in the environment—viz., the physical circumstances that surround the pb and give rise to it.

Compare how it is with having legal evidence. In a court of law when a prosecutor presents the evidence on the basis of which she seeks to convict, she does not appeal to her believings as such, but describes certain putative facts and happenings: the defendant said this and did that. Her evidence consists of these facts. But of course, it remains true that in so far as they constitute her grounds for her belief that the defendant is guilty, they are the content of beliefs that she has about those facts.

Similarly, in perceptual cases, the subject recognizes that it is objective factors in the physical environment (such as that his eyes are being stimulated in the appropriate way by the object), and in his perceptual past (that pb’s of the kind he is having have tended to be correlated with their objects) that ground his belief. It is important not to overlook the place of these objective considerations in the evidence that perceivers actually have in ordinary cases. On this view, then, the subject’s grasp of the context of his experience is epistemically on a par with his awareness of the character of that experience. It might be thought that this appeal to external grounds flies in the face of our internalist assumption (Int₁) that only beliefs can justify other beliefs. But this apparent contradiction disappears once it is seen that objective factors, by themselves, cannot confer justification on any belief except as the subject takes account of them, and fits them into the pattern of justificatory reasoning that I have described.¹² We turn now to an important objection that has been brought against the Sellarsian model of justification.

Alston's Objection

In his paper "What's Wrong with Immediate Knowledge?" (1983), William Alston considers Sellars' view of perceptual justification as formulated in the several papers we have mentioned. In some lucid expository remarks, Alston brings out the way in which, for Sellars, a pb depends for its justification "on some higher-level reasons that have to do with its epistemic status" (p. 80). Specifically, it depends on the subject's awareness of "the relevant facts about what gives [the] utterance its 'authority'" (p. 83). (It will be convenient if we begin to refer to these higher-level beliefs as "epistemic beliefs.")

Presumably Alston thinks that ordinary perceivers do not in fact rely on any epistemic beliefs and do not need to in order to have justified beliefs. He launches his attack on Sellars by focusing on some passages that suggest that perceivers not only have higher-level reasons, but could actually bring them forward, in the manner of Jones, to support the reasonableness of their pb's. Alston then points out that we frequently take ourselves to know things even if we cannot *say* how we know them, or produce any very good evidence for them. And presumably, he thinks that perceivers also have knowledge, but cannot say very much about what justifies it.

Sellars' "higher-level slant on justification" reflects the "widespread tendency of epistemologists to think of knowledge as the exclusive possession of critically reflective subjects," namely those "philosophers and other choice spirits who have achieved a considerable ability in making explicit what it takes to render one or another sort of belief rational" (p. 85). Alston is posing a dilemma for the strong internalist: either admit ordinary perceivers into the ranks of epistemologists, or exclude them from the community of perceptual knowers.

In response to this objection, it seems that Sellars is committed to the view that ordinary perceivers *do* have the capacity to produce their evidence. My reason for thinking this is that Jones' reasoning, after all, is not overly sophisticated. It is true that many—perhaps most—ordinary perceivers would need some tutoring in the business of finding their perceptual grounds, for they surely are not right on the surface of consciousness. But for all that, it could be maintained that all of us could, with proper guidance, follow Jones' lead and give expression to our grounds.

But the main issue between Alston and Sellars seems to boil down to whether ordinary perceivers have at all the sorts of epistemic beliefs we have described. I do not think it is far-fetched to say that ordinary perceivers do appreciate that their perceptual beliefs are based on (adequate) evidence. This awareness is manifested not only in their capacity to ask, and give answers to, questions about what justifies them, but also, and more so, in their ability to recognize when and for what reasons they are not justified in their perceptual beliefs. Ordinary contexts such as these:

1. I shouldn't have been so hasty in thinking it was Sally on the beach. She was too far away for me to be certain.
2. I thought I saw someone entering the garage last night, but I can't be sure because it was getting dark and I may have been influenced by my own fears.

show not only an awareness of the sorts of conditions that can defeat one's pb, but also the realization that one does not have the right to one's belief as long as one believes that these unfavorable conditions obtain.

