

Defeating looks

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Abstract In previous work, I have suggested a doxastic account of perceptual experience according to which experiences form a (peculiar) kind of belief: Beliefs with what I have called “phenomenal” or “looks-content”. I have argued that this account can not only accommodate the intuitive reason providing role of experience, but also its justificatory role. I have also argued that, in general, construing experience and perceptual beliefs, i.e. the beliefs most directly based on experience, as having different contents best accounts for the defeasibility of experiential reasons. In this paper, I shall have a closer look at the evidential or inferential relation between looks-propositions and the contents of perceptual beliefs and argue for a form of what I shall call “Pollockianism” about experiential reasons: such reasons are good unless defeated. Questions to be investigated include: Does the resulting picture of perceptual justification contain an externalist element? Is it compatible with Bayesianism? And how does it do with respect to problems that have been raised for other forms of Pollockianism such as dogmatism or phenomenal conservatism?

Keywords Epistemology of perception · Representational content of perceptual experience · Prima facie reasons · Looks · Phenomenal properties · Experience and Folk-psychology

1 Introduction

Lilacs are my favourite flowers. In May, when Stockholm is lush and green, they bloom in abundance in parks and gardens everywhere. But they rarely make an appearance

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in the flower shops. When I spot some, I never resist. Once, I emerged from a florist's with a bunch of white lilacs in my arms. The friend who was waiting for me outside the shop exclaimed: "But you said you wanted purple! Why did you get these?" Only then realizing my mistake, I explained: "Well, these *looked* purple in there."

Examples like this can easily be multiplied; they are witnesses of a folk-psychological practice of citing looks as reasons for both beliefs and actions. This is a practice most naturally understood as that of citing our perceptual experiences as reasons (cf. a. o. McDowell 1994, p. 165f; Glüer 2009). The practice is natural, deeply entrenched, and forms a central part of our intuitive or pre-theoretical conception of our cognitive relation to the world surrounding us. Accommodating the intuitive reason providing role of perceptual experience is a desideratum on any successful account of perceptual experience.¹

In the lilac example, I cite the way the flowers looked in the shop as a reason for an action, for buying them. That, of course, is due to folk-psychology's aversion to pedantry. What the flowers' looking purple in the shop was a reason for, was first and foremost the belief that they are purple. Which, together with my desire for purple lilacs, provided me with a (practical) reason for buying them. Even though my friend is a philosopher, too, that's not the kind of explanation I would normally want to entertain her with. Here, however, we are interested in precisely the epistemic (or theoretical) part of the story of the lilacs: Experience's reason providing role for first order empirical belief.

Now, my friend could have told me that that particular flower shop always is lit in strange, purplish light. And surely, had I known that, I would have been more careful in judging the color of my lilacs. My reason for believing that they are purple would have been undermined by my belief that the light is purple. Since I had no good reason to believe that the light was strange, however, I can not only provide a perfectly good explanation for my forming a false belief—rather, by citing my experience I can show that, in a certain sense, I was quite justified in forming it. This illustrates some features of the reason providing role we are interested in: the reasons in question are defeasible, and even if they are misleading, they can be good, or justifying, in a certain "subjective" sense. This is the sense in which I will use "justification" in this paper. The idea will be that experience is a "prima facie justifier", i.e. that the reasons it provides are *good unless defeated*.

Of course, we cannot assume that there is just one way of accommodating the reason providing role of experience. A natural thought is that precisely how an account would go about this will depend in part on what an experience *is* according to that account. In this paper, I am going to assume *intentionalism*, the view that perceptual experience is a conscious mental state with representational content.² On a suitably uncontentious

¹ However central, it is not the only such desideratum. It might thus turn out that i) there is no account that satisfies all desiderata and ii) the best overall account does not accommodate the reason providing role of experience.

² In Glüer (2014), I have used precisely the reason-providing role of experience, its inferential integration into our systems of cognitive attitudes, to *argue for* intentionalism. For more, and different arguments for intentionalism, see for instance, Brewer (1999), Pautz (2009), Siegel (2010, 2011) and Schellenberg (2011). For arguments against the view that experience has representational content, see for instance Martin (2002), Travis (2004) and Brewer (2006). Burge (2010) and McDowell (2008) think that perceptual content is

construal of propositions, as well as of attitudes towards them, intentionalism is the view that experience is a propositional attitude (cf. Byrne 2005, p. 245). Intentionalism would prima facie seem very well suited to accommodating reason providing: Having propositional content, the thought is, would allow experiences to provide their subjects with reasons in pretty much the same way other propositional attitudes do. To make intentionalism hospitable to reason providing is, however, more difficult than one might think.

Construing experiences as propositional attitudes does take the wind out of the sails of a classical Davidsonian argument to the effect that experiences don't provide reasons or justification. The argument concludes this from the premises that having propositional content is a necessary condition on being a justifier, and that experiences don't have propositional content.³ The claim that having propositional content is necessary for being a justifier is controversial. What shouldn't be controversial, however, is that there *are* justifiers that have propositional content. Moreover, it shouldn't be controversial that there are justifiers that not only have propositional content, but for which having such content isn't just a feature accidental to their justificatory powers. For such justifiers it is at least natural to expect that what they provide justification for is (at least in part) *a function of their contents*. Let's call such justifiers "propositional justifiers". Having propositional content, experience would seem eligible for being a propositional justifier.

But being a propositional justifier requires more than just having propositional content. It is quite plausible to think that what disqualifies for instance desires from providing epistemic justification is that they are *not the right kind of attitude*: To provide (epistemic) reasons for (first order, empirical) belief, an attitude needs to be of a certain kind; more precisely, it needs to be "*belief-like*" in a certain respect. There is widespread agreement that experience, if it is a propositional attitude, is an attitude of this belief-like kind. Such attitudes have what Searle calls "mind-to-world direction of fit" (cf. Searle 1983, p. 7ff). They represent the world as actually being the represented way, as actually fulfilling their condition of correctness or truth. Such states have been called "committal" (Burge 2003, p. 452) or "stative" (Martin 2002, p.

Footnote 2 continued

non-propositional. For an interesting, non-standard view according to which we need to think of experience as having both phenomenal, imagistic and "semantic" propositional content, see Crane (2013). For those construing experience as having content of some kind, there is also the issue of whether this content is conceptual or not. I shall stay out of this debate, but see Crane (1992), Heck (2000, 2007) and Speaks (2005) for discussion.

³ Cf. Davidson (1983, p. 143) and Davidson (1997, p. 136). His conclusion: "nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief" (Davidson 1983, p. 141). This is, of course, Davidson's way of embracing the Sellarsian rejection of the myth of the given—experience won't be able to serve as a justifier because it's not in the "space of reasons" (cf. Sellars 1963). Construing experience as having propositional content is precisely the move McDowell makes in *Mind and World* in response to Davidson. For Davidson's reply to McDowell, see Davidson (1999). Several writers then developed the Davidsonian argument into an argument to the effect that in order to "count as a reason" in Davidson's sense, experience would indeed need to be an attitude of holding true, or belief (cf. Stroud 2002; Manning 2003; Glüer 2004; Ginsborg 2006). In his (2008), McDowell distinguishes propositional from what he calls "intentional" content. He acknowledges that if experience had the former, it would indeed be belief, but claims that experience has the latter kind of content and that it therefore does not provide reasons, but a different epistemic status he calls "entitlement". For more on this debate, see Glüer (2012b) and Crane (2013).

386f), but the maybe most suggestive metaphor characterizing these attitudes is that of assertion. Pryor thus calls them states “assertively representing a proposition” (Pryor 2005, p. 187f).

The easiest way of making sure that experience is the right kind of propositional attitude would, of course, be to construe it *as belief*. Since belief uncontroversially is *the* paradigmatic propositional justifier, if experiences were beliefs, there would not be any additional questions as to what it is about the experiential attitude that qualifies experience for being one, too. This is not usually considered an option, however; usually, it is taken for granted that there are well-known knock-down arguments against belief theories of experience.⁴ But if it indeed were the case that we know that experiences are not beliefs, it would seem at least a matter of some urgency to pinpoint what precisely it is that makes an attitude into a propositional justifier—without by the same token making it into a belief. This is not a question that has gotten all that much attention so far, but there is reason to think that it is at least surprisingly hard to actually come up with informative necessary and sufficient conditions here that are met by all the right kinds of attitudes (including experience) (cf. Briesen 2015). Let’s call this the “attitude problem”. The attitude problem is an unsolved worry for intentionalists thinking of experience as a propositional justifier. The attitude problem is premised on the assumption that experiences are *not* beliefs, however. There thus is a way around it: Construing experiences as beliefs.

Even if we had a solution to the attitude problem, our troubles would be by no means over. If experience is a propositional attitude of the right kind, the basic thought now is, it can provide its subject with reasons in pretty much the same way other such attitudes do. But the paradigm case is that of belief. When it comes to belief, it is natural to think that a belief that *p* provides its subject with a reason for believing *q* in virtue of an *inferential* or *evidential relation* between *p* and *q*. Belief thus is a paradigm case of what I shall call an “inferential justifier”. When it comes to empirical reasoning, the inferences in question don’t have to be deductively valid—rather, the underlying relations can be thought of as relations of probabilification. This would seem to provide a plausible understanding of the defeasible nature of empirical reasons. And again, all of this looks just right for experiential reasons; reasoning from experience would seem to be empirical reasoning par excellence, and clearly the reasons provided would seem defeasible.

