

# Experience and Defeat\*

## Introduction

We can agree that our experiences sometimes justify our beliefs, while still disagreeing about how our experiences do so. In this paper, I will clarify and adjudicate an important debate about the role of background information in the justification of belief by experience. I'll focus on visual experiences and external world beliefs.<sup>i</sup>

The parties in the debate agree that, when our experiences justify our beliefs, they do so *defeasibly*. For example, suppose your visual experience initially justifies you in raising your confidence that two lines are of different lengths. You could then cease to be justified in being confident up to that level when it is explained to you that the lines are of the same length despite looking to be of different lengths. To a first approximation, when an experience gives you justification to believe some external world proposition that P, it's always possible for you to gain justification to believe some defeating hypothesis H, and thereby have less justification to believe that P. (We'll soon say a lot more about which hypotheses are defeating hypotheses, and about exactly what defeating hypotheses do).

The disagreement in the debate is about the role of background information when experiences justify beliefs. According to the *Conservative*, an experience never gives one any justification to believe that P on its own, but rather does so only in conjunction with one's independent reason to reject defeating hypotheses about the experience (Bonjour 1985, Wright 1985, 2000).<sup>ii</sup> On this view, experience is like a gas gauge: experience provides justification only in combination with information that it is not malfunctioning. But which defeating hypotheses exactly must one be able to reasonably reject? For now I will simply say, *all* hypotheses which are defeaters of the experience, and will use the following formulation of the view:

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\* *Acknowledgments omitted*

**(Conservatism1):** For any defeater D of one's experience E with the content P, if E provides one with justification to believe P, then E does so partly in virtue of one's having independent justification to believe not-D.

In what follows, however, it will take careful work to refine the formulation of Conservatism.

The rival view we will consider is much easier to capture. According to the *Liberal*, the Conservative is entirely mistaken. The Liberal allows that experiences sometimes give us justification for beliefs about the external world in a way that doesn't happen in virtue of one's having independent reason to believe any claim. In other words, our experiences sometimes give us *immediate* justification for external world beliefs (Pollock 1974, Pryor 2000).<sup>iii</sup>

The dispute is important. At stake is whether experiences provide us with a special kind of justification, different from the kind we get from gas gauges, thermometers, and the like. Given the focus on whether experiences are a basic source of justification, also at stake is whether a moderate foundationalist view of empirical justification can be brought off the ground.<sup>iv</sup>

My primary aim in this paper is to articulate a tempting argument for the Conservative position, and to explain where the argument goes wrong. The strategy of the argument is to reveal how experiences succeed in justifying beliefs by looking at special cases in which they fail. In broad outline, the idea is that we should believe the Conservative view because it best explains the defeasibility of experiences. In particular, consider that for any given defeating hypothesis, we can ask why it is a defeater.<sup>v</sup> The idea is that we should believe Conservatism because, for each defeater of an experience, it gives the best explanation of why it is a defeater.<sup>vi</sup>

Let's call the argument for Conservatism the *defeasibility argument*. In the course of seeing why it fails, we will shed positive light on how our experiences in fact do justify our beliefs, by providing a better account of defeaters than that given by the Conservative.

A secondary aim of this paper is simply to clarify the Conservative view, by trying to identify the background beliefs which are crucial to perceptual justification

according to the view. We will need to work through a number of alternative formulations to understand which one is the best. This work will reveal unacknowledged kinds of bad news one can get which play a defeating role. So we will clarify the ways in which experiences can be defeated in addition to clarifying the Conservative view.

Before developing the defeasibility argument in any detail, we should understand why the argument deserves our attention.

First, the argument is an attractive although under-discussed defense of the Conservatism. On the face of things, the Conservative has the advantage in accounting for defeaters of experiences. It seems clear that, if your experience justifies your belief in virtue of your having independent reason to reject a hypothesis, then of course you will lose justification from the experience if you gain justification to believe the hypothesis. It's much less clear what the Liberal may say here to account for defeaters of experiences. So it's surprising that Conservatives have not advanced the argument in print (as far as I am aware).

Second, the argument is more promising than any other available argument for the Conservative view. To my mind, the next most promising argument for Conservatism proceeds in probabilistic terms (White 2006).<sup>vii</sup> This argument is focused on any defeater  $D$  such that (i)  $D$  entails  $E$  [that one has an experience with the content  $P$ ], and (ii)  $D$  is inconsistent with  $P$ . For example, consider the defeating hypothesis that [you have an experience with the content *o is red* when  $o$  is not red]. The argument aims to exploit the fact that, since  $D$  predicts  $E$ , you become at least somewhat more confident in  $D$  when you learn  $E$ , and hence at least somewhat less confident in  $\neg D$  when you learn  $E$ .<sup>viii</sup>

We can set aside the details of how the probabilistic argument works.<sup>ix</sup> The problem is that it does not seem general enough to get us to Conservatism itself. Some defeating hypotheses, such as the unspecific hypothesis that one is having some experience or another which is inaccurate, do not entail or even confirm that one has any particular experience. If the Conservative demands that one have independent justification to reject such defeating hypotheses, as they typically do, Conservatism cannot be established just by using the probabilistic argument. The defeasibility argument, on the other hand, has the generality the Conservative needs. So the defeasibility argument is a much more promising source of support for the view.<sup>x</sup>

Finally, the question of how to account for defeaters of experiences is important and interesting aside from the Liberalism/Conservatism dispute. Evaluating the defeasibility argument will permit us to address this question, which is rarely addressed by philosophers on either side of the dispute (or by philosophers on neither side of the dispute). By taking up the question, we will learn about how experiences positively do justify beliefs. Regardless of whether the defeasibility argument establishes its conclusion, then, the Conservative is right to think that we can learn about how experiences succeed by looking at how they fail. And since the defeasibility argument connects the Conservative view with the question of how to account for defeaters, the argument will at least establish the significance of the view.

To assess the defeasibility argument, we first need to see exactly what it is. I will give a rough statement of the argument in section 1. In section 2, I will gradually refine our understanding both of the argument and of the Conservative view, by distinguishing different cases of defeaters, and by bringing out the limitations of the Conservative approach in making sense of them. Now it is one thing to undermine the argument for Conservatism, and another to answer the core question which drives the argument. In section 3, I will provide a better positive account of defeaters of experiences, one which can be readily accepted by the Liberal.

