

A Fatal Dilemma for Direct Realist Foundationalism

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Abstract: Direct realist versions of foundationalism (hereafter, DRF) have recently been advocated by (among others) Pryor, Huemer, Alston, and Plantinga. DRF can hold either that our foundational observation beliefs are about the simple perceptible qualities of objects (like color, shape, etc.), or that our foundational observation beliefs are more complex ones about objects in the world. I will show that whether our observational beliefs are simple or complex, the agent must possess other epistemically significant states (knowledge, or justified beliefs) in order for these observational beliefs to be justified. These other states are therefore epistemically prior to observation belief, and prevent them from being epistemically foundational.

Keywords: foundationalism; epistemology; knowledge; justification; direct realism; the Given; Pryor, J.; Sellars, W.

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In a classic critical discussion of foundationalism, BonJour described the theory as a proposed solution to the epistemic regress problem (BonJour 1986). Briefly, if we ask what justifies a particular belief A, we might be told that it is justified by B. B, in turn, is justified by C. Assuming that this regress cannot go on *ad infinitum* or circle back on itself, it must terminate with a belief (or set of beliefs) which is self-justified.¹ This set of beliefs serves as the foundation on which all of our other beliefs rest. Crucially, for foundational beliefs to be

¹ I am ignoring the possibility that the terminal belief is not justified.

genuinely foundational, for them to be genuine ‘regress stoppers,’ they cannot depend for their justification on any other belief (at least, not on any belief the agent is required to justifiably believe).

BonJour asks, “In virtue of what features is this foundational belief justified?” BonJour identifies two possibilities. The first is externalism: the belief is justified by something, but the belief’s possessor need not know or even justifiably believe that this something justifies the belief in question. The second alternative is that “what justifies the belief is the immediate apprehension or intuition of the state of affairs” (BonJour 1986: 107)—the Given, a non-belief state or event (such as a perceptual experience) that justifies the agent’s foundational belief without itself standing in need of justification, and thereby allowing this foundational belief to serve as a stopping place for the regress of justification. This view, BonJour writes, is “so venerable that it deserves to be called the standard foundationalist solution to the problem in question” (BonJour 1986: 106). BonJour famously argues that neither alternative provides a satisfactory solution to the epistemic regress problem.

Because of criticisms from authors like BonJour, Sellars, and others, foundationalism was long thought to be on the ropes; but it has been making a comeback. Particularly robust have been various direct realist versions of foundationalism² (hereafter, DRF), which will be the focus of this paper. In characterizing such views, Richard Fumerton writes,

Direct Realism has made a remarkable comeback in recent years...Let’s define epistemological direct realism as the view that we have noninferentially justified beliefs in at least some contingent propositions describing the external physical world...A belief is noninferentially justified when its justification is not constituted, even in part, by the having of other justified beliefs. (Fumerton 2006: 680-1)

There are a couple of features of contemporary DRF that are important to point out (and one point on which advocates of this theory differ). First, the theory is notable in that it

² See, for example, Alston 1999, Huemer 2001, Plantinga 2000, and Pryor 2000.

resurrects the notion of the Given: advocates of DRF defend the claim that our foundational beliefs are caused and justified by a certain type of experience; it is this experience (and not any other justified beliefs or knowledge we possess) which justifies our foundational beliefs.

For example, James Pryor writes,

when it perceptually seems to you as if p is the case, you have a kind of justification for believing p that does not presuppose or rest on your justification for anything else, which could be cited in an argument (even an ampliative argument) for p . To have this justification for believing p , you need only have an experience that represents p as being the case. No further awareness or reflection or background beliefs are required. (Pryor 2000: 519)

Alston writes, “Upon undergoing a certain visual experience, I believe there to be a beech tree in front of me...I am justified in believing this by virtue of the fact that the belief is based on that experience” (Alston 1999: 197). In a similar vein, Huemer writes, “My position, then, is that our perceptual beliefs are justified *by* the perceptual experiences on which they are based” (Huemer 2001: 96).

The second important feature of DRF is this: as is implied by the appellation “direct realist foundationalism,” advocates of DRF are committed to a particular theory of perception (direct realism, the idea that “we directly perceive mind-independent objects in the physical world” (Crane 2001: np), that “in veridical cases we *directly* experience external material objects, without the mediation of either sense-data or adverbial contents” [BonJour and Lyons 2013: 31]); and in this, DRF is contrasted with indirect realist forms of foundationalism (sometimes known as classical foundationalism), which are committed to a different theory of perception, according to which “our perceptual access to such objects is mediated by perception of mind-dependent entities” (Crane 2001: np). Thus, according to the classical foundationalist, our foundational beliefs are not about external objects, but are instead about sensations, sense data, or other mental objects or phenomena. Indirect forms of foundationalism have been historically the most common, and are today defended by

philosophers such as Timothy McGrew and Evan Fales.³ As can be seen by the above discussion, advocates of DRF hold that perceptual experiences cause and justify our perceptual beliefs, but our foundational beliefs are ultimately about objects or properties in the external world, and not about these experiences themselves, as they are for the classical foundationalist. To enter a debate concerning what our observational beliefs are ultimately about would take us deep into a discussion of the philosophy of perception, which is well beyond the scope of this paper. I merely wish to note that advocates of DRF are committed to a particular conception of the role of experience in perception, quite different from the role conceived for experience by (say) the representationalist. Setting aside such issues, we will confine ourselves in this essay to a discussion of DRF rather than classical foundationalism: can we have knowledge of the external world that is non-inferential in the way described above by Fumerton?