But what I shall call “standard intentionalism” construes experiences as ascribing sensible properties—properties such as color or shape, for instance—to material objects. According to standard intentionalism, my experience of the lilacs in the store, for instance, ascribed purpleness to the lilacs. Let’s call the first beliefs formed on

⁴ Someone regretfully appreciating the doxastic option is Heck:

I take it to be a well-established, and familiar, point that perceptions are not beliefs. This is unfortunate, for if they were, we would have a relatively easy answer to the question how experience justifies beliefs about the world. ... Though one can certainly raise questions about how some beliefs justify other beliefs (how the beliefs we now hold give us reasons to hold other ones), these sorts of questions seem relatively tractable—much more tractable, anyway, than questions about how perceptions justify beliefs. It is just in the nature of beliefs to stand in justificatory relations with other beliefs ... (Heck 2000, p. 507f.).

the basis of, and thus potentially justified by, experience “P-beliefs”. According to the story of the lilacs, I formed the P-belief that the lilacs are purple on the basis of my experience. There are, of course, quite a variety of options as to how precisely the experience contents are construed on standard intentionalism, but I think we can safely use contents of the form *o is F*, where ‘o’ is a material object, and ‘F’ a sensible property, as our dummy here. Nothing in this paper will hang on this choice.⁵ What matters is that according to standard intentionalism, an experience as of *p* and a corresponding P-belief that *p* either have the very same content, or are such that the content of the P-belief is “part of” the experience content in something like the way a conjunct is part of a conjunction. Thus, my lilac experience would have the content that the lilacs are purple, and so would the P-belief I formed on its basis. Let’s call this the “same content assumption”. And while the claim that experience has a standard semantics, i.e. the claim that

(EC) An experience as of *p* has the content that *p*,

certainly seems natural and intuitive enough, the same content assumption is quite troublesome. In particular, the same content assumption means trouble for the epistemology of perception. This is not because there is no inferential relation between *p* and *p*—even a “stuttering inference” is an inference, after all—but because of the *defeasibility* characteristic of experiential reasons. It is at least far from obvious how *p* could be a defeasible reason for believing *p*.⁶

In previous work, I have suggested, and argued for, a doxastic account of experience. A main part of the argument is that construing experience as a kind of belief makes it comparatively easy to accommodate its reason providing role (Glüer 2009). I have also argued that if experience is to be a propositional justifier providing defeasible reasons, its content is best construed as *different* from P-belief content (Glüer 2016b). Meeting this “difference requirement” at the same time allows us to escape the classical knockdowns for belief theories of experience, as these invariably, if implicitly, are premised on the same content assumption (cf. Glüer 2009). My suggestion is to use “phenomenal” or “looks-contents” instead of standard contents. What results is a form of intentionalism, “phenomenal intentionalism”, that is non-standard both in construing experience as belief and in construing its content as phenomenal. In this paper, I shall further develop the phenomenal belief account. In particular, I shall work on the epistemology of perception that can be built upon it.

I shall proceed as follows: In the next section, I shall give a brief outline of the phenomenal belief account and illustrate both how phenomenal contents allow it to escape the classical anti-doxastic arguments and how stuttering provides independent reason for the difference requirement. In Sect. 3, I shall spell out the relevant notion of an inferential reason and look at some objections to the claim that experience is an inferential justifier. After that, I shall in Sect. 4 look into the question of when

⁵ Choice points for the standard intentionalist include, but are not exhausted by: Are experiential contents singular or general? If singular, are they object-dependent or object-independent? Do they have a demonstrative element or not? What kind of propositions are they: Fregean, Russellian, possible worlds, centered worlds, or some other kind?

⁶ I have written about stuttering inferences and the “defeasibility problem” in previous work (cf. esp. Glüer 2009, 2016b), work that I shall further elaborate on below.

experiential reasons are good reasons and argue for what I shall call “Pollockianism” about experiential reasons: They are good unless defeated. I shall also argue that this version of Pollockianism allows for straightforwardly using standard Bayesianism for modelling defeasible reasoning from experience. In Sect. 5, some comments will be provided on Bayesian worries that have been raised for other Pollockianisms (such as dogmatism), and in the final section, I shall investigate the worry that “phenomenal Pollockianism” involves an inferential gap in need of bridging.

2 The phenomenal belief account

As worked out so far, the account I have suggested is an account of visual experience. It construes visual experience as a (peculiar) kind of belief with “phenomenal” or “looks-contents”.⁷ Phenomenal intentionalism agrees with standard intentionalism that the objects of visual experience are ordinary material objects, and that experience ascribes properties to these objects. Phenomenal contents differ from standard contents with respect to the kind of property experience is construed as ascribing to its objects.

Think of an experience of purple lilacs again. According to standard intentionalism, this experience has a content of the form *o is purple*. The basic idea behind phenomenal or looks-contents then simply is to instead construe the content as of the form *o looks purple*. Thus, phenomenal contents can be generated from standard contents by looks-modifying their predicates. The more general idea, however, is to generate looks-contents from standard contents by looks-operating on them: Where standard intentionalism assigns the content *p* to an experience neutrally described as an experience as of *p*, phenomenal intentionalism assigns *Lp*.⁸ In what follows, I shall call all such contents “looks-contents” or “*Lp* contents”.

So, the claim is that visual experience is a kind of belief, and that these beliefs have looks-contents. Two questions immediately arise: What kind of belief are experiences? And what kind of properties are the properties that figure in looks-contents? One possible answer to the first question is that (visual) experiences are precisely those beliefs that have looks-contents. Alternatively, some other characteristic could be used to specify which of the beliefs with looks-contents are experiences, for instance their sensory phenomenology. Thus, visual experiences might be those beliefs that represent their looks-contents in a visual way. Whether it is plausible to think that phenomenal contents can be shared between experience-beliefs and other beliefs depends at least in part on our answer to the second question, i.e. on what the relevant phenomenal properties are.

⁷ There is an obvious way of extending phenomenal intentionalism across the sense modalities: Visual experience has looks-contents, auditory experience sounds-contents, olfactory experience smells-contents, etc. My hypothesis is that this can be done, and that all perceptual experience indeed has contents that are, so to speak, modified or operated on by modality-specific appearance modifiers or operators, but there are intriguing questions regarding for instance the objects of olfactory experience that need to be resolved when working out the extended account.

⁸ As long as we are concerned with object-dependent singular contents, *o looks F* and *it looks as if o is F* are truth-conditionally equivalent. But $\exists x (L_2 Fx)$ and $L_1 (\exists x Fx)$, where L_1 is a sentential operator, and L_2 a predicate modifier, are not truth-conditionally equivalent. Since I for reasons I won't explain here prefer the latter versions as experience contents, I suggest treating the looks-operator L_1 as analytically primary and then defining the predicate modifier L_2 in terms of it: $\exists x ((L_2(F))(x)) \equiv_{df} \exists x L_1(Fx)$.

We can approach that question by asking more generally what *appearance properties* are—if we think they are properties of material objects. Most people think that appearances, so understood, are *relational* properties. Shoemaker, who I think was the first to propose that experience represents appearance properties, offers two main suggestions (cf. Shoemaker 1994, 2000). *Occurrent* appearance properties are properties such as that of presently causing an experience of a particular phenomenal kind k_p in a subject S . *Dispositional* appearance properties are properties such as being disposed to cause k_p experiences in subjects of a particular kind (under particular circumstances). Shoemakerian appearance properties thus are relations involving a “phenomenal” element: relations to (phenomenal kinds of) experience or sensations. Alternatively, appearance properties could be understood as “non-phenomenal” properties—as relational properties objects have in virtue of their intrinsic properties and features of the perceptual situation or perspective that are not dependent on the subject, for instance.⁹ Whether construed as phenomenal or not, those who think that experience does represent appearance properties usually think that experiences represent both these properties *and* “intrinsic” sensible properties such as color or shape.¹⁰ As far as I can see, only Antony (2011) and myself suggest that the only properties “present” in our experience are (phenomenal) appearance properties. For reasons going beyond the scope of this paper, I think the appearance properties represented in visual experience are best construed as phenomenally relational, roughly but not quite along Shoemakerian lines.¹¹ If that is right, more precisely, if what experience ascribes are *occurrent* phenomenal properties, then it might be possible to argue that experiences are the only beliefs doing so. But I think that nothing I shall argue in this paper hangs on whether looks are phenomenally relational or non-phenomenally relational.¹² I shall therefore not pursue this question any further here.