## **1. The Argument**

### **What's To Be Explained**

The argument for Conservatism is an inference to the best explanation. To understand the argument thoroughly, we need to start with a proper description of what's to be explained.<sup>xi</sup>

First, it's one thing to say that a justifier (something that gives you justification for a belief) is defeasible, another to say that a justifier is fallible. When my visual experience that *o* is red justifies me in believing that something is red, my experience gives me defeasible justification to believe that something is red. Nevertheless, it might still be that, for content externalist reasons, it is impossible for me to have an experience

with the content *o* is red unless it is true that something is red. Perhaps I am able to have an experience with the content that *o* is red only if I have interacted with something's redness. In such a case the defeasible justifier of my belief would be infallible, in the sense that it would be impossible for me to have the experience when the belief it justifies is false. At the very least, the notion of defeasibility is different from the notion of fallibility.<sup>xii</sup>

Second, I should clarify what happens when one gains information in favor of a defeating hypothesis. A defeater need not decrease one's total degree of justification for the belief, even if one's evidence in favor of the defeating hypothesis is itself undefeated (contrast e.g. Pollock and Cruz 1999, 195).

To take one example, consider the hypothesis that I am *veridically* hallucinating that there is a circle in front of me. If I am veridically hallucinating that there is a circle in front of me, then I am hallucinating that there is a circle in front of me while there in fact is an unseen circle in front of me.<sup>xiii</sup> Although this hypothesis entails that there is a circle in front of me, it is still a defeater of my visual experience with the content that there is a circle in front of me. If I receive information that my experience that *p* is a veridical hallucination that *p*, my experience is to some degree discredited. Compare: if you were to gain evidence that your memory of childhood summer camp was implanted--when you were a child, in a grim summer camp--the memory would be to some extent discredited as a source of justification to believe that you went to summer camp as a child. In these cases, however, the content of one's experience or memory is not itself disconfirmed. In the experience case, I need not end up with less justification to believe that there is a circle in front of me, and could even end up with more justification for the belief, if my evidence in favor of the defeating hypothesis were sufficiently good. In such a scenario, the hypothesis has played the role of a defeater, without decreasing my overall degree of justification to believe that there is a circle in front of me.<sup>xiv</sup>

To see what defeaters of experiences do, notice that, even if my overall justification to believe that there is a circle in front of me remains fixed or increases, there is still a negative impact on the justification supplied by my experience to believe that there is a circle in front of me. In general, when a hypothesis is a defeater of an experience, gaining information in favor of it has a negative impact on the justification

that the experience confers on a content, whether or not gaining information in favor of the hypothesis decreases one's total degree of justification for the content. That is what defeaters of experiences do.<sup>xv</sup>

## The Explanation

Now that we have a sharper sense of what defeaters are and what they do, we may sketch how a Conservative explanation of them might run. Note that this is just a start: in the next section we will refine both the Conservative view and its treatment of defeaters.

The first step is simply to acknowledge that perceptual justification is defeasible.<sup>xvi</sup> Simplifying somewhat, the Conservative needs to endorse the following claim to set out the defeasibility argument:

**(Defeasibility):** When one's experience gives one justification to believe P partly in virtue of one's having independent justification to believe Q, one's independent justification to believe Q is defeasible.<sup>xvii</sup>

The next step is to claim that, when you have some degree of independent justification to reject defeating hypotheses about your experience, that sets a ceiling for how much justification you acquire from the experience. In particular,

**(Ceiling):** If one's experience E gives one justification to believe that P to degree n, then for any defeater D of E, one has independent justification to believe not-D at least to degree n.

Let's now start to set out the explanation using this claim. Again, we will refine the story in what follows.

The rough lesson from Ceiling is that, when you form a belief on the basis of an experience, you rely on various background beliefs, and you can't rationally have a greater confidence on the basis of your experience than you have in the various background propositions you believe. Now add that you are only defeasibly justified in having these various background beliefs. Then, to a first approximation, whenever there is a drop of the ceiling of the degree to which one may disbelieve a defeater of an

experience, there will also be a drop of the ceiling of the degree to which one may be confident on the basis of the experience.<sup>xviii</sup>

That's a first step to get the Conservative story, but more work is needed. To put the problem very roughly, a ceiling can drop a bit without yet hitting your head.

Suppose you have justification from an experience to believe that *p*, and then you lose some justification to reject a hypothesis which is a defeater of the experience. If the experience justified you in believing that *p* to degree *n*, the experience is defeated only if you become justified in rejecting the hypothesis only to some degree *lower* than *n*. Since you could have been more justified in rejecting the hypothesis than in believing that *p*, there could be a decrease in your justification to reject the defeater without a decrease in the justification you get from the experience. For example, one might have started out with an extraordinary assurance that one would not hallucinate (where one fails to see anything), while having only an ordinary assurance that one would not be in a case of illusion (where one does see things while standardly misperceiving them). Here one might reasonably become a little more confident that one is hallucinating without losing any justification from the experience for one's external world belief.

Let's now start to improve on the Conservative story.

Consider any case in which one starts out being justified by an experience in being confident that *p* to degree *n*, and then ceases to be justified in rejecting some defeating hypothesis to any degree greater than or equal to *n*. According to Ceiling, when one's independent justification to believe that a defeating hypothesis is false drops below *n*, the degree of justification conferred by one's experience to believe *P* will itself drop below *n* as well. Whenever the ceiling of the degree to which one may reject the defeater falls below the first ceiling of the degree of the perceptual belief, the first ceiling will drop as well.

Here we have an explanation of why, other things being equal, when you gain evidence in favor of a hypothesis which is a defeater of your experience, your experience gives you less justification for your belief.<sup>xix</sup>

According to the argument for Conservatism, as developed so far, the simplest and best account of defeaters of experiences is in terms of Ceiling. So far, though, we don't yet have an explicit argument for the view. The further thought is that only the

Conservative is in a position to endorse Ceiling and to provide this explanation. In particular, Conservatism plausibly itself must be accepted in order to explain why Ceiling itself is correct. On the other hand, the Liberal arguably cannot accept Ceiling and therefore cannot accept the best explanation available. The upshot would then be that we have reason to believe Conservatism, insofar as it is a commitment of the best explanation of the phenomenon in question.

## **2. Challenging the Conservative Argument**

Let's now evaluate the initial argument for Conservatism. The argument for the view and the view itself need to be refined in a number of ways. The main problem is that, as it stands, the Conservative view is far too demanding. One doesn't need justification to reject each defeater of an experience in order to gain justification from the experience. In the course of improving the Conservative view, I will show that none of the most promising refinements result in a viable defeasibility argument.

Let me first mention an important line of objection I won't pursue here. The argument so far assumes that only the Conservative can accept the Ceiling thesis. However, the Ceiling thesis is merely a claim about a necessary condition for experiences to justify beliefs. The Ceiling thesis does not yet explicitly concern the conditions in virtue of which one has perceptual justification. The issues are different: every necessary truth is a necessary condition for experiences to justify beliefs, but not every necessary truth is a condition in virtue of which experiences justify beliefs. It thus remains a live option for the Liberal to accept the Ceiling thesis, while rejecting Conservatism itself.