But even if these sorts of examples show that ordinary pb's are couched in a context of evidence and reasons, we may well wonder whether they show that perceivers are thinking that surrounding conditions are favorable for seeing *before* any doubt arises. Take the first case. A question has arisen as to whether I *did* see Sally on the beach. I remind myself that she was pretty far off, and there was the strong glare. Although I had no doubt at the time, I now have a doubt, and let us suppose that this doubt leads me to conclude that I did *not* see Sally because she was not within my perceptual range. I originally thought that I had enough to go on, and specifically that Sally was within range, but I now judge that I was mistaken in believing this. My original pb has now been overruled because the evidence I was relying on has been impugned. It is plausible, then, to construe this case as one in which I am questioning the grounds I *had* for my perceptual belief when I first unquestioningly asserted it. Perhaps these remarks are enough to show that ordinary perceivers do recognize that their perceptual beliefs are grounded.

The Justification of Premises and Normal Conditions

We will now take up the question of whether we must put a further requirement on "S's having a justification for p," namely that the premises of S's justificatory argument must be justified for S. If S accepts p for the reason that r, but S is not justified in accepting r, then it would seem that S is not justified in accepting p. The point seems to have intuitive support: premises that are mere guesses, or that are themselves based on evidence that is suspect, presumably do not confer justification on their conclusions.

If this is so, then we are led to ask: what possible justifications are there for the premises of our perceptual justificatory arguments? and is it plausible to think that ordinary perceivers have them? Let us begin with the first premise of JA: *S believes that his pb is occurring in normal conditions*. Call this belief P₁. As we have seen, what the subject believes is that certain specific external conditions are present, together with the further generalization that no countervailing conditions obtain. Some of the specific conditions that seem to be involved in S's belief P₁ in ordinary visual cases are (from S's perspective):

1. that the lighting is normal
2. that the object is an appropriate distance from me
3. that the object is sufficiently in view (not obscured)
4. that the object is stimulating my eyes in the appropriate and usual way
5. that my eyes are working properly.

What strikes us immediately about these conditions is that some (and perhaps all) of them are things *S* observes when *S* perceives the object that is there before him. If this is so, then it would seem that *S*'s premise-belief (or the relevant part of it pertaining to these conditions) is itself a kind of pb and so, presumably, is justified in the same manner as the original pb. What justifies *S* in the pb that the lighting is good is (his recognition) that his perceptual experience of the lighting is occurring in certain (more restricted) conditions, and that experiences of this kind are reliable.

But even if ordinary perceptual beliefs do in this way usually rest on other perceptions, it seems clear, first of all, that justification along these lines comes to an end pretty quickly, and moreover that any evidence that involved pb's occurring in more restricted circumstances would depend on the same sort of justificatory argument as the original pb, and thus would reintroduce the same problems we are trying to resolve. We are simply robbing Peter to pay Paul if we fail to see that these other perceptual beliefs depend just as much for their justification on some belief about normal conditions as does the original pb.

It is, however, helpful to see that one's premise-belief about normal conditions, P_1 , is, in large part, a belief about *perceptual* conditions, and hence that the original pb is supported in part by other concurrent pb's. Moreover, once this is seen, then there is some basis for thinking that the *general* component of P_1 , that no countervailing conditions obtain, is itself partially grounded in what one positively perceives. One believes on the basis of what one is perceiving that other (unseen) conditions are normal as well.

My claim is that *S*'s original pb derives justification from P_1 , and that P_1 includes a non-perceptual, general component that is partially grounded in what *S* is actively perceiving. However, a question can now be raised as to whether the "current" of justification is one-way (from P_1 to pb) or *reciprocal*. For, as Bonjour has pointed out (1985, p. 126), even the original pb may provide some grounds for P_1 . We believe that we are in normal circumstances in part because of the character of our spontaneous pb's. It is interferences in the normal, expected flow of pb's that cause us to think twice about possible abnormalities in our situation.

But even if there is such a pattern of *mutual justification* between premise and conclusion, it seems clear that it cannot account for all the justification that the relevant perceptual beliefs have. At best, these relations of mutual support can strengthen and reinforce the justification that each of them already has and must have gotten from some other source. We must then look to the whole justificatory argument (JA), including the epistemic belief, to find the (full) source of their warrant.¹³

The second important feature of conditions 1–5 is that they seem to involve beliefs or presuppositions about the causal interactions of physical objects, and specifically the effects of objects on perceivers (or on the sensory apparatus of perceivers). This is evident in conditions 1, 4, and 5. Thus one's evidence in perceptual cases is shot through with causal assumptions, and it seems that perceivers need some justification for these assumptions. But if they do, then we have opened ourselves again to Alston's criticism, for we are making perceptual beliefs depend on beliefs that even philosophers have great difficulty justifying. Thus if perceptual knowledge depends on causal assumptions, how are we to stop from skidding into the requirement that ordinary perceivers must have come to grips at some level with the problem of induction? Although I cannot begin to deal with the many-

sided problem of induction in this paper, I will make a suggestion, at a later stage, about how perceivers might be justified in applying an inductive principle. But first we need to consider possible grounds for epistemic beliefs.