⁹ Philosophers thinking that experience represents non-phenomenal, but situation-dependent properties include Harman (1990), Tye (1995), Noë (2004), Schellenberg (2007, 2008), and Brogaard (2010). Brogaard thinks of these properties as “centered properties”. Except for Noë, who identifies what he calls “perspectival” or “P-properties” with looks, these philosophers do not usually link them to appearances, however. Relationalists such as Brewer (2011) and Genone (2014) do identify looks or appearances with certain kinds of non-phenomenal, situation-dependent properties, but they do not think that experiences represent these. Rather, they join Martin (2010) in thinking that experiences do not have representational contents. Martin himself goes even further and argues that looks aren’t relational at all. According to him, looks are identical to the basic sensible properties. (In my (2013), I argue that he is wrong to claim that there are no semantic reasons for disputing this).

¹⁰ There are two main kinds of motivation for adopting such a “dual representationalism”. Shoemaker suggests that experience represents both colors and “appearance colors” in order to allow for spectrum inversion without misrepresentation while holding on to strong representationalism, i.e. the claim that experiential content determines (experiential) phenomenal character and vice versa. Most others adopt the dual representation idea in order to explain *perceptual constancies* in terms of experiential content. Egan has used phenomenal “centering features” for both purposes, but acknowledges that tension results from doing so simultaneously (cf. Egan 2006a, b, 2010). For an argument to the effect that dual representationalism cannot account for the full phenomenology of perceptual constancy, see Glüer (2016a).

¹¹ Shoemakerian appearance properties are a good start, but where he has *phenomenal* kinds, I think we need what could be called “*functional* phenomenal kinds” (drawing on ideas from Pagin 2000 here). The idea has been developed in more detail for color experience in Glüer (2012a).

¹² Things would change, however, if looks were identical with the basic sensible properties, as Martin (2010) would have it.

What I shall do instead in the remainder of this section is run us through two arguments against construing experiences as beliefs. The first one is one of those classical knockdown arguments I mentioned in the introduction: the argument from known illusion. The other is the “stuttering inference argument”. The second will take us directly to the problem of defeasibility.¹³

The argument from known illusion takes as its starting point certain very stable illusions such as the Müller-Lyer illusion. Looking at a Müller-Lyer diagram, the lines look unequal in length. And they do that regardless of whether you know that they are in fact of the same length or not. That is, the illusion does not go away just because you have a background belief to the effect that the lines are of the same length. They look as if they were of unequal length no matter what you believe and how used you are to the illusion. This kind of “belief-independence” (Evans 1982, p. 123) is also known as the “modularity” (in Fodor’s sense) of perceptual experience. And it provides us with a powerful argument against classical belief theories of experience, theories that identify experience either with belief, or with the formation of belief, and possibly even those that identify experience with dispositions to belief (for a classical belief theory, cf. for instance Armstrong 1968).

In its simplest form, the argument proceeds from the premise that an experience as of the Müller-Lyer lines’ unequal length is a belief. The second premise is that the subject has background knowledge to the effect that the lines are of the same length. From this, we derive the conclusion that the subject has outrightly contradictory beliefs. This conclusion is bad, but not clearly absurd. However, in cases of known illusion the subject can be fully aware of both experience and background belief. Moreover, there need not be anything irrational or otherwise malfunctioning about the subject of a known illusion. This does strike me as absurd. Beliefs just don’t behave like that. The argument from known illusion concludes that experiences are not beliefs.¹⁴

But the argument from known illusion has a hidden premise: the same content assumption. That the subject of a known illusion comes out as having contradictory beliefs follows from a belief theory of experience only on the assumption that for instance the experience you have when the Müller-Lyer lines look unequal in length to you has the content that the lines are of unequal length. If we instead construe the experience as ascribing looking unequal in length to the lines, there is no contradiction.

Something like a generalisation of the argument from known illusion can also be found in recent work on what has come to be known as “phenomenal conservatism”. Originally suggested by Huemer (cf. esp. Huemer 2001, 2007, for a survey over recent

¹³ For a more thorough presentation of the most influential anti-doxastic arguments, see my (2009).

¹⁴ One might think that modularity is a form of compartmentalization. Compartmentalization, however, is usually used precisely to explain how a subject could possibly display certain kinds of irrationality that intuitively are clearly possible. But, as I said, there need not be anything irrational about the subject of a known illusion. Byrne, who recently has come out as a belief theorist (of a rather different kind), seems to disagree; he appeals to an old idea of Armstrong’s according to which the belief that the lines are of unequal length is “a belief that is held in check by a stronger belief” (Armstrong 1968, p. 221), and comments: “The idea that the belief that p might be ‘held in check’ by the ‘stronger belief’ is not ad hoc, since it arguably applies elsewhere, notably in some cases of delusions and other irrational beliefs” (Byrne 2016). I agree that the idea is promising in some cases of delusion, but if we want to use it in cases of known illusion, we either need to explain in what sense the subject of such an illusion thereby is irrational—or we need to say what it is that prevents this kind of compartmentalization from being a form of irrationality.

work, cf. [Moretti 2015b](#)), phenomenal conservatism subsumes perceptual experiences under a wider kind of propositional attitudes called “seemings”, a category that also is supposed to also include such *prima facie* disparate states as memory seemings, intellectual seemings, and introspective seemings. Seemings are not beliefs, and according to Huemer, we can identify the seemings by reflection on paradigm examples:

If, as I claim, there is a class of conscious mental states that may be dubbed ‘seemings’, including states that occur during the normal operation of perception, memory, and intellectual reflection, then these states should be familiar to all normal individuals. I therefore need not provide a philosophical analysis of seemings; I need only say enough to draw readers’ attention to these familiar mental states ([Huemer 2013b](#), p. 328f).

One feature, in particular, is supposed to help us identify the seemings, a feature we are already familiar with from the discussion of the attitude problem above: seemings are “‘assertive’ mental representations” ([Huemer 2013b](#), p. 329).¹⁵ But while their assertiveness might suffice to distinguish seemings from pure states of the imagination, it certainly does not suffice to distinguish the seemings from the beliefs. So, what would prevent an account like mine from suggesting that either all seemings, or at least those that are perceptual experiences, in fact are beliefs? Beliefs with not only looks- contents, but “seems-contents” more generally?

As I understand it, phenomenal conservatism is a novel form of foundationalism with fairly far-reaching ambitions of epistemological unification: seemings are supposed to provide non-inferential justification for beliefs of quite different types (cf. [Moretti 2015b](#), p. 298; [Piazza and Moretti 2015](#), p. 1273).¹⁶ Now, this form of foundationalism would seem particularly attractive precisely because the foundational justifiers it works with *are not beliefs*. This is in strong contrast to classical foundationalism where the foundational justifiers *are* beliefs: introspective beliefs about perceptual experiences. Suggesting that seemings could just as well be construed as beliefs (with seems-contents) would thus be a bit of a party-spoiler.

As far as I can see, the arguments for the claim that seemings are not beliefs are of the very same kind as the classical anti-doxastic arguments against belief theories of experience: they proceed from the observation that things can seem *F* to you even if you know perfectly well that they are not. Phenomena like known sensory illusion, but also the appearance of correctness that for instance the naive comprehension schema of set theory is said to possess even for those who know that it is not correct (cf. [Huemer 2007](#), p. 31f), are cited as witnesses here. I am not totally convinced of the relevant similarity between these two kinds of cases, but even if we grant it for the time being, what we get is precisely a sort of generalized known illusion argument. And the generalized argument relies on the (generalized version of the) same content assumption just as much as the perceptual version does. Once the suggestion that

¹⁵ Huemer also characterizes this as a certain kind of “forcefulness”: “perceptual experiences represent their contents as actualized; states of merely imagining do not” ([Huemer 2001](#), p. 77).

¹⁶ Some go further and claim that “Huemer’s position provides a unified account of the source of all justified beliefs” ([Skene 2013](#), p. 540).

seemings could just as well be understood as beliefs (with seems-contents) is on the table, we at least need additional argument to rule it out.^{17, 18}

Pointing out that arguments like the argument from known illusion are premised on the same content assumption only shows that they don't prevent us from construing experiences as beliefs—if we are prepared to give up that assumption. It's another thing to argue that experiences are best construed as beliefs. That's a fairly ambitious goal, especially as (EC), and thus the same content assumption, indeed are rather natural for an intentionalist. In this paper, I shall work towards this goal by developing the argument that the phenomenal belief account not only provides a good account of reason providing but also of the justificatory role of experience. As I said already in the introduction, thinking about the reason providing or justificatory role of experience from an intentionalist perspective pushes towards phenomenal intentionalism not only because a doxastic account provides a simple answer to the attitude problem. It also puts independent pressure on the same content assumption. This brings us to the argument I have called the “stuttering inference argument”.

As we saw above, it is natural for an intentionalist to think of experience as an inferential justifier. At the same time, the reasons experience provides clearly are defeasible. The stuttering inference argument, as first proposed in McDowell (cf. McDowell 1997, p. 161, 1998, p. 405), uses the defeasibility of experiential reasons in a *reductio ad absurdum* that could be reconstructed as follows:

- (IR) Experience provides inferential reasons for first-order empirical belief.
- (D) These reasons are defeasible.
- (1) An inference from an experience as of p to a belief that p is an inference from p to p .
- (2) An inference from p to p is not defeasible.
- (3) \perp

McDowell uses this argument as a *reductio* of (IR). But just like the argument from known illusion, the stuttering inference argument uses the same content assumption as a hidden premise. While it can be taken as a *reductio* of (IR), it therefore can equally well be taken as a *reductio* of the same content assumption. The stuttering inference argument thus puts pressure on the same content assumption, pressure that is independent of that already exerted by the attitude problem.