For present purposes we can bracket the question of how to get from the Ceiling thesis to Conservatism itself. We can show that the defeasibility argument does not establish the Ceiling thesis, indeed we can show that the Ceiling thesis is false.

To refine the Conservative position and the argument for it, we need to take a closer look at what sorts of defeaters there are. I'll start by reviewing a standard distinction between two types of defeaters. I'll then show that, for each type, we should not give a Conservative treatment to all defeaters of the type. The Conservative view itself needs to be restricted.



## **A Distinction**

The key distinction for our purposes is between “rebutting” and “undercutting” defeaters (Pollock and Cruz 1999). I will introduce the distinction with some useful examples and slogans.

Let’s start with some examples of rebutting defeaters. When my justification for believing that it’s noon is that John said so, a rebutting defeater of the justification is that Mary said that it’s not noon. Or when my justification for believing that the cereal costs \$3 is that it has a price tag of \$3, a rebutting defeater of the justification is that the register reads \$3.45 when the box is scanned. In a slogan: rebutting defeaters *oppose*.<sup>xx</sup>

Let’s now see some examples of undercutting defeaters. When John tells me that it’s noon, an undercutting defeater of my justification to believe that it’s noon is that he formed his belief by looking at his broken watch. When I’m relying on the price tag on the box, an undercutting defeater of my justification to believe that the box of cereal costs \$3 is that a child is running around in the supermarket with a price-tagging gun. In a slogan: undercutting defeaters *discredit*. (Notice that defeaters can themselves be subject to defeat in either of these ways).

It’s difficult to capture the distinction sketched above precisely.<sup>xxi</sup> Since we don’t need to in order to evaluate the Conservative argument, we may proceed by keeping an eye on the key examples and slogans which illustrate the distinction.<sup>xxii</sup>

## **Rebutting Defeaters**

We should not give a Conservative treatment to all rebutting defeaters. Notice that, when my experience gives me justification to believe P, the hypothesis that not-P is a rebutting defeater of my experience. However, it would be absurd to expect that, in order for your experience to give you justification to believe P, you must have independent reason to believe not-not-P. If such a demand were legitimate, we could never gain new information from our experiences, since we would need independent reason to believe P in order to get any reason from them to believe P!

The Conservative position must be somehow restricted.<sup>xxiii</sup>

## Undercutting Defeaters

A natural suggestion is that the Conservative view should be reformulated as follows:

**(Conservatism<sub>2</sub>):** For any undercutting but not rebutting defeater D of one's experience E with the content P, if E provides one with justification to believe P, then E does so partly in virtue of one's having independent justification to believe not-D.<sup>xxiv</sup>

The new formulation is an improvement, but it's still not good enough. We can start to see why by considering the important related case of defeasible a priori justification.

Philosophers allow for the possibility of one's having a justification which is itself a priori in character, although it can be defeated by empirical information (e.g. Burge 1993). They seem right in so doing. For example, if I proceed carefully in constructing a proof of some mathematical statement M, and in fact succeed in proving the statement, I have at least some a priori justification to believe the statement. Nevertheless, if I gain misleading empirical evidence from an expert that my attempt to construct a proof failed, my a priori justification to believe the statement is undermined to at least some degree.

We should allow for the possibility of a priori justifications which are empirically defeasible. We cannot do so if we give a Conservative treatment of all undercutters which are not rebutters (in what follows I will simply speak of "undercutters", leaving it as understood that we are only concerned with undercutters which do not also rebut).

In the case under consideration, that Expert believes that I failed to construct a proof is an undercutting defeater. To see why we should not provide a Conservative account of it, we can set up the problem as a dilemma. Either the independent justification demanded by a Conservative treatment is a priori, or it is not (I'll say that a justification is empirical just in case it is not a priori). Either way a Conservative account of the defeater is in trouble.

Suppose one has a priori justification to believe a mathematical statement, and a Conservative demands that one have empirical justification to reject an undercutter of the priori justification. If the justification demanded by the Conservative is empirical, then experience plays some role in giving one that justification to reject the undercutter. Further, if a Conservative treatment of the undercutter is correct, then part of what makes one have the justification to believe the mathematical statement itself is that one has the empirical justification to reject the undercutter. But then one would fail to have a priori justification to believe the statement.<sup>xxv</sup>

On the other horn of the dilemma, the Conservative will demand that one have a priori justification to reject the defeater. The problem is that this excessively stretches our conception of what one has a priori justification for. The defeater in question is that Expert believes that I failed to construct a proof. So one would need an a priori justification for a belief about Expert's state of mind. Such a justification seems impossible to have.<sup>xxvi</sup>

We shouldn't give a Conservative treatment to all undercutters of a priori justifications, and there is therefore pressure on the Conservative to explain why we should treat undercutting defeaters of experiences differently. Until we hear a good story about the difference between the a priori case and the perceptual case, the defeasibility argument for Conservatism won't be convincing. It looks like a mistake to account for undercutting defeaters in Conservative terms.<sup>xxvii</sup>

There is also a more direct problem for the current statement of Conservatism. We can bring it out by looking more closely at the case of perceptual justification. Consider the hypothesis that my experiences are not in general reliable. This hypothesis is a textbook example of an undercutting defeater, and it certainly seems to be an example of an undercutting defeater which is not a rebutting defeater. However, it is false that I must have independent justification to reject it in order to gain justification from my experiences. Somewhat surprisingly, even a Conservative should not demand that one have independent reason to reject such a hypothesis. To see the point, consider a possible case in which it is 50/50 that my experiences are in general reliable, but I am still assured that my next experience will be an optimal case of perception of the world (as opposed to any kind of case of illusion or hallucination). Given that I do have

independent reason in such a case to believe that my next experience will be a good case of perception, we should all be able to agree that I will gain justification from my next experience (we can, if you like, also build in that my experiences in fact are reliable, that my next experience will in fact be accurate, and so on).<sup>xxviii</sup> In such a case, however, the hypothesis that my experiences are not in general reliable can still act as a defeater: evidence that my experiences are not in general reliable can still damage the amount of justification I gain from my experience. After all, I might gain evidence that my experiences are not in general reliable in a way which also affects my confidence that my next experience will be a good case of perception.

Even the Conservative should agree that, in some cases, I gain justification from my experience despite lacking independent reason to believe that my experiences are in general reliable.

The revised formulation of Conservatism is false in addition to being unmotivated. We should not give a Conservative treatment to all defeaters which are undercutters though not rebutters.

How then should we understand the Conservative view? It's natural to move to a formulation which is even more restricted than the previous ones:

**(Conservatism3):** Necessarily, if one's experience E gives one justification to believe that P, then E does so partly in virtue of one's having independent justification to believe that, if one has E, then P.