I have said that defenders of DRF appeal to a notion of the Given to justify foundational beliefs. But what type of foundational belief is justified by this experience? This question reveals an important difference among defenders of DRF, a difference that will turn out to be crucial in the development of our argument.

The defender of DRF can have one of two answers to this question. On the one hand, she might think that we have foundational beliefs (or, alternately, she might think perception justifies propositions) about basic perceptible qualities of objects (color, shape, and so forth). On this first view, more complex beliefs or propositions (“That is a Ford Pinto”; “The dandelions are in bloom”; “There is a policeman”; etc.) are based on these more basic beliefs or justified propositions, and derive their justification from them. On the other hand, the foundationalist might think that these aforementioned, more complex beliefs or propositions *are* the basic foundational beliefs or propositions directly justified by our experience.

³ See, for example, McGrew 2003 and Fales 1996.

Michael Huemer seems to hold the first view. Huemer distinguishes between our perceptual experience, and our perceptual belief, which is the foundational belief based on and justified by this experience. I interpret Huemer as arguing that perceptual experiences are about the simple perceptible qualities of objects:

In sum, we have perceptual experiences which at least represent there to be objects having certain specific shapes and colors (a similar point can be made using tastes, smells, and other observable properties)...In the primary sense of “aware,” then, we are directly aware of the fact that there are objects with those colors and shapes. We might also be said to be aware (directly and primarily) of the colors and shapes of the (facing surfaces of) physical objects around us. (Huemer 2001: 80-81)

Perceptual beliefs, Huemer seems to think, cannot represent more than the perceptual experiences on which they are based, and hence can only represent the simple perceptible qualities of objects such as color, shape, and so forth:

When I look at a tomato on the counter, the visual experience I have will typically cause me to believe, at the least, that there is a red, round thing there. (It is due to various background beliefs of mine that I accept the further proposition that the thing in question is a tomato. That latter belief, then, is not purely perceptual because it is based on my perceptual experience *together with* background knowledge.) (Huemer 2001: 95)

Other direct realist foundationalists seem to think that we can have foundational beliefs that are quite complex. Plantinga, for example, argues that in a variety of circumstances, the *sensus divinitatis* can call forth warranted beliefs such as “an awareness of divine disapproval upon having done something wrong, or cheap, and something like a perception of divine forgiveness upon confession and repentance” (Plantinga 2000: 174), or even just the (relatively more simple, and yet still conceptually complex) belief that God exists. Other direct realist foundationalists, like Pryor, take no official stand. Pryor writes

The official version of my view is that we have immediate *prima facie* justification for believing those propositions that our experiences basically represent to us—whichever propositions those turn out to be...The cognitive psychologists will have to tell us whether our experiences have contents like *There is a (complete) hand*, or whether they instead have contents like *There is a facing flesh-colored surface of such-and-such a shape*. (Pryor 2000: 539).

At any rate, both versions of DRF face serious problems. These problems occasionally overlap, but are not always the same, and require separate treatment.

I noted above that the various versions of DRF under discussion all make use of some notion of the Given,⁴ a perceptual experience that justifies an observation belief without the need to appeal to any further beliefs (thereby satisfying foundationalist constraints). I am willing to concede that perceptual experience can play a role in justifying observation belief (a concession not every anti-foundationalist is willing to make). For even if perceptual experiences play a role in justification, this does not show that they can serve as a Given to single-handedly justify empirical beliefs and vindicate DRF. The further question, often neglected, is “What else would need to be in place before these perceptual experiences could serve to justify our empirical knowledge?” We will see that many other epistemically-significant states must be in place before perceptual experience can serve a justificatory role, and that crucially, these states are epistemically prior to the supposedly foundational belief or proposition justified by these experiences.

The paper will be structured as follows. Part I is primarily directed at philosophers who, like Huemer, adopt the first version of DRF (the one holding that our foundational beliefs are about the simple perceptible qualities of objects, such as color, shape, and so on). There, I will argue that observation beliefs about such simple perceptible qualities cannot be foundational, because such beliefs are only justified to the extent that we have mastered (and can render justified judgments) about a whole range of what I will call *perception-altering factors*. In Part II, I will discuss some more familiar points about theory-ladenness, and how this bears on the epistemology of complex observational beliefs (as well as on the epistemology of our perception of simple perceptible qualities of objects such as color, shape, and so forth). I will argue that complex observation beliefs *definitely* (