¹⁷ This, it seems to me, holds even if we construe the assertiveness of the seemings as a matter of their *attitudinal phenomenology*. We might hold, as Moretti puts it, that “the experiences constituting seemings are essentially characterized by a distinctive phenomenology that makes them represent their contents *assertively*” (Moretti 2015b, p. 299), where this distinctive phenomenology could be characterized as “felt veridicality” (Tolhurst 1998, p. 289f). The first question here would be whether we really want to claim that beliefs don't have felt veridicality. (To the extent that I can make out what an “assertive phenomenology” is, it certainly seems right to me to say that beliefs have it.) But even if those states we all agree are beliefs lack some phenomenal feature distinctive of seemings, we can't just assume that that shows that experiences/seemings are not beliefs. Rather, we would need an argument as to why attitudes with that kind of phenomenology aren't beliefs. Otherwise, the belief theorist remains free to maintain that phenomenology is (part of) what distinguishes the experience/seeming kind of belief from other kinds of beliefs.

¹⁸ It should also be noted that there is some disagreement about whether perceptual experiences actually are seemings. While perceptual experience appears as a paradigm case in Huemer's writings, others argue that we need to distinguish between sensory experiences and seemings based on them (cf. Bergmann 2006, 2013; Brogaard 2013; Sosa 2015).

It is generally held that defeasible reasoning is reasoning from premises that leave open the possibility of the conclusion's falsity. Such inferences can be retracted because of new information. The classical example of such non-monotonic reasoning is Tweety, the bird (cf. Reiter 1987, p. 149). Learning that Tweety is a bird provides you with a defeasible reason for believing that Tweety can fly. If you subsequently learn that Tweety is a penguin, your reason for believing that Tweety can fly has been defeated. But you still believe that Tweety is a bird. Above, I said that inferential relations can be relations of implication or of probabilification. In order to be defeasible, they need to be of the latter kind. More precisely, they need to be such that the conditional probability of the conclusion on the premise is not equal to 1. But if anything is an example of a conditional probability of 1, it is the conditional probability of p on p . So, if we construe experiences as inferential justifiers for the most basic first-order empirical beliefs based on them, and we give them a standard semantics, we seem bound to make a hash of defeasibility. I shall get back to the defeasibility problem in Sect. 4.

But why should we take stuttering to put pressure on the same content assumption—rather than on the idea that experience is an *inferential* justifier? At this point, all I am saying is that stuttering can equally well be taken to be a reductio of either premise. Thus, it puts pressure on both. This pressure adds to the pressure on the same content assumption exerted by the attitude problem. To my mind, that is sufficient to motivate an investigation into giving up the same content assumption, be it ever so intuitive. After all, that experience provides inferential reasons is ever so intuitive, too. To boost our confidence that experiential reasons are inferential, I shall in the next section spell out the relevant notion of an inferential reason in a bit more detail, and look at some objections to thinking that experience actually provides any such reasons.

3 Experiential reason providing

Let me spell out in a bit more detail the sense of reason, and reason providing, in which I take (R) to be the most natural understanding of an important and integral part of folk-psychology:

(R) Experience provides defeasible inferential reasons for first-order empirical belief.

Our model is “belief-belief” reasoning. The relation of reason providing we are interested in is a relation between two first-order empirical beliefs. One of them, the belief that p , provides its subject S with a reason for another such belief, the belief that q . Strictly speaking, the reason this belief provides S with is a proposition: p .¹⁹ S ‘has’ this reason in the sense that it is the content of one of S ’ beliefs. In this respect, the notion of a reason we are interested in is subjective: We are interested in reasons the subject has.

Such reasons rationalize further beliefs. If p is a reason for believing that q , then p must be such that it—from the subject’s own perspective—speaks in favour of

¹⁹ Williamson (2000, p. 194ff), makes a to my mind convincing case that all evidence is propositional. Nothing I am arguing for hangs on the truth of this general claim. I am exclusively concerned with propositional justifiers here.

believing that q . This rationality, too, is subjective in the sense that the explanation provided by citing the reason is such that it shows that something spoke for believing q from S ' own perspective.

At the same time, however, S ' perspective needs to be recognizable as a perspective by others: Believing that p needs to be such that it would provide any subject with a reason to believe q . This objective, or at least intersubjective, aspect of reason providing can only be secured by an underlying, objective relation of inferential or evidential support between p and q . In order for the belief that p to provide its subject with a reason for believing that q , there needs to be a *valid inference* (of some sort) from p to q .²⁰

So far, we are concerned only with *prima facie reasons*. The need for an underlying, objective relation of inferential or evidential support between p and q can also be seen by reflecting on the fact that these reasons can be *good reasons*: they can *justify* beliefs based on them. But not all reasons subjects in fact base their beliefs on justify those beliefs. The distinction between good and bad reasons, between those that do, and those that do not, justify beliefs based on them, requires there to be an (objective) relation of inferential or evidential support between the believed propositions themselves, a relation that obtains independently of any particular attitudes subjects take to them.

Two more (negative) characteristics are crucial to this conception of reasons: Having reasons for one's first-order empirical beliefs does *not* require forming them by means of conscious inference. Having a reason for believing that q does not require anything regarding how that belief is formed, not even that it actually be formed at all. And if S does form the belief that q on the basis of their belief that p , this inference does *not* have to be performed by means of any kind of conscious deliberation, or act of reasoning, to be justified.

Connected with this is the observation that having or providing reasons does *not* require the possession of second order states. What we are concerned with here are relations between first order propositional attitudes and their contents. A creature has reasons in the required sense as soon as its beliefs and actions can be explained by means of its further beliefs and desires. The capacity to think about these beliefs and desires is not required, and even less the capacity to think about these beliefs and desires *as* providing the reasons in question. What is required, however, is a certain minimal, subjective rationality. There are no reasons explanations, be it for beliefs or actions, unless a creature's beliefs actually to some minimal but significant degree instantiate the basic inferential or evidential relations objectively obtaining between the propositions that are the contents of their beliefs.²¹

If we think of perceptual experiences as beliefs, we can accommodate their reason-providing role by simply extending our account of how beliefs, in general, provide reasons for further beliefs to them. This requires some care, however, as we at the same time want to preserve certain peculiarities of the inferential or evidential relations between experiences and other beliefs. What's most important here is the peculiar combination of the defeasibility of experiential reasons with the modularity or belief-

²⁰ This is a bit simplified, of course; sometimes, reasons are *multi-premise*, so that S has reason for believing that q only if S believes all of a set of premises p_1, \dots, p_n .

²¹ For a little more on this conception of rationality, cf. [Glüer and Wikforss \(2013\)](#).

independence of experience: While for instance the reason for believing that the lines are of unequal length that a Müller-Lyer experience provides its subject with usually is defeated by background belief, the experience itself is impervious to the background belief. Its “message” remains unchanged.

Before returning to the issue of defeasibility, however, I would like to take a brief look at a challenge to the very idea that experiences are reason providers in the first place. Gauker, for instance, does not find the idea intuitive or natural at all, and therefore asks if any good arguments can be provided in support of it (cf. Gauker forthcoming).

Let me start by clarifying the kind of argument I take myself to have made. It’s what we could call a “here’s a way to get the job done argument”. Such arguments start from a “job description”. My argument starts by reminding us of the everyday practice of citing the way things look as reasons for our beliefs about the world around us. I shall occasionally call this practice the “looks-practice” in what follows. This practice is pervasive and fundamental to our folk-psychology, and I take accounting for it to be a desideratum on any satisfactory account of experience. My argument then has simply been that the phenomenal belief account does precisely that. This leaves open the possibility that there are other ways of getting the job done.

What I have not been sufficiently explicit about, however, is the following: The desideratum is to account for the practice of citing looks as reasons. My account does that by construing experience itself as the reason provider. I take this to be the most natural way of understanding the practice, and have therefore formulated the desideratum as that of accounting for experience’s reason providing role. But one might try to get a wedge in here. That is, one could argue that the reasons that get cited when we cite looks are in fact not the experiences themselves, but for instance the very first beliefs we form on the basis of them.²² But even though this is true, this possibility just by itself does not detract from my basic argument: the phenomenal belief account gets the job done. Moreover, it gets it done very well, among other things by implementing the most natural understanding of the practice it accounts for. Rival accounts will have to be assessed on their merits. At the end of the day, the phenomenal belief account might turn out not to be the best overall account, not

²² This might be especially attractive for an anti-intentionalist. If you think that experience does not have any content, a way of accounting for the looks-practice would be to construe the reasons cited as the contents of the very first beliefs formed on the basis of experience. This, I take it, is the kind of position McGrath (2016; Comesaña and McGrath 2016) has recently started to develop. To make this into an epistemology of *perception*, we would need an account of how those looks-beliefs themselves are justified by the experiences they are based on. This is a challenge, a challenge that is aggravated by having to involve a relation of epistemic warrant between a state without content and one with content.