This proposal is actually not focused on ruling out defeaters, but rather on one's having independent reason to believe that things are the way they seem to be. This formulation focuses on one's reason to believe that one's experience is reliable, using a narrow construal of "reliable". What matters here is one's confidence that the justifying experience is accurate, setting aside the reliability of one's experiences overall.

The formulation has important advantages over the previous ones.

First, and most straightforwardly, the new formulation allows that one can gain justification from an experience one has without having reason to believe that one's experiences are in general reliable. So the formulation avoids the mistake made by the previous formulation.

A further advantage of this formulation is that it has explanatory power. In the example above, the hypothesis that my experiences are in general unreliable acts as a defeater, in spite of the fact that I do not need to have independent reason to reject it. However, the new formulation explains why the hypothesis is a defeater, since the hypothesis still serves as evidence against the claim that, if I have the relevant experience, then P. Here we can explain why a hypothesis is a defeater in Conservative terms without demanding that one have independent reason to reject that very defeater. Since the new formulation manages to explain why some hypotheses are defeaters while avoiding the excessive demands made by previous formulations, the new formulation results in a much more viable version of the defeasibility argument.

More generally, the formulation gives us an informative sufficient condition for a hypothesis to be a defeater. The proposal would be that, if an experience justifies me in believing to degree  $n$  that P, and gaining evidence for a hypothesis H requires me to reduce my confidence to some degree below  $n$  in the proposition that I have the experience only if P, then H is a defeater of the experience. Here we have a significant advantage of the current formulation over previous ones, which did not give us information about which hypotheses are defeaters and which are not.

Despite the advantages of the new formulation, it has a major problem: it is of only limited value in explaining why defeaters of experiences are defeaters. The problem arises because there's a whole range of defeaters which do not disconfirm the claim that, if you have an experience with the content that p, then p. The sufficient condition proposed by the Conservative does not extend to these cases.

One case already seen is that of veridical hallucination. When you gain evidence that you are having a veridical hallucination that p, your experience is to some extent defeated, but there's by no means any defeat of your confidence that you have the experience only if p. By the Conservative's lights, then, gaining evidence in favor of the hypothesis does nothing to the ceiling of how confident you may be given your experience. So it's unclear why the hypothesis should be a defeater given the Conservative view.<sup>xxix</sup>

For further tricky cases of defeaters, we should also consider various ways in which you might gain evidence that you are not having an experience with the content

that  $p$  at all. Most straightforwardly, you might gain evidence that your judgments are unreliable in tracking the contents of your experiences. For example, you might gain evidence that, when you are inclined to judge that something is navy blue in front of you, apparently on the basis of taking your experience at face value, you in fact tend to not be having an experience with the content that something is navy blue in front of you. Perhaps you learn that you most often judge that something is navy blue when you have experiences of blackness. I take it that, when one gains evidence of the unreliability of one's judgments in this way, there is a drop in the amount of justification you have from your experience to believe that there is something navy blue in front of you. In such a case, however, you gain no reason to doubt that, *if* you are having an experience that something navy blue is in front of you, then something navy blue is in front of you. Your doubt is instead focused on whether you have the experience in question at all. So the modified formulation of Conservatism, as improved as it, does not explain why the hypothesis is a defeater.<sup>xxx</sup>

So far we have seen cases of defeaters which the Conservative view does not explain. The difficulty raised by these cases is even worse for a natural strengthening of the Conservative view. On the Conservative picture we have so far, an experience justifies a belief only if the experience is certified as reliable in a certain narrow sense of "reliable". On the natural strengthening of this picture, an experience justifies a belief *if* the experience is certified as reliable. This extension of the view predicts that the veridical hallucination hypothesis is not a defeater, and it predicts that the poor judgment hypothesis is not a defeater. The extended view doesn't simply fail to explain why the hypotheses are defeaters, the view instead has the false consequence that the hypotheses are not defeaters.

The discussion in this section has been intricate. Let's sum it up.

We saw that, as initially formulated, the Conservative view was far too strong. No one should say that we need independent reason in advance to discount every defeater of an experience: taking that position ends up ruling out that we gain new information from our experiences at all. We then improved on the Conservative view, and the defeasibility argument for it, in a couple of steps. The first improvement focused on all

defeaters which discredit one's experience (without rebutting one's experience). This formulation was also too demanding: one does not even need independent reason in advance to discount every hypothesis which discredits one's experience. The next and best formulation focused on one's independent reason to believe that a particular justifying experience is accurate. Still, even the best formulation of the view fails to explain why important cases of defeaters are defeaters.

The defeasibility argument, as initially presented, fails. It's not true that, for each defeater, Conservatism gives the best explanation of why it is a defeater. There are important defeaters which the view does nothing to explain.

However, the defeasibility argument is not yet blocked. The possibility remains that, for some defeater, Conservatism gives the best explanation of why it is a defeater. This would be enough to give us at least some reason to believe the Conservative view. To block this possibility, let's now see how we can do better than the Conservative in shedding light on the defeasibility of experiences.

### **Section 3. The alternative explanation**

Our current aim is to give an account of defeaters of experiences which is more general than that given by the Conservative, without committing ourselves to the Conservative view. I'll set out such an account in two stages. I'll first discuss the case of defeating hypotheses which are incompatible with the contents of one's experiences, since this case can be given a straightforward treatment of its own. I'll then discuss the less straightforward case of defeating hypotheses which are compatible with the contents of one's experiences.

#### **The case of defeaters incompatible with P**

One family of defeaters of experiences consists of hypotheses which are incompatible with the contents of our experiences. We can think of these defeaters as *falsifiers*. For example, when it looks to one as if the table is red, the hypothesis that the

table is white but lit by red lights is a falsifier of one's experience, since it entails that the table is not red.

There is a simple explanation of why falsifiers are defeaters which does not commit us to Conservatism. The key is that falsifiers can easily be assimilated to the familiar case of "rebutting" defeaters. Other things being equal, when you acquire evidence in favor of a falsifier, you acquire evidence against the content of your experience, given the incompatibility between the falsifier and your experience. For example, when I am credibly told that the table is white but lit by red lights, I gain evidence that the table is not red. This is because, other things being equal, if the rational response to some evidence is to increase your confidence in H, and H entails not-P, the rational response to the evidence will also be to lower your confidence in P.<sup>xxx</sup> So we should expect that, when you acquire evidence in favor of a falsifier, you lose justification to believe the content of your experience.

Here we have a straightforward explanation of why falsifiers are defeaters, one which does not in any way commit us to the Conservative view.

### **Neutral defeaters and verifying defeaters**

There are defeaters of perceptual evidence that P which are compatible with its being the case that P. Some defeaters, such as the hypothesis that one is hallucinating that P, or that one is prone to hallucinations, neither entail P nor entail not-P. We can think of these hypotheses as *neutral* defeaters. Other defeaters, such as the hypothesis that one is veridically hallucinating that P, themselves entail P. We can think of these hypotheses as *verifying* defeaters.