Justifying Epistemic Beliefs

The second premise of the justificatory argument, JA, is what we have called an epistemic belief or warrant principle that has the general form:

P₂ Pb's of a certain kind that occur in (normal) circumstances a, b, c . . . are likely to be true

I have argued that perceivers make use of a range of warrant principles of this kind which correspond to the different types of perceptual objects and situations they encounter. Thus when Seymour perceives a green glass in front of him, the instantiation of P₂ that he applies would look like this:

P_{2i} Pb's about green, translucent, glass-shaped objects that occur in good lighting, etc., are likely to be true¹⁴

We must now consider a difficulty that arises when we begin to think about whether a perceiver has any grounds for P₂. We have just seen how perceptual beliefs depend on other *perceived* facts about external conditions. Moreover, it was mentioned earlier that the use of an epistemic belief in a particular case is the application to one's experience of a *standard of correctness*, a criterion for the (probable) truth of a particular pb, and thus presupposes that the subject *already has ascertained* the conditions in which that kind of pb is likely to be true. If so, then it may well be asked how the perceiver has established this standard of correctness. Specifically it may be noted that P₂ is a generalization based somehow on the subject's previous *observational* experience of objects and situations of the kind in question, in which case an obvious regress opens up.¹⁵ Our account of the justification of perceptual belief would presuppose that the subject already has perceptual knowledge of the very kind we seek to explain. This regress problem can be given either a temporal form in which case it is argued that empirical justifications can't get started, or it can be put in the form of a logical dependence which emphasizes the circularity just mentioned. And so we need to consider the grounds that subjects might have for their epistemic beliefs not only because of the general requirement that the premises of their justificatory arguments must themselves be justified, but also in order to counter this potential regress.

And it *is* plausible to think that the perceptual epistemic belief in question does ultimately rest on the subject's past experience of having had the appropriate pb in circumstances in which it was and was not reliable. I say *ultimately* because once the subject has acquired a stock of empirical knowledge, then he might be able to tell about some new perception, on its first occurrence, that it is not reliable, on the basis of what he already knows. (That portrait of mother is so life-like that her eyes seem to be following me around the room, but surely they aren't moving.) But presumably (the objection goes) the reliability of some *basic* set of pb's is in some way grounded in the *verifying procedures* that one employs to determine whether those beliefs are veridical. And surely these truth-testing

procedures depend on making the relevant observations. Specifically, it seems that certain practical routines involving observation are necessary if a subject is to acquire the ideas of (i) a pb occurring in such-and-such conditions, and (ii) a pb being reliable (in those conditions). For example, a perceiver, S, acquires knowledge of the conditions in which his pb of a green glass is reliable by having a range of green glass experiences in a variety of circumstances. He notes that when the circumstances change, his pb sometimes changes with them. What was green now has a purple cast when viewed next to these other objects. Typically, the subject intervenes in the situation, altering conditions and then taking note of the altered perceptual outcome. S then packages a range of experiences-cum-conditions that are reliably connected with their object. At the same time S separates these from other experiences-cum-conditions that cannot be relied on. Presumably then S's epistemic belief presupposes that S has noticed correlations between a certain range of his experiences and objective features of the situation in which that experience occurs, and it seems that S would have to rely heavily on his observations in carrying out this experimental activity. And the regress threatens.

I think that Sellars' oft-cited reply to this type of argument is worth citing once more, as it does effectively remove the challenge (1963, pp. 168–69). Put simply, the idea is that S only begins to have observational knowledge—and justified pb's—when he becomes aware of his evidence for those beliefs, that is, recognizes the conditions in which they are likely to be true. S's observational knowledge and the epistemic beliefs on which it is based both come into being at once. Thus it can be allowed on this view that S's pb's are indeed grounded in prior experiences, namely the experiences involved in the sorts of truth-testing procedures that we have just described, but that these experiences, to which S later appeals in support of his epistemic beliefs, were not instances of observational knowledge when they occurred. S's outward perceptual responses might have mimicked full-fledged observations, but they would have failed to be such in virtue of their not being incorporated into a framework of reasons.