My own epistemology of perception, of course, also needs to be completed in a structurally similar way: by an account of how experience beliefs themselves are justified. Going foundationalist on experience belief would be an option (after all, experience beliefs with phenomenal contents are almost guaranteed to be true). For various reasons, it is not an option I would go for, however. Simplified quite a bit, my idea is this (cf. Glüer 2004): I take relations of inferential or evidential support to run in both directions. In which direction they get cited in reasons explanations or justifications depends on what’s in need of support in the relevant context. Thus, experience-beliefs both provide reasons for other beliefs, and other beliefs provide reasons for experience beliefs. The difference is that experience-beliefs typically aren’t *produced* by those other beliefs. But that doesn’t prevent surrounding beliefs from providing reasons or justifications for them. Thanks to Mohan Matthen and Matthew McGrath for conversation on this.

even with respect to the desideratum at hand, but for the time being, it's alive and kicking.

By contrast, Gauker thinks that proponents of the view that experience provides reasons—including McDowell (1994), Ginsborg (2006), and Pollock (1974) and Pollock and Oved (2005)—proceed on the (implicit) assumption that there is a sense of 'looks' exclusively tied to reporting experience content (cf. Gauker forthcoming, p. 12). Given the nature of the argument I have tried to make, I do not think that I need to make any such assumption. My argument, it seems to me, is compatible with allowing that the looks-reports we make in the looks-practice could also be construed as reporting something other than experiences. All I claim is that we can make very good sense of the practice if we indeed construe these reports as citing experiences as reasons.

Gauker then goes on to argue that even though an interpretation of 'looks' exclusively tied to experience-reports can indeed be provided, on that interpretation, the proposition expressed by '*o* looks *F*' does *not* evidentially support *o is F*. Proceeding by elimination, he argues, among other things, that there is no relation of probabilification between *o looks F* and *o is F*. But even if that were right for the interpretation of 'looks' Gauker offers, it seems pretty clear that it does not hold if 'looks' is interpreted in terms of phenomenal properties.²³ That, I have suggested, is the sense of 'looks' that figures in experience contents. And on that interpretation, it is pretty clearly the case that *o looks F* probabilifies *o is F*. That is, the conditional probability of *o*'s being *F* on *o*'s looking *F* is (equal or) higher than the prior probability of *o*'s being *F* (cf. Glüer 2014, 2016b).

Looking *F* is a phenomenal property, a property the possession of which by an object *o* is a pretty good *indicator* of *o*'s also possessing another property, that of being *F*. Moreover, it's a pretty good, but not an infallible indicator—thus, the conditional probability of *o*'s being *F* on its looking *F* is high, but not equal to 1. And that brings us back to the claim that if we construe experiences as beliefs with phenomenal contents, they provide their subjects with defeasible reasons for first-order empirical belief. We now want to know when these reasons are *good* reasons—which is the topic for the next section.

4 Justification, defeaters, and defeasibility

According to phenomenal intentionalism, an experience-belief that *Lp* provides its subject with a defeasible reason to believe that *p*. The question now is: When does the subject of such an experience have a *good or all-things-considered reason* for believing *p*? And again, what I am interested in is first and foremost justification for believing *p*, whether or not such a belief is actually formed—that is, what most people call “propositional justification”.

²³ On the interpretation Gauker offers, 'looks' works along the lines of operators like 'reportedly' or 'allegedly'. His main reason against construing evidential support between *o looks F* and *o is F* in terms of probabilification is that the propositions expressed by sentences of the form 'allegedly, *p*' or 'reportedly, *p*', and therefore also '*o looks F*' on his interpretation, cannot even be assigned probabilities. This strikes me as implausible.

Like many others these days, I think it's a good idea to “go Pollockian” on this (cf. [Pollock 1974](#)).²⁴ What I shall call “Pollockianism” is the following claim about perceptual justification:

(P) Perceptual reasons are “prima facie reasons” in the Pollockian sense of *being good unless defeated*.

Pollock himself thought that two kinds of justification providers are to be construed as involving prima facie reasons in this sense: induction and perception.

Applying the idea to the phenomenal belief account of perceptual experience, we get the view that reasons provided by *Lp* experiences are good reasons for, or justify, believing that *p* unless defeated. Merely having a reason provided by experience is not sufficient for justification, but the “more” that is required is not more belief, or more reason for belief, but rather the absence of (good) reasons strong enough to defeat them. And just as we are concerned here with reasons subjects *have*, we are concerned with defeaters subjects not only do *not* have, but do *not even have good reason to have*.

When it comes to the nature of possible defeaters, the picture we get is quite standard, and we can again take our descriptions fairly directly from Pollock. It has become common to distinguish between two kinds of defeaters: rebutting defeaters (Pollock called them “type I defeaters”) and undercutting or undermining defeaters (“type II”). Rebutting defeaters “attack” the conclusion of the relevant inference directly: They provide independent reasons against believing *p*. Undercutting defeaters “attack” the connection between premise and conclusion, for instance by providing a subject with reasons for believing that circumstances are such that white things look purple, or more generally such that the senses can't be trusted.²⁵ When it comes to perception, examples for both kinds of defeaters are not hard to come by. Pollock himself provides this example for a rebutting defeater:

‘Jones told me that *x* is not red, and Jones is generally reliable’ would be a type I defeater for ‘*x* looks red to me’ as a prima facie reason for me to believe that *x* is red ([Pollock 1974](#), p. 42).

And in the following quote he illustrates how ‘*x* looks red’ in the absence of any undercutting defeaters provides good reason for believing that *x* is red:

Ordinarily, when I can see an object clearly, and have no reason for supposing that there is something wrong with my eyes, or that there are strange lights playing on the object, or anything of that sort, I unhesitatingly judge that the object is red if it looks red to me ([Pollock 1974](#), p. 41).

²⁴ Other recent fans of Pollockian prima facie justification include dogmatists like [Pryor \(2000, 2005\)](#), and phenomenal conservatives like [Huemer \(2007, 2013a, b\)](#).

²⁵ On the face of it, this distinction looks pretty clear, but that impression is probably somewhat superficial. If we think of rebutters as in the first place speaking against believing a hypothesis *H*, we can, as Pryor points out, immediately ask: “don't they also constitute some evidence against the reliability, in this context, of any evidence (...) that speaks for *H*? The underminers may speak in the first place for the unreliability of [the evidence], at least concerning *H*, but then by doing so, don't they contribute to its being less reasonable for me to believe *H*—and so more reasonable to believe not-*H*—than it was before?” ([Pryor 2013](#), p. 91).

Taking all of this together, we get:

- (LP) An experience that Lp provides its subject S with justification for believing that p iff
- i) $Lp \rightarrow p$, and
 - ii) S does not have good reason to believe any defeaters,

where ‘ \rightarrow ’ stands for a suitable relation of inferential or evidential support.

As I have already indicated, I think that for perceptual reasons, evidential support should be construed as probabilification. Moreover, it should be such that the conditional probability of p given Lp is (equal or) higher than the prior probability of p —but lower than 1.²⁶ That is, the experience content must be such that its truth is compatible with the falsity of the proposition the probability of which it raises. Once thinking in terms of looks, this seems simple and natural: Of course, the proposition *that the lilacs look purple* can be true without the lilacs’ being purple. And analogously for the Müller-Lyer lines. And the reason their looking purple gave me for believing them to be purple is easily seen to be defeated by having good reason to believe that the light is purple. But that only undermines the connection—not the way the lilacs look.

What we see here is how well-suited the phenomenal belief account is to using a Bayesian model for the epistemology of perception.²⁷ Given the assumption that experience is a kind of propositional attitude, it is only natural to expect that its justifying powers are (at least in part) a function of its content. And it is equally natural to expect that experiential content can be treated as “incoming information” on the basis of which to update your beliefs or credences.

But standard versions of Bayesianism are in fact not particularly hospitable to this natural idea—at least as long as we stick to standard versions of intentionalism. For one thing, standard Bayesian models strictly speaking do not even apply to reasoning from experience as standardly construed—they only apply to beliefs. Thus, it is initially quite unclear what the kind of defeat we are probably most interested in here—“perceptual undermining” (Weisberg 2015, p. 121)—would even amount to on such a model: If the model does not cover the connection, how could it model its being undermined? This is of course especially glaring if we update on p —for instance, the proposition that the lilacs are purple—by means of classical Bayesian conditionalization: p will get probability 1 from the start, and be stuck with it. But, as already Christensen (1992) noted, the situation does not really improve if we switch to Jeffrey conditionalization instead. Jeffrey conditionalization does allow us to assign a probability lower than 1 to incoming p and then update on it, but it is silent on the question how to determine that initial probability. Thus, incoming perceptual information normally should get a much higher initial probability than it should get when you already know that the light is iff, but there are no rules for determining these initial values. In

²⁶ Among other things in order to allow for evidence to remain evidence even after having been updated upon, we should only require that the conditional probability of p on Lp is *not lower than* the prior probability of p . I shall abstract from problems like this here.