We can give a new story to account for these defeaters which also does not commit us to Conservatism. To give the story, I'll state an important fact about defeaters, and then show how to explain the fact.

The fact in question is a necessary and sufficient condition for a hypothesis to be a defeater of an experience. Since the fact concerns the relation between defeaters of experiences and the hypothesis that one is seeing that p, I should give a bit of background about the intended sense of "seeing that p" before stating the fact. First, when I speak of



“seeing that p”, I have in mind a distinctively visual propositional attitude such that, if one bears it to the proposition that p, then p. Thus if someone is said to “see that 19 is a prime number”, they will not see that 19 is a prime number in the sense I have in mind. Second, largely for the sake of simplicity, I will take it that one can bear the attitude in question to a proposition even if one does not know that p. Thus for example someone who has not noticed that there is a red patch in front of them might still see that there is a red patch in front of them.<sup>xxxii</sup>

Let me now state the important fact about defeaters. Notice that, even if a defeating hypothesis fails to disconfirm that p, when one has an experience with the content that p, the hypothesis does disconfirm that one is seeing that p. For example, when one’s justified confidence goes up that one is veridically hallucinating that p, one’s justified confidence will go down that one is seeing that p, even if one’s justified confidence that p does not. Or when one’s justified confidence goes up that one’s experiences are unreliable, and one loses justification from one’s experience to believe that p, one’s justified confidence will go down that one is seeing that p. Here it looks like, when a hypothesis is a defeater of one’s experience, the hypothesis is evidence one is not seeing that p when one has the experience. Conversely, when an experience with the content that p gives one some justification to believe that p, and a hypothesis gives one evidence that one is not seeing that p, that hypothesis acts as a defeater of one’s experience. It looks then like the following generalization is true:

**(Clue):** When one has an experience E with the content that p which gives one justification to believe that p, a hypothesis H is a defeater of some justification given by E for one to believe that p just in case H is evidence that one is not seeing that p.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

An alternative account of defeaters of experiences can exploit this significant fact. The Liberal can explain the fact about defeaters by endorsing the following claim:

**(Ceiling2):** If one has an experience E with the content that p, and E gives one immediate justification to believe to degree n that p, then one has justification to believe to degree n that one is seeing that p.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

The thesis is a ceiling thesis for perceptual justification, saying that an experience with the content that p can give one no more immediate justification to believe that p than one has justification to believe that one is seeing that p. If the claim is true, evidence that one is not seeing that p is bound to act as a defeater of one's experience with the content that p. If it comes to be that one only has justification to believe to some lesser degree n' that one is seeing that p, one will likewise then only have immediate justification from one's experience to believe to the lesser degree n' to believe that p. This ceiling thesis makes sense of Clue.

By making sense of Clue, the Liberal makes sense of defeaters themselves, in a way which is more general than the account given by the Conservative. Here it is helpful to revisit the cases which were problem cases for the defeasibility argument. First, we can explain why the veridical hallucination hypothesis is a defeater, given that evidence in favor of it is evidence that one is not seeing that p, and evidence that one is not seeing that p will lower one's immediate justification from one's experience to believe that p. Second, we can also explain why the hypothesis that [one's color judgments about navy blue are unreliable] is a defeater, given that evidence in favor of it is likewise evidence that one is not seeing that something is navy blue, and evidence that one is not seeing that something is navy blue tends to lower the ceiling of the immediate justification stemming from one's experience. Here we have an account of defeaters which handles the hard cases as well as the simple ones.

The Liberal can further explain the ceiling thesis by endorsing the following claim:

**(Source):** If one has an experience E with the content that p, and E gives one immediate justification to believe to degree n that p, then E gives one justification to believe to degree n that one is seeing that p.

The ceiling thesis was silent about the source of one's justification to believe that one is seeing that p, the current thesis is not. According to the current claim, experiences do not merely have the capacity to give us immediate justification for beliefs about the external world, but instead also have the capacity to give us justification for beliefs about the internal world. The claim should be accepted, given that it make sense of the Ceiling

thesis and of Clue. The Liberal can give a principled account of the connection between the immediate justification one gets from an experience to believe that *p*, and the justification one has to believe one sees that *p*.

One might doubt whether an experience as of *p* could justify one in believing that one sees that *p*. One question is whether an experience as of *p* is even a legitimate candidate to do such a thing, given that the proposition that one sees that *p* does not purely concern how things appear to oneself. The proposition that one sees that *p* indeed has implications about how the external world is, for instance it entails that *p*. However, according to the Liberal, an experience as of *p* is already capable of giving you immediate justification for an external world proposition, namely the proposition that *p*. Once you accept that your experience as of *p* can give immediate justification to believe some external world proposition that *p*, your experience should look like a good candidate to give justification to believe an internal world proposition with implications about how the external world is. Given that the experience does not merely justify one in a belief about how things appear, it should be capable of justifying one in a belief about what one genuinely sees.

There remains the question of exactly *how* an experience as of *p* might give one justification to believe one sees that *p*. Here it is helpful to contrast the case of visual experience with the case of visual imagination. In particular, contrast imagining a white page with a black dot on it, on the one hand, with the visual experience you have when you genuinely see a white page with a black dot on it, on the other. When you have the visual experience, there being a black dot on the page is presented to you in a very different way from imagination. Very roughly speaking, your visual experience has a revelatory character, it purports to reveal how the world is, whereas your imagination does not. There is a further question about exactly how the revelatory character of visual experience is to be understood. If you can imagine the same simple scene you might experience, the revelatory character of visual experience is presumably a matter of attitude rather than content. In any case I set aside how to analyse the revelatory character of visual experience.<sup>xxxv</sup> The crucial claim here is that the revelatory character of experience is a good candidate to explain how an experience as of *p* can justify one in believing one sees that *p*.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

In sum, the Liberal can explain defeaters, and indeed can explain a wider range of defeaters than the Conservative.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

## **Conclusion**

According to the strategy of the defeasibility argument, we can learn about how experiences succeed in providing justification by looking at cases in which they fail to provide justification. This strategy is fruitful. In the previous section, we gained reason to believe that, whether or not one must in fact see that *p* to gain justification from an experience, an experience with the content that *p* can give one no more immediate justification to believe that *p* than it gives one to believe that one is seeing that *p*. However, the strategy of the defeasibility argument is not fruitful for the Conservative. It's a mistake to demand that one have independent reason to reject every defeater of an experience, and less demanding versions of Conservatism still fail to make sense of all key cases of defeaters.