Sellars puts the argument in this way: if a perceiver (Jones) is justified in his pb, then it is required that

he *now* knows the appropriate fact of the form X is a *reliable symptom* of Y. . . . And while the correctness of this statement about Jones requires that Jones could *now* cite prior particular facts as evidence for the idea that these utterances *are* reliable indicators, and hence that Jones now knows, thus remembers, that these particular facts *did* obtain, it does not require that it be correct to say that at the time these facts did obtain he *then knew* them to obtain. And the regress disappears (1963, p. 169).

The Sellarsian solution gives us a way of explaining the fact that one can only form epistemic beliefs after one has had a long history of perceptual encounters with things, while still maintaining that observations, as states of knowledge, get their warrant from those epistemic beliefs. It is important to see that Sellars is asserting that Jones not only has

evidence for his premise-belief that X is a reliable symptom of Y , but that he can cite evidence for that belief. Thus Jones' justificatory repertoire is even more extensive than we earlier supposed.

It should also be noted that the evidence cited involves as an element a further *external* ground for Jones' pb, viz., a source of justification lying outside of his (cognitive) perspective. For the subjective states that figure in the empirical regularities underlying Jones' epistemic belief are not conceptual states of which he was aware when they occurred. They do of course become part of Jones' perspective and part of his evidence when he later conceptualizes and remembers them. But in this regard they are no different than the external circumstances which also become part of Jones' evidence.

A question that might be asked at this point is whether it is plausible to think that Jones could cite the particular facts in question as evidence for his belief. Jones may have originally relied on an accumulation of experience in forming P_2 , but once P_2 has become established in his belief repertoire, wouldn't he quickly forget the preconceptual experiences that led to it and initially constituted its ground? Would he *need* to remember these experiences in order to be justified later in applying P_2 ? I can see no reason to think that Jones does, or should, retain these states in memory or that Jones is relying on any set of particular prior experiences when he employs P_2 . And yet it is reasonable to think that Jones realizes that he has *some* evidence of this kind, viz., that P_2 is grounded in an indeterminate range of past experiences relating to, e.g., green, translucent, glass-shaped objects. And if this sort of belief *is* part of Jones' actual cognitive state when he applies P_2 , as I am maintaining, then he does have some justifying grounds for it.

The Criterial Status of Epistemic Beliefs

There is however, another deeper objection that can be brought against the view that I am defending. It can be argued that there is a peculiar problem about saying that epistemic beliefs could be grounded in past perceptual experiences. The problem arises from the fact that these beliefs (or rather the epistemic principles they express) have a criterial or normative status. They are warrant principles that lay down the conditions in which a pb is to be accepted. But how could a principle that determines criteria of acceptability for perceptual beliefs itself be grounded in particular perceptual beliefs? The objection naturally leads to the view that epistemic principles are prior to experience (*a priori*), and therefore cannot be grounded in experience.

I wish to defend the different view that while epistemic principles do have a criterial status (and are in this sense prior to experience), they are nevertheless grounded in experience.¹⁶ In particular, they presuppose and are grounded in the empirical regularities that we described in the last section. We argued there that in the process of forming epistemic beliefs, perceivers select a set of previous experiences-cum-conditions that are reliably connected with their objects. The epistemic belief then endorses a current pb because it fits into this larger pattern of perceptual experience. It is only as belonging to this pattern that the pb becomes a candidate for its approved epistemic status. Hence the door is open for saying that these principles derive their justification from their "explanatory coherence" with these perceptual facts (and with other parts of the perceiver's system of beliefs). The

perceptual facts in question are the regular connections, that occur in the process of learning to perceive, between the perceiver's perceptual reports and their objects.