²⁷ Note, by the way, that a growing number of cognitive psychologists and neuroscientists working in the “prediction error minimization” paradigm of modelling the brain itself as a hierarchical Bayesian system are perfectly happy to call experiences beliefs; cf. for instance Frith (2009).

a way, that is not surprising, as the model is one for updating on incoming information, but to the extent that perceptual undermining intuitively already takes place before the model even kicks in, it is a serious shortcoming. The model seems bound to mischaracterize the realm of rational cognition by missing its real starting point.²⁸ Moreover, the situation is not easily remedied, either. Considering perceptual undermining as a diachronic process, Weisberg shows that Jeffrey conditionalization “doesn’t just fail to regulate perceptual undermining, it bungles it” (Weisberg 2015, p. 122; cf. also Weisberg 2009). Think of the lilacs again. Their actual color is independent of the lighting, and before I look at them information about the latter has no relevance to my beliefs about the former. But Jeffrey conditionalization is “rigid” and thus will preserve this independence even after I have come to believe that the lilacs are purple based on their looking purple. Thus, not even later learning about the lighting in the flower shop will have any relevance for my belief about the lilacs’ color. Jeffrey conditionalization in effect prevents what intuitively looks like perceptual underminers par excellence from even diachronically having any undermining effects.

And as long as we stick to standard intentionalism, trying to extend the model to cover the step from experience to P-belief does not improve the situation. As long as we are serious about it’s being the experience itself that provides the proposition to be updated on (and not, for instance, introspection), what we end up with is updating p on p . Whether p comes in with probability 1 or something lower then doesn’t actually matter much—either way, the connection wouldn’t be such that a defeater could undermine it. This problem is different from that generated by independence preservation: Even a defeater relevant to p cannot undermine the connection between p and p . Just adding a stuttering step thus makes a hash of perceptual undermining, too.

Our problem is that we need a relation between incoming evidence and “hypothesis” that a defeater can “get at” at all. Think of the way we talk about perceptual reasons again: It is central to the way we cite looks as reasons that looking F leaves open the possibility of not being F . Our looks-practice thus is structurally very similar to other practices involving non-monotonic reasoning. When it comes to the structure of defeat, the story of the lilacs is very much like that of Tweety: Learning that the lilacs look purple did provide good reason for believing them to be so—until I also learned that the light in the store was purplish. Just as learning that Tweety is a bird provided good reason for believing Tweety able to fly—until we learned that Tweety is a penguin.²⁹ We distort this structure if we construe the ‘looks’ used in our looks-practice

²⁸ See my 2016 for a discussion of an alternative way of understanding defeat suggested to me by Juan Comesaña. He suggests developing Williamson’s framework (Williamson 2000, p. 209ff) so as to treat defeat of perceptual information in analogy to forgetting evidence: defeated experience content will be “struck” from your evidence. But this, too, does not really capture the defeat of experiential information, but at best only its aftermath.

²⁹ In Tweety’s case, Tweety’s being a penguin is a reason for believing Tweety can’t fly, however, while learning that the light is purplish isn’t a reason to believe that the lilacs are not purple. It’s a reason to withhold belief on that, or a reason to believe that they are either white or purplish, depending on what one knows about how things look under purplish light.

as propositional attitude operators reporting experiences with standard contents.³⁰ To capture this structure, the relation between incoming proposition and hypothesis must be such that the truth of the incoming proposition leaves open the possibility that the hypothesis is false.³¹ Moreover, the relation must be such that perceptual underminers are relevant to it. The relation between *o looks F* and *o is F* seems to be of precisely the right kind. And there is an additional bonus of construing experience content as phenomenal: so construed, the actual deliverances of the senses are virtually guaranteed to be true. The phenomenal belief account thus allows perceptual updating to be modelled by classical conditionalization. And in any case, whether we prefer classical or Jeffrey conditionalization, construed as beliefs, experiences are automatically covered by Bayesian models.³²

To sum these considerations up: Defeasibility provides motivation for what I have called the “difference requirement”. To successfully model the defeasibility of the reasons experience provides for further belief, experience content and P-belief content cannot be the same. The same content assumption must be given up.³³

³⁰ For more on why (phenomenal) ‘looks’ is not a propositional attitude operator, see my [Glüer \(2014, Sect. 4.5\)](#).

³¹ This might not hold for defeasible reason providing in total generality. What seems clearly true to me is that the relation is such that *from the subject’s perspective* a defeasible reason leaves open the possibility that the hypothesis is false. The proviso might be needed to avoid commitment to certain claims regarding relations of entailment, for instance between large, hard to survey bodies of logical knowledge and all their consequences. It might seem as if such reasons could be defeated. I tend to think not, but I don’t have the space to explain why. I briefly discuss a case in point suggested by Comesaña in my [\(2016\)](#).

³² Jeffrey himself in fact considers avoiding the need for Jeffrey conditionalization by updating on looks-propositions, but claims that this sort of proposition is “too vague” to be useful: many different experiences would fall under any such description ([Jeffrey 1965; Christensen 1992](#)). That might be a problem as long as experience does not have propositional content, but would not seem to be one once the relevant proposition is the experience content.

[Weisberg \(2015, p. 127f\)](#) considers updating on “appearance propositions”, but construes these as about experiences, i.e. as the contents of beliefs formed by introspection. Updating on such propositions would only push the problem one step further away. Weisberg argues, as there are underminers for appearance propositions as well. It is far from clear, however, that this indeed is anything like the same problem recurring. In Weisberg’s example, an appearance proposition is supposed to be undermined by the subject’s having evidence of their being an unreliable judge of their own color experiences. However, this would be a case of “undermining” by “higher-order evidence” ([Christensen 2010](#))—i.e. evidence about the (un)reliability of a source of evidence such as perception, memory, or introspection. Whether higher-order evidence can be understood as evidence at all, and if so, whether its rational effects can be understood, and modelled, as undermining in anything like the usual sense is far from clear and highly controversial. Moreover, how to handle higher-order evidence is a general problem for every source of evidence, not a problem particularly affecting the epistemology of perception. (For discussion, see a.o. [Kelly 2005; Christensen 2010, forthcoming; Lasonen-Aarnio 2014; Sliwa and Horowitz 2015](#)). And anyway, things are again quite different on the phenomenal belief account. Here, looks-propositions are construed as experience contents, not as the contents of introspective (second-order) beliefs. I do think that experience-beliefs can be false—on the rare occasion of a subject’s misapplying a concept to their own sensations. But I doubt that this could possibly amount to any significant unreliability, (if you too often make such basic mistakes in concept application, it becomes unclear whether you even possess the relevant concepts, after all). Moreover, if there could be such unreliability, and the subject could have evidence of it, this would only be yet another form of higher-order evidence.

³³ But isn’t experience content much richer than P-belief content to begin with? Doesn’t that provide standard intentionalism with a way of dealing with the different content requirement? I don’t see how it could. On the simplest construal of “richness”, the experience content has the form of a very long

The difference requirement pushes us towards giving up the same content assumption, and thus standard intentionalism, at least as much as the attitude problem. These two forces are at least to some degree independent, as it is only natural for an intentionalist to think that experience content is not an idle wheel in the epistemology of perception. Even if we could solve the attitude problem without construing experience as belief, that is, it would be natural to expect experience to be a justifier whose justifying power is a function of precisely its content. The content of such a justifier impacts the epistemological machinery in a certain way. How? Well, it seems natural for the intentionalist to think that experience content should be treated as incoming information on which to update belief. Which in turn suggests that it should be possible to apply our most successful formal account of such reasoning to incoming perceptual information. As long as we stick to standard intentionalism, however, none of this seems to be forthcoming. Instead, we would have to look for a rather different model of how experience justifies.³⁴

Somewhat ironically, phenomenal intentionalism thus comes out as a rather conservative position once we consider the epistemology of perception. We give up one, admittedly intuitive, assumption, and a lot of the epistemic things we have always wanted from experience happen almost automatically.³⁵ Most importantly in the present context, experience gets to be an inferential *prima facie* justifier, straightforwardly modelled by standard Bayesianism.³⁶ In the rest of this paper, I shall investigate

Footnote 33 continued

conjunction, and conjunction elimination does not provide the required kind of difference. See my (2016) for a more detailed investigation of the question, and some ideas as to why construing the required difference as a difference in *kind of content*—for instance, in terms of the difference between structured and unstructured propositions—probably won't work, either.

³⁴ One interesting suggestion here would be to look to the “phenomenal force” of experience for help. Several authors have made suggestions along these lines recently (Koksvik 2011; Chudnoff 2013; Bengson 2015; Piazza and Moretti 2015). The first was, I think, Pryor who noted that it might be “the peculiar ‘phenomenal force’ or way our experiences have of presenting propositions to us” (Pryor 2000, p. 547, fn. 37) that explains the justificatory powers of experience. I agree with these writers that experience indeed has an “assertive” phenomenology. And I do think that this phenomenology is part of the argument for experience's being a justifier. But while this would allow experiential justification to remain a function of experience content (the function being identity), it does not help with any of the problems discussed in this paper—even if we locate the justificatory powers of experience in its phenomenology, we still need to give up on thinking of experience as an inferential justifier and probabilistic modelling of reasoning from experience will at least not be straightforward.