The Liberal, on the other hand, can account for a wider range of defeaters than the Conservative. The defeasibility argument for the Conservatism is therefore blocked, in a way which nevertheless sheds light on how experiences justify beliefs. In the course of evaluating the argument, we've also learned how the Conservative view should be properly understood, and we've also learned about how defeaters in general should be understood: a hypothesis can play the role of a defeater without requiring a drop in one's degree of belief.

The Liberal view maintains that experiences are a basic source of justification, unlike gas gauges, thermometers, and the rest. One might have thought that this view cannot account for the defeasibility of experiences. For the Liberal view, however, there is no agony in defeat.

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<sup>i</sup> For convenience I will speak of experiences as having representational contents, and as having contents that can be shared with beliefs. For debate of the first point, see Travis (2005), Brewer (2008) and Siegel (forthcoming). For debate of the second point, see Brewer (2005), Byrne (2005) and Speaks (2007). It should be possible (although inconvenient) to adapt all formulations in the paper so as to be neutral with respect to those debates.

<sup>ii</sup> I'm using the terminology of Pryor (2004).

Further defenses of the Conservative view are in Wright (2002, 2008), Cohen (2002), Davies (1998, 2000, 2003), and White (2006).

<sup>iii</sup> Further defenses of the Liberal view can be found in Pryor (2004), Burge (1993, 2003), or Huemer (2001, 2007).

<sup>iv</sup> The Liberal view has also been thought to have great significance with respect to skepticism. For discussion of how the Liberal view might be relevant to the resolution of at least one skeptical problem, see Pryor (2000), Wright (2002), and *omitted*.

Some further clarifications of the Liberal view. First, the view as I have stated it says that experiences sometimes give one some non-inferential justification, but the view is silent about how much justification one gets from them. I think experiences give us

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enough non-inferential justification to believe some propositions outright, rather than merely to boost one's credence a little bit, but we can leave the issue open in what follows. Second, the Liberal view is not the negation of the Conservative view. This means that the falsehood of one does not strictly entail the truth of the other. In particular, if one's experiences justify beliefs only in virtue of one's having reason to hold background beliefs, but the relevant background beliefs are different from those ultimately highlighted by the Conservative, then both the Liberal view and Conservative view will be false. That said, I will usually ignore positions which are incompatible with both views. Third, Liberalism (like Conservatism) does not give any sufficient condition for experiences to justify beliefs. The Liberal view does not say that, if you have an experience, in the absence of defeaters, then some external world belief is justified by that experience. The Conservative view does not say that, if you have an experience, in the absence of defeaters, with appropriately justified background beliefs, then some external world belief is justified by that experience. On either view further requirements, such as reliability requirements, might need to be met.

<sup>v</sup> It may well be that not only hypotheses are defeaters. Perhaps some experiences are themselves defeaters too. For the purposes of this paper, we can restrict our attention to defeating hypotheses.

<sup>vi</sup> There are actually several related questions in the vicinity, which we can enumerate as follows:

- (1) Which hypotheses are defeaters?
- (2) Why are they defeaters?
- (3) Which experiences are defeasible?
- (4) Why are they defeasible?
- (5) How are experiences defeated?

Our focus will be mainly on the first and second questions, but we will also touch on the others.

<sup>vii</sup> Some responses can be found in Weatherson (2008), Pryor (forthcoming), and *omitted*. For further arguments for Conservatism, and responses to them, see Wright (2008) and Brown (forthcoming).

<sup>viii</sup> One complication here is that the justificatory role of an experience might differ from the justificatory role of a belief that one has an experience. I'll discuss this sort of complication later in more detail but bracket it for now.

<sup>ix</sup> The first step of the argument concludes that

$$\Pr(\neg \text{DIE}) < \Pr(\neg \text{D})$$

The second step of the argument relies on the fact that P entails  $\neg \text{D}$ . Given the entailment,

$$\Pr(\text{PIE}) \leq \Pr(\neg \text{DIE})$$

Aligning the first sub-conclusion to the right of the second sub-conclusion, we obtain the conclusion that

$$\Pr(\text{PIE}) < \Pr(\neg \text{D})$$

To give a (controversial) gloss on the conclusion, one's experience justifies one in believing P to some degree n only if one has independent justification to disbelieve D at least to degree n. Here we have an argument at least for a consequence of the Conservative view.

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<sup>x</sup> Here it is important that Liberalism is not the negation of the Conservative view. The probabilistic argument is clearly general enough to refute the Liberal view, whether or not it fails for some other reason. The argument is not clearly general enough to establish Conservatism itself.

<sup>xi</sup> Classic and recent discussions of defeaters can be found in Pollock (1987, 1995 2001), Pollock and Cruz (1999), Kvanvig (2003), Schiffer (2004), Bergmann (2006), and Pryor (forthcoming). For a detailed discussion of how to respond in particular to news of unreliability, see Egan and Elga (2005).

Notice that I don't mean what philosophers such as Lehrer and Paxson (1969) mean by "defeater". On their usage, being a "defeater" is a matter of having an impact on whether one knows. On my usage, being a "defeater" is a matter of having an impact on how much justification one has for a belief. The usages are different. Consider that, in a classic Gettier case of justified true belief without knowledge, one's belief is presumably defeated in their sense without being defeated in mine.

<sup>xii</sup> For other candidate perceptual justifiers which are infallible though defeasible, consider the possibility that some experiences have contents which are necessarily true. Also, consider the (controversial) possibility that some justifiers are factive attitudes such as *seeing that* *o* is red, where one can bear a factive attitude to a proposition only if it is true.

The point that some justifiers are defeasible though infallible is important for the question of why perceptual justifiers are defeasible at all (this question is different from the question of why this or that defeater is a defeater). To explain why perceptual justifiers are defeasible, someone might say (i) fallibility entails defeasibility and (ii) for any perceptual state which justifies a belief with the content that *P*, you can be in that state when it's not the case that *P*. If some experiences are defeasible and not fallible, however, the suggestion will fail to explain all the cases which need to be explained.

<sup>xiii</sup> For some classic discussions of veridical hallucination, see Grice (1961) or Lewis (1987). Searle (1983) defends the view that it's not possible to have an entirely veridical hallucination, Burge (1991) and Soteriou (2000) respond.

<sup>xiv</sup> In probabilistic terms, the bad idea was that *D* is a defeater of *E* only if  $\Pr(\text{PIE and } D) < \Pr(\text{PIE})$ . In fact, it can be that *D* is a defeater of *E* even if  $\Pr(\text{HIE and } D) \geq \Pr(\text{PIE})$ . One might object that the veridical hallucination hypothesis is not a defeater. Be that as it may, other examples in any case make my main point. Suppose you know that Mary testifies that *p* only when Mark has been guessing that *p* and you know that Mary is more reliable than Mark. In such a scenario, if you start out with some justification to believe that *p* from Mark's testimony, but then learn that Mary testifies that *p*, you end up with more justification to believe that *p*, even though less of that justification than before is traceable to Mark's testimony (thanks here to OMITTED).