While the a-priorist may well agree that epistemic principles fit with these phenomena, and thus account for them, he would certainly balk at the idea that they play any stronger *explanatory* role. Certainly, as warrant principles, their function is not merely explanatory. On the other hand, they seem to resemble theoretical principles in science in several crucial respects. First, they appear to be, in a sense, *subject to revision* on the basis of "ongoing experience." It is of course unlikely that the warrant principles on which ordinary perceptual judgments depend will be overthrown or even shift in any significant way. Nevertheless it may be instructive to think about the sorts of pressures that *could* force an extension or revision of current standards. Thus revision could come as a result of an increased understanding of the conditions in which certain pb's, hitherto suspect, are reliable. For example, as we become more aware of the conditions in which blind people are aware of color through touch, or sense the presence of objects in their vicinity, we will be more apt to credit them with perceptual knowledge. It should be remembered that there are many different spontaneous perceptual (or quasi-perceptual) beliefs, ranging from extrasensory perceptions to experiences of God, which are currently not credited but which claim to be knowledge. Further inquiry may specify conditions under which some of these claims are reliable.¹⁷

Secondly, the idea that epistemic beliefs are explanatory fits with the way in which our account of perceptual evidence has had to appeal to other sorts of presumed knowledge. In particular, it should now be clear that the epistemic belief, P₂, rests on other kinds of knowledge—specifically (1) *introspective* knowledge about one's occurrent belief-state, (2) *memories* of past pb's, and (3) the recognition that one's present *pb resembles* those others. Thus it is likely that there are other epistemic principles relating to those other kinds of knowledge, which are a part of the perceiver's belief system, and that the *perceptual* epistemic belief we have been considering receives "lateral" support from its coherence with them.¹⁸ And further, any evidence that perceivers have for an overarching principle of induction would also connect with each of these epistemic principles, and thus indirectly with the various low-level beliefs falling under them.

But we must finally face the question whether ordinary perceivers are aware that P₂ gets its warrant from the fact that it has the explanatory function we have sketched and from its coherence with other epistemic principles? The question is important for us because we have accepted the requirement that the premises of a justifying argument must be justified *for the subject*. I am inclined to say that our commonsense view does include some minimal grasp of the explanatory coherence of perceptual epistemic beliefs, mainly because of the way these beliefs are linked to empirical regularities in one's past experience. We have seen that epistemic beliefs collect and sanction pb's that are reliably connected with their objects. Perceivers recognize that a current pb is justified because it fits into a larger pattern of like pb's in like circumstances that is truth-conducive. And it seems to me a short step from this awareness to the recognition that the epistemic belief is justified *because* it coheres with this pattern of events. Further, perceivers recognize that their perceptual justifications depend on other kinds of knowledge, and hence that perceptual justification may interlock with other kinds of justification.

In these ways, ordinary perceivers give evidence of a partial apprehension of the explanatory coherence of their epistemic beliefs. Nevertheless I have serious doubts about saying that they have anything approaching the full justification we have given for the epistemic premise-belief P₂. My reasons are, first, that the justification we proposed relied heavily on an analogy with the justification philosophers of science have given for empirical hypotheses and theories. This model of explanation in science apparently involves some rather sophisticated ideas about the formation of hypotheses, their explanatory relevance to observables, their falsifiability, and their support from other hypotheses and theories. And it is doubtful that non-specialists have a very well-developed grasp of this technical apparatus. Secondly, our justification was offered in the context of a *general* theory of justification which asserts that pb's derive *all* their warrant from their relations to other beliefs. But I am reluctant to attribute any such systematic beliefs to ordinary observers. Clearly, for example, any notion of coherence they may have would lack the contrastive meaning (with other theories) that ours possesses. It is even doubtful whether ordinary people have a general theory of justification. What they think about their grounds doesn't cut that wide or that deep and would probably be compatible with any of the current rival theories of justification. Epistemologists should recognize that their accounts of justification are constructions that extend and elaborate ordinary beliefs, and are only crudely contained in them. But the fact that epistemologists can give fuller or deeper grounds for ordinary pb's and their premises does not take away from the degree of justification ordinary perceivers do have; it only shows that they could have more.

Conclusion

The crucial claim of this paper has been that ordinary perceivers do have justifying reasons for their perceptual beliefs and are aware that they do. We have tried to defend Sellars' insight that "to be the expression of knowledge, a report must not only have authority, this authority must in some sense be recognized by the person whose report it is." We attempted to defend the strong internalist position by using it to illuminate the perceptual case; but at the same time it was argued that the subject's grounds include significant descriptive elements, and hence that there is an external ground for perception. The evidence that ordinary perceivers bring to bear in perception includes (1) a belief about the external conditions in which the perceptual belief is occurring, and (2) an epistemic belief that perceptions that occur in conditions of that sort are reasonable ones. We noted that the subject's premise-belief about external conditions consists largely in other concurrent perceptual beliefs (whose justification also depends crucially on appropriate epistemic beliefs.) Further, we saw that the epistemic belief is grounded in the subject's awareness that his experience-cum-conditions fits into a larger pattern of similar past experiences that are reliably connected with their objects. This realization opened the door for saying that epistemic beliefs—and the warrant principles they embody—are *grounded in experience* because they are justified by their explanatory coherence with these sets of empirical regularities that occur in perceivers' pasts.*