³⁵ We also need to ask to what extent intuition really favors the same content assumption. As I have argued from the start, it certainly is not introspection that tells us that this assumption is true, or that experience doesn't have phenomenal content. The only difference between standard and phenomenal contents is that the latter are, so to speak, “looks-operated”. Think of an experience as of a bunch of purple lilacs in front of you. It is indeed natural to think that the experience represents the lilacs as purple, but would things look any different if it instead represented them as looking purple? Or the whole scene as looking as if there were some purple lilacs in front of you? It seems rather clear to me that a visual experience such as this one does carry phenomenal information about its own modality. Putting that right into the content will thus not make a phenomenal difference—we will not end up mischaracterizing the phenomenology by working with these contents. To the extent that intuition seems to favor standard contents seem intuitive for phenomenological reasons, I don't think this impression withstands careful scrutiny.

³⁶ Elsewhere, I have argued that phenomenal intentionalism also provides a reasonable version of transparency, a uniform account of experiential content across veridical and non-veridical experience,

the suggested epistemology of perception a little further, and locate it in relation to some landmarks, and landmark problems, in epistemological space.

5 Bayesianism, skepticism, and immediacy

A question that can be raised with respect to Pollockianism is the question of whether prima facie justification—be it experiential or from some other source, such as seeming in general—amounts to “immediate justification”, that is, in Pryor’s words, justification “that does not presuppose or rest on your justification for anything else” (Pryor 2000, p. 519). Defenders of dogmatism claim that experiential justification is immediate, and phenomenal conservatives think that justification by seemings in general is so. And what Pryor calls “credulism” (Pryor 2013) is the position of someone who thinks that *at least some* prima facie justification is immediate.

When it comes to perceptual justification, important worries concerning dogmatism concern precisely its relation to Bayesianism. As we already saw, one question is whether Bayesianism even applies to experiential justification. As Moretti (2015, 271ff) points out, it is therefore not at all straightforward for a Bayesian to make trouble for an account of experiential justification such as dogmatism.³⁷ As Moretti also points out, those worrying about the compatibility of dogmatism with Bayesianism implicitly avoid this problem by indeed construing the incoming proposition as a belief content: White (2006), for instance, uses (E)

(E) It appears to me that this is a hand,

where (E) is interpreted as *about experience*. As I have pointed out elsewhere, this move does comply with the difference requirement, but at the price of making introspection, not perception, the source of (the supposedly immediate) justification (Glüer 2016b). Moreover, it is not at all obvious that, or why, we should think that *I have hands* and the introspective proposition *It appears to me that I have hands* have identical justificatory profiles (Moretti 2015a, p. 273). But this would be required to adequately model any “standard Pollockianism” (such as dogmatism).

But there are no such objections to the applicability of Bayesianism to phenomenal Pollockianism. However, this might seem to deliver it right into those objections that White, for instance, tries to raise for dogmatism by way of applying Bayesianism to it. The first of these problems is that the combination of Pollockianism with Bayesianism

Footnote 36 continued

“looks-indexing” of experience content, as well as a neat account of shape-constancy (cf. Glüer 2014, 2016a).

³⁷ As a defence against Bayesian troubles this goes only so far, however. At least for the intentionalist who thinks of experience as a propositional justifier, the resulting overall epistemology would lack the kind of uniformity that one would expect to come with construing the propositional justifiers as including attitudes other than belief. As I argued in the last section, this uniformity makes it at least natural to expect Bayesianism to either cover them as is or to be easily adaptable to do so.

It might be objected that even if we think of experiences as a propositional justifiers, there are very good reasons to think that the Bayesian model cannot be expected to cover them. Bayesianism, after all, is a model for *rational* reasoning, and phenomena like known illusions show that experiences are not subject to the same standards of rationality as beliefs: experience can openly contradict belief without irrationality. Arguing along these lines would beg the question against the phenomenal intentionalist as it is premised on the same content assumption.

has the consequence that an experience as of p provides evidence not only for p but at the very same time for “skeptical alternatives” (of a certain kind) to p . For instance, if p is the proposition *that the lilacs are purple*, the relevant experience does provide evidence for believing that, but at the very same time, it also provides evidence for believing *that the lilacs are white and lighted by purple light*. This is so because the conditional probability of both these propositions given the evidence is higher than their prior probabilities.³⁸ In fact, which hypothesis the subject will get most evidence for depends on their priors.³⁹ This, I think, should be seen as a *feature* of Bayesianism, not a bug. It captures an *observation*, not a problem. It is simply true that if an experience provides evidence for believing p , then it also provides evidence for what we can call p ’s “phenomenal alternatives”, for instance, ways the world immediately around the subject could be that would look precisely the way they look in having that experience.⁴⁰

There might be a problem, however, if what we want is not just phenomenal Pollockianism, but phenomenal dogmatism. Phenomenal dogmatism would claim that the justification provided by an experience-belief that Lp for believing p is *immediate*. The worry here would be exactly parallel to a second worry White tries to raise for standard dogmatism. As White shows, when updating on evidence e the probability of hypothesis p will stay lower than the prior probability of the negation of any phenomenal alternative to p . The worry then is that this shows that in order to get justification for believing p from incoming e the subject would already need to have stronger justification for believing the negation of any phenomenal alternative to p .⁴¹ But if this indeed is a worry, it is a worry for immediacy. Having no stake in immediacy, I am happy to remain a fence-sitter here.

6 Bridge problems

Before concluding, I would like to consider one more set of worries concerning phenomenal intentionalism’s “going Pollockian” for its epistemology of perception. Let’s call these worries “bridge worries”. Bridge worries arise where a proposition p (or set of propositions p_1, \dots, p_n) does provide a sufficiently high degree of probabilification for another proposition q , but this, by itself, does not seem sufficient for belief in p to provide its subject with reasons for believing that q . That something is a *reliable indicator* of something else might be necessary for empirical reasons to be good, or “material inferences” to be valid, but in general it’s not by itself sufficient. For instance: That Paul is red-haired, just by itself, does not seem to be any reason for believing

³⁸ Cf. White (2006, p. 531ff). This isn’t really news, however: The basic observation goes back to Carnap (1950). See also Cohen (2005), Wright (2004, 2007), Spectre (2009) and McGrath (2013) for relevant discussion. The phenomenon is also noted (but welcomed) in Glüer (2014).

³⁹ Thus, this is one more incarnation of a very general problem of Bayesianism—the problem of the priors—not anything specific to Pollockianism.

⁴⁰ What we don’t get this way is *anti-skepticism*: Even though the negation of a phenomenal alternative to p follows from p , it is the probability of the phenomenal alternative that also gets boosted by an experience boosting that of p .

⁴¹ Various ways of defending immediacy have been suggested in the literature; for overviews, see Moretti (2015a, b).

that he is left-handed. This does *not* seem to change on the mere assumption that (unbeknownst to the relevant subject) there in fact is a strong correlation between red hair and left-handedness. It *does* seem to change, however, when the subject knows, or justifiably believes, there to be such a correlation. To put it metaphorically, in cases like this, there is a *gap* between propositions p and q that is in need of bridging in order for belief in p to provide justification for believing q . Moreover, consideration of cases like this suggests that what is required to bridge the gap is not only an evidential relation between p and q but the subject's awareness of such a relation. It might thus seem that in order to secure the kind of justification we are interested in here, subjects will have to have additional (justified) beliefs in what we can call "bridge principles" of some sort wherever an inference is material.

Now, an inference from Lp to p certainly is material. Does this mean that, just by itself, an Lp proposition is as little of a reason for p as Paul's being red-haired, just by itself, is for his being left-handed?⁴² We tried to prevent experience's reasons from stuttering by construing experience content as different from that of basic perceptual belief. But can this really be done—without thereby introducing a gap that will need bridging? The worry is that to prevent experience from stuttering we would have to "silence" it. That would be a bit of a dilemma (cf. Glüer 2014, p. 86ff).

Even though the worry needs to be taken seriously, I don't think there ultimately is a dilemma here. For starters, going Pollockian does not amount to regarding probabilification, by itself, to be sufficient for justification. It also requires the absence of defeaters. Of course, the absence of defeaters would not make a belief that Paul has red hair provide a good reason for believing that he is left-handed, either. But neither was it supposed to. We endorsed Pollockianism for experiential reason providing only. Reasoning from Lp to p is relevantly different from "inferring" left-handedness from red hair, it seems to me.

Thinking of experiential reasons as Pollockian *prima facie* reasons is perfectly in line with our intuitive rationality judgments. Consider Laura. Laura never draws any conclusions about people's handedness from their hair color, and Laura does not (have any (good) reasons to) believe anything that would defeat such inferences, either. Laura does not in any way strike us as odd or irrational. Quite the contrary. But the situation is rather different when it comes to experience and P-belief. Take John. In bright daylight, he looks at a book right in front of him. The book is red, and nothing obstructs John's line of sight. There is nothing wrong with John's eyes, and the surrounding conditions aren't such that experience will be misleading. And John neither believes any of these things, nor does he have reason to. Nevertheless, John does not believe that the book is red. He readily acknowledges that the book does, indeed, look red to him. Asked about defeaters, he denies believing any of them. Nor does he have any good reason to. Yet, he assures us ardently that he does not believe the book to be red. This is immensely odd, and appears quite irrational.