<sup>xv</sup> There is a narrower notion of a defeater according to which a defeater must reduce one's total degree of justification to believe a claim, but this notion of a defeater would be less useful for our purposes. Our focus is on experiences rather than on empirical beliefs. So we need to consider impacts on experiences as sources of justification, even in cases where a belief justified by an experience ends up as justified as it was before.

<sup>xvi</sup> One could actually accept Conservatism as it has been formulated so far, but think that it is vacuously true, on the grounds that there are no defeaters of experiences. Consider



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the extreme view that, if you have *indefeasible* reason to believe that your experiences are reliable, then your experiences justify some of your external world beliefs, and if you don't have indefeasible reason to believe that your experiences are reliable, then your experiences don't justify any of your external world beliefs. Here one could accept the current statement of Conservatism without leaving any room for experiences to be defeated.

<sup>xvii</sup> Strictly speaking, the Conservative only needs to accept the Defeasibility thesis as applied to negations of defeaters. It's open to the Conservative to take the (strange) view that, when an experience justifies a belief, that also happens partly in virtue of one's having indefeasible reason to hold some belief. For example, perhaps one has indefeasible reason to believe that one has phenomenal consciousness, and perhaps experiences justify beliefs partly in virtue of one's having indefeasible reason to believe that one has phenomenal consciousness.

<sup>xviii</sup> Compare the Liberal view. One might think that, on this view, you can have justification from your experience to believe *p* to some high degree while being justified in rejecting a defeating hypothesis only to some very low degree. Why then should it matter if one comes to be slightly less justified in rejecting the defeating hypothesis?

<sup>xix</sup> Notice that we don't yet have a specification of which hypotheses are defeaters and which are not. So far the story is mainly an account of why experiences give defeasible justification rather than indefeasible justification, and of how experiences get defeated. We'll soon provide more detail about which hypotheses are defeaters and why they are defeaters.

<sup>xx</sup> I borrow the talk of "opposing" from Pryor (forthcoming).

<sup>xxi</sup> See Pryor (forthcoming) and Kotzen (forthcoming) for discussion of whether it's possible to capture the distinctions about defeaters in Bayesian terms.

<sup>xxii</sup> It's still worthwhile to make a couple of clarifications: they will be important when we reformulate the Conservative view.

First, although being evidence for the unreliability of a source will typically be sufficient for being an undercutter of the source, it isn't obvious that being evidence for the unreliability of a source is necessary for being an undercutter of the source. For example, the hypothesis that I am veridically hallucinating that *p* arguably discredits my experience, but need not be evidence that my experiences are unreliable.

Second, we can't yet say that the distinction between rebutting and undercutting defeaters is exclusive nor exhaustive. Nothing we've said so far establishes that a hypothesis couldn't be both an undercutting and a rebutting defeater. And nothing we've said so far establishes that all defeaters are either undercutting or rebutting defeaters. In what follows, I'll leave open what the Conservative should say about defeaters which fall in neither category.

<sup>xxiii</sup> The point obtains beyond the case of perceptual justification, and beyond the case of not-*P*'s being a defeater of a reason to believe *P*.

Say that John's believing *P* is a justification for me to believe *P*, and that Mary's believing not-*P* is a rebutter of that justification. One might insist that, if I am justified in believing *P* (on the basis of John's belief), then I am so justified partly in virtue of having independent reason to believe that Mary does not believe not-*P*. But such a requirement is too demanding. It is perfectly plausible that, in such a case, I have no independent

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reason to believe that Mary does not have a belief contrary to mine, while still being justified in believing P. In this case, I lose justification to believe P if I gain justification for the defeating hypothesis, but I have justification to believe P even if I lack independent justification to disbelieve the defeating hypothesis. In general, in order to receive justification to believe P from a source which can be rebutted by other sources, I need not have independent reason to believe that the other sources did not pronounce not-P.

<sup>xxiv</sup> One might instead apply Conservatism to all undercutting defeaters without qualification:

**(Conservatism<sub>2</sub>):** For any undercutting defeater D of one's experience E with the content P, if E provides one with justification to believe P, then E does so partly in virtue of one's having independent justification to believe not-D.

The suggestion is simpler but unhelpful. That's because it looks like every rebutting defeater is itself an undercutting defeater. When I start out with justification from my experience to believe that P, but then encounter a defeater which plays the role of rebutting the belief, I will standardly gain evidence that I have my experience while it's not the case that P. So I seem to gain at least some evidence that my experiences are unreliable. More generally, it looks like all rebutters of my experience will at least to some extent discredit my experience. So the reformulation of the view still makes the outrageous demand that, in order to get justification from a perceptual source, one must have independent justification to reject all rebutting defeaters of that source.

<sup>xxv</sup> Notice that this argument is aimed specifically at a Conservative view which states conditions in virtue of which one has a priori justification. The argument does not directly bear on views which are merely about necessary conditions for a priori justification. Our gloss on "a priori" leaves open the possibility that you have some a priori justification only if you have some empirical justification. What the gloss rules out is that you could have some a priori justification in virtue of having some empirical justification.

<sup>xxvi</sup> In response, one might deny that there any empirically defeasible a priori justifications.

I take the response to be very implausible in any case, but a further problem is that it would commit an important family of Conservatives to a skeptical treatment of ordinary beliefs. Consider the skeptical hypothesis that, although it seems to you that you have hands, you are really a brain in a vat. Many Conservatives will want to say that, whether or not your experiences can justify you a little in rejecting the skeptical hypothesis, your experiences cannot justify as much in rejecting the skeptical hypothesis as they can justify you in believing that you have hands. Since the Conservative will think that you do need to be in a good position to reject the hypothesis, the Conservative will demand that our justification to reject the skeptical hypothesis be at least in large part a priori. Call such Conservatives "a priori Conservatives".

Now, it is possible, albeit unlikely, that one receive empirical evidence in favor of the skeptical hypothesis, say thanks to a ticker-tape message running across one's visual field (Cohen 1999). Such a scenario is one in which any a priori justification to reject the skeptical hypothesis is defeated, at least to some degree. Thus, if we do not have

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empirically defeasible a priori justifications, then we do not have a priori justification to reject any skeptical hypotheses. And by the a priori Conservative's lights, if we do not have a priori justification to disbelieve any skeptical hypotheses, then our experiences do not justify us in believing ordinary propositions either (or at least to the extent we normally think they do). Most Conservatives will want to avoid this skeptical result.

<sup>xxvii</sup> There is no easy story to tell. One might say that one can't have an a priori justified false belief, although one can have a perceptually justified false belief, and conclude that there is a much smaller role for background beliefs to play in the case of a priori justification. The problem with this suggestion is that one arguably can have an a priori justified false belief, as in the case of a priori inductive reasoning to a false conclusion (Burge 1993).

<sup>xxviii</sup> I take it that a similar point is familiar from the testimony literature, concerning the "global reductionist" view that one gains justification from another's testimony only if one has non-testimonial reason to believe that testimony is itself in general reliable. The global reductionist view is false not least because, if one has non-testimonial reason to believe that the particular person's testimony is reliable, it doesn't matter if one lacks reason to believe that testimony is itself in general reliable.

<sup>xxix</sup> As an anonymous referee pointed out, a Conservative might try to explain why the veridical hallucination hypothesis is a defeater by endorsing the following claim:

Conservatism5: Necessarily, if one's visual experience as of p gives one justification to believe that p, then it does so partly in virtue of its giving one justification to believe one has a visual experience as of p and partly in virtue of one's having independent justification to think that if one has such an experience, one is seeing that p.

I think this proposal fails because of the complicated way in which the veridical hallucination hypothesis is a defeater. When I learn I have a veridical hallucination as of p, my experiences as of p can still give me non-immediate justification to believe that p. My experience gives me justification to believe I have it, and my justification to believe I am veridically hallucinating gives me justification to believe that, if I have the experience, then p. Both Liberals and Conservatives in the epistemology of perception should agree about that. The Liberal can explain why the hypothesis is nevertheless a defeater by pointing to a loss of immediate justification in particular.

When I gain evidence in favor of the veridical hallucination hypothesis, I have non-immediate justification from my experience, but I have no justification to believe that, if I have the experience, then I see that p. Conservatism5 predicts that I get no justification whatsoever from my experience in the case, but that is the wrong prediction about the case.

<sup>xxx</sup> In response, the Conservative might say that your experience justifies you in believing that p only to the extent that you have reason to believe that you have the experience. Given this suggestion, we should expect misleading evidence that you lack an experience to defeat your experience.

The suggestion doesn't do justice to the role of experiences themselves in justifying beliefs. Compare the following two quite different cases. One person has a justified but *false* belief that she has an experience with the content that something is navy blue---

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perhaps she has been assured that her track record is good in self-ascribing such experiences, even though it's not---and she has a justified belief that she has an experience with the content that something is navy blue only if something is navy blue. Another person has a justified and *true* belief that she has an experience with the content that something is navy blue, and a justified belief that if she has the experience then something is navy blue. There is an important epistemic difference between these cases, given that the experience is present in one although not the other. The suggested addition to the Conservative position is not able to respect the epistemic difference between the cases.

<sup>xxx</sup> The statement is qualified because of a curious fact brought out by the probabilistic argument for Conservatism discussed in the introduction. The curious fact is that our experiences can themselves provide evidence in favor of defeaters of experiences. Again, consider any defeating hypothesis which entails that one has the experience the defeating hypothesis concerns. Given that the defeating hypothesis predicts that one has the experience, one ought to increase one's confidence in the defeating hypothesis in response to the experience (assuming that one wasn't certain in advance that the hypothesis was false or that one would have the experience). Here it looks like one's experience provides evidence for the defeating hypothesis. However, this is still a case in which the experience serves as evidence in favor of the proposition that P rather than against the proposition that P. For more background here, again, see White (2006).

<sup>xxx</sup> For useful relevant discussion, see Dretske (1969), Williamson (2000, chapter 1), Cassam (2007, chapter 1).

For an argument that seeing that p does not entail knowing that p, see Whitcomb (2008). For a discussion of complications which arise if seeing that p does require knowing that p, see note 34.

<sup>xxx</sup> For closely related remarks, see Peacocke (2004, 116-7).

I should explain why my formulation is restricted to cases in which an experience with the content that p gives one justification to believe that p. Notice that, on any non-skeptical view, experiences mediate justify some of our beliefs, whether or not they immediately justify some of our beliefs. For example, when I have background knowledge that such and such marks tend to be tracks of deer, a visual experience of marks can give me (mediate) justification to believe that a deer has been present, whether or not it gives me immediate justification to believe anything. I take it that in such a case I do not see that a deer has been present (we could work with a different content if you disagree). In such a case, if I become even more confident that I am not seeing that a deer has been present, my experience still need not be defeated. Such cases are no problem for our formulation, since our formulation applies only to cases where an experience with the content that p gives one justification to believe that p.

<sup>xxx</sup> If seeing that p entails knowing that p, the ceiling thesis most likely needs to be reformulated. If seeing that p entails knowing that p, most likely there will be cases in which an experience justifies one in being more confident that p than one is that one sees that p. Consider a case in which one knows that one does not know that p. For example, perhaps one knows that one does not know that there is a barn in the field, since one knows that there are fake barns around. In such a scenario (in which let's say that one is aware that seeing that p entails knowing that p), one will only be justified in believing to

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a low degree that one sees that there is a barn in the field. However, in such a case one could be justified in remaining somewhat confident that there is a barn in the field, say to degree .6. If seeing that p entails knowing that p, it looks like one could have more justification from an experience to believe that p than one has to believe that one sees that p.

One way to reformulate the thesis would be in terms of the attitude of seeing a's Fness rather than the attitude of seeing that p. Here the idea is that one can see a's Fness without even believing that a is F (see Peacocke (2004) for this strategy). The problem for the reformulation would be that we want to account for the epistemology of perceptual beliefs other than those to the effect that a is F. We want a formulation which applies more widely than to perceptual beliefs to the effect that a is F. So I prefer to work simply with formulations in terms of seeing that p.

<sup>xxxv</sup> For further discussion, see Martin (2002), Pryor (), Siegel (forthcoming), Bengson (forthcoming).

<sup>xxxvi</sup> For further discussion of experience and self-knowledge, see Johnston (2008: 285-9), Peacocke (2009) and Byrne (forthcoming).

<sup>xxxvii</sup> See Pryor (2004, forthcoming) for a more radical view in a similar spirit. According to the sort of view defended in his work, an experience which justifies one in believing that one sees that p does more than that, it can also justify one in believing that one is not undergoing an illusion or hallucination in which one seems to see that p. I deny these further claims, for the sorts of Bayesian reasons rehearsed in the introduction of this paper in *reference omitted*).

The position I endorse might seem incoherent: how could an experience justify one in believing that one sees that p while failing to justify an obvious consequence of the proposition that one is seeing that p? Here it is important to recall that evidence for a proposition P need not be evidence for an obvious consequence of P. In a type of example given by Pryor himself, that Jones has a hairless pet is evidence that Jones has a Manx cat (which is a kind of hairless cat), but is not evidence that Jones has a cat. A much more thorough defense of my position is given in (*references omitted*).