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Endnotes

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1. A fuller account of Seymour's perceptual state (and of a perceptual belief) would bring out that it has a far richer content than the propositional content-cum-attitude mentioned. It has, in addition, a *sensuous* character whereby the particular sensible qualities, of, e.g., greenness and translucence, and the particular shape of the glass, enter into the experience, are in some way instantiated in it, but not simply in the way of being thought about. Greenness, for example, enters into Seymour's experience in two guises—as conceived and as sensed.
2. I have defended the idea that ordinary perceptual beliefs are noninferential in the epistemological sense in Crawford (1982).
3. William Alston (1985) has ably defended the primacy of this concept of justification.
4. For a useful precisening of the family of expressions pertaining to reasons occurring in ordinary usage, see Robert Audi (1986, pp. 29–31).
5. Most notably Carl Ginet (1975), and Robert Audi in a number of recent essays.
6. Alston has distinguished these two senses of *having evidence*. The first he calls the "mere possession" sense, and contrasts it with the "on the basis of" sense (1985, pp.74–75).
7. See BonJour's helpful discussion of the idea that epistemic justification is sought and valued by rational beings as the means by which they can achieve the cognitive goal of truth (1985, pp. 5–8).
8. I will not attempt to evaluate the bold position, recently advanced by some epistemologists with a foundational bent, most notably William Alston and Robert Audi, that noncognitive states, e.g., sensory experiences, can also justify beliefs.
9. "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" is reprinted in (Sellars, 1963, pp. 127–96). References to "The Structure of Knowledge" (Sellars, 1975) are included in the text. I have also benefited

from Laurence Bonjour's paper (1978), "Can Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?," especially section III.

10. In his discussion of perceptual knowledge in "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," Sellars explicitly introduces this generalization as part of an observer's grounds. If an utterance of "this is green" expresses observational knowledge, then the subject must "know that overt verbal episodes of this kind are reliable indicators of the existence, suitably related to the speaker, of green objects" (1963, p. 168).
11. In a more recent essay Sellars puts the conclusion in terms of the (probable) truth of the pb. (See Sellars, 1979, pp. 172–77.) In "Phenomenalism," Sellars gives an even more reduced version of his inference schema:

x's thought that p occurred in manner M
So (probably) p

He refers to it as a "trans-level inference" because it involves the sort of epistemic appraisal that we have described. It is to be contrasted with *same-level* perceptual inferences of which the following is an illustration:

Lo, there is a largish bird with a red breast
So there is a robin.
(Sellars, 1963, p. 88).

12. However, it must be admitted that Int₁ is misleading and fails to indicate that the source of one's justification lies not in the justifying belief qua belief, but in its content. Int₁ (and indeed all three internalist conditions) should be viewed as positing *formal* requirements on otherwise specified types of evidence and not as themselves *material* principles of evidence.
13. It is worth noting that we seem to have found in this small constellation of beliefs a *model* of what the coherentist might mean in saying that the beliefs in one's overall belief-system are "mutually justifying"—a claim that is obviously crucial in extricating that position from the "regress of reasons."
14. In the following discussion of P₂, I should be taken to be referring to these particular instantiations of P₂.
15. Sellars formulates this second type of regress explicitly in (1963, paragraphs 36–37, pp. 168–69).
16. In the next few paragraphs I am developing an idea that I find most clearly stated in Sellars' essay "More on Givenness and Explanatory Coherence" (1979, sec. IV, pp. 176–181).
17. If warrant principles are theoretical principles that are grounded in experience, then we can see another way in which one's justifying reasons are *mutually supporting*. For the perceptual claims that warrant principles validate are exactly the same reports that enter into the regularities on which those principles are themselves grounded, and which constitute an ongoing body of fact that the principles must agree with. The point suggests a way of stopping the regress of reasons.
18. Sellars argues that epistemic principles relating to introspection, perception, and memory together form a theory which is reasonably accepted (in part) because it coheres with our introspective, perceptual, and memory judgments. The other part of its reasonableness comes from an overarching ground that, as agents, we require "cognitive maps of ourselves and our environment" to achieve any goals (1979, p. 180).