There is a stark contrast between John and Laura: Intuitively, Laura is perfectly justified in not drawing conclusions about people's being left handed from their being red haired, while John's refusal to draw conclusions about the book's redness appears

⁴² Thanks for conversation here to Alex Byrne.

utterly unjustified—in fact, it appears so unjustified that we might start wondering whether John knows what ‘red’ even *means*.⁴³ Some very basic inferential connections, the idea is, just need to be instantiated in a subject’s belief system for such a system to be at all recognizable as a belief system, a system of states with empirical content.⁴⁴ No bridge beliefs are required at this most fundamental level. The presence of a relation of evidential support (of sufficiently high degree) between the relevant propositions is sufficient.

Ultimately, however, the presence of such a relation depends on the way the world actually is. If the world “cooperates”, inferences from Lp to p will be reliable: In the absence of defeaters, we might say, such reasoning is ultimately warranted by its reliability. This much *externalism*, it seems to me, is unavoidable in the theory of empirical justification. Whether we can trust what the senses “tell us” in the end remains hostage to the world. And again, that is just how it is, it seems to me—it’s the human predicament.⁴⁵

⁴³ This might be a way of interpreting Pollock’s own way of distinguishing the prima facie reasons (those that are good unless defeated) from other reasons, which I find not all that easy to understand. On the face of it, he seems to construe the relation between a prima facie reason and what it is a reason for as some sort of *conceptual necessity*. According to him, the prima facie reasons are a subspecies of what he calls the “logically good reasons”:

Many logically good reasons have a certain kind of structure which makes it reasonable to call them *prima facie reasons*. A prima facie reason is a logical reason that is *defeasible*. In other words, a prima facie reason is a reason that by itself would be a good reason for believing something, and would ensure justification, but may cease to be a good reason when taken together with some additional beliefs (Pollock 1974, p. 40).

And Pollock explains what he means by “logical reason” as follows:

Whenever the justified belief-that-P is a good reason for one to believe that Q, *simply by virtue of the meanings of the statements that P and that Q*, we will say that the statement-that-P is a logical reason for believing the statement-that-Q (Pollock 1974, p. 34, *emph. added*).

But while cases like that of John certainly indicate that inferences from experience play an important and central role in the determination of meaning and content, I think it is important to hold on to the idea that these inferences are “contingent” or material.

⁴⁴ This, of course, is an old and fundamental Davidsonian insight. It doesn’t imply, though, that there is any particular list of inferences that always need to be drawn. But to systematically miss a looks-is inference of the kind John misses will appear irrational unless John does indeed believe a defeater. For more on the relation between phenomenal intentionalism and Davidsonian ideas about meaning and content determination, as well as about skepticism, see my (2016). For a defense of the claim that there are no specific meaning constitutive inferences, see my (2003).

⁴⁵ This does mean that in a relevantly non-cooperative world, a subject having an Lp experience who is not aware of any reason against inferring p from Lp nevertheless does not have justification for believing p . This is because in such a world, such an experience not only does not provide any *good* reason for believing p , it doesn’t even provide a prima facie reason for believing p . This result is in line with my intuitions regarding, for instance, demon worlds (for a bit more on this, see Glüer and Wikforss forthcoming). But others have different, more thoroughly internalist intuitions regarding such worlds. These different intuitions, however, can only be accommodated if the basic, non-deductive inferential or evidential relations between propositions themselves are not hostage to the world. As I argued in Sect. 3, these relations must obtain objectively between propositions for two reasons: First, if the “reasons relations” tying a subject’s beliefs into a system were totally subjective, such a system would not be recognizable as a perspective on the world at all. And second, objectivity is required for there to be such a thing as (doxastic) justification to begin with, i.e. a distinction between being justified in forming a belief on the basis of some other belief and just

Moreover, it seems fairly clear that bridge principles wouldn't ultimately be able to help, anyway. Even in cases like the red hair case, where the demand for at least some background beliefs about a connection between indicator and indicated is very plausible, these beliefs will nevertheless not reach all the way across the gap. As long as we are concerned with defeasible reasons, there *simply are no bridge principles that reach all the way*: Requiring belief (or having good reason for believing) in bridge principles leads into the kind of infinite regress familiar from Carroll (1895). Here is one way of illustrating this for inferences from Lp to p : As already observed, there is a (logical) gap between premise and conclusion. The inference thus is *not necessarily truth preserving*. We are trying to close that gap by means of belief in a bridge principle. Now, assume that the bridge principle is an inference schema like (S):

$$(S) \frac{Lp}{p}$$

Using such a schema to guide our inferences can take two forms: either we treat the schema as admitting of exceptions, or we treat it as to be followed in every case. If we treat it as admitting of exceptions, there will be a gap in the application of the schema to any particular instance i : Why is i an instance where the schema will lead to a true conclusion? And if we treat the schema as not admitting of exceptions, there is a gap in the justification of the use of the schema itself: since it is not necessarily truth preserving why should it be followed as if it were? In either case, there is a new gap—a gap of the very same nature as the original gap—in need of closing by means of a further bridge principle. And so on, ad infinitum.⁴⁶

Footnote 45 continued

forming it. This, I think, creates a problem for accommodating thoroughly internalist intuitions regarding justification because it is at least very hard to see how non-deductive inferential relations could be objective in the required sense without being hostage to the world.

⁴⁶ McGrath and Comesaña claim that background beliefs indeed are required for looks-belief to provide reasons for further beliefs. But they seem to think that these are very easy to come by:

On our Propositionalism, one's basic perceptual reasons—in the visual case—are of the form *this looks such and such*. Now, we fully concede that such reason by itself does not give one strong support for *there is a tomato before me*. The subject must 'make up the difference' with background information. But the background information is clearly there. It is information about what tomatoes look like. There is no peculiarity in explaining why someone might believe there is a tomato before her in part because she knows what tomatoes look like. This is plausible partial basis for the belief, unlike a belief in the reliability of experience or even facts about experience (Comesaña and McGrath 2016).

It is indeed more plausible to think that subjects that have looks-beliefs also have beliefs about what tomatoes look like than to think that they invariably have beliefs about the reliability of perceptual experience or some such. But I don't quite see how such beliefs are supposed to bridge the relevant gap here. To unclutter things a bit, let's consider the gap between *this looks F* and *this is a tomato*. Clearly, *tomatoes look F* won't help (undistributed middle). We would need something like *Only tomatoes look F*, but that is of course false. Fake tomatoes, for instance, look F , too. And anything weaker, like *Most things that look F are tomatoes* or *if something looks F, it probably is a tomato* leave precisely the kinds of gaps again that we started with. I agree that subjects competently inferring further beliefs from looks-beliefs do, in some sense, know what things look like. Their very competence with these inferences is sufficient to show that. Moreover, as I argued above, if a subject without any discernible reason whatsoever were not to perform such inferences, we would ultimately conclude that they lack not only knowledge of what F things look like, but the very concept of F -ness. But having that concept, and knowing what F 's look like does not require background belief of the sort envisaged by Comesaña and McGrath, even though sufficiently reflective subjects probably do have such beliefs. Competently making the licensed inferences is sufficient.

This does not have anything in particular to do with the sometimes perceived need for the subject to be aware of their reasons in the strong sense of having (justified) beliefs *about what is a reason for what*. The latter is one of the horns of Bergmann’s “dilemma for the internalist” (Bergmann 2006): Requiring awareness of reasons in the strong sense, Bergmann argues, generates the need for an infinity of awareness attitudes stacked on top on one another. Note that this kind of regress is vicious in the sense that it might overtax our cognitive capacities. The kind of regress I am generating is of the (more clearly vicious) kind where even an infinity of further principles will not get you where you wanted to get. The further requirement of thinking of the premise in (S) *as a reason* for the conclusion is not needed in order to generate the regress. The other horn of Bergmann’s dilemma is the so-called “subject’s perspective objection”, an objection first raised by BonJour (BonJour 1985, p. 41ff) against *externalist* notions of justification: Bergmann claims that an internalist not requiring subjects to have strong awareness of their reasons will end up with having reasons for beliefs the truth of which is merely accidental from the subject’s own perspective. This is the kind of objection motivating the demand for the subject’s having some background belief as to the relevant connection for instance in cases like the red hair case. Now, phenomenal Pollockianism isn’t purely internalist in any case—as I have developed it, phenomenal Pollockianism is built upon on a relation of probabilification the presence of which depends on how the world actually is. So, Bergmann’s dilemma isn’t ours. The subject’s perspective objection might of course nevertheless apply. But we implicitly already saw why it doesn’t: If it was possible that the truth of p systematically appears to be totally accidental to someone having experience-beliefs that Lp , nothing would hinder them from being just like John in the example above—without appearing subjectively irrational at all. But that is not the case. Rather, for someone like John it is not clear that they even *have* a perspective on the relevant part of the world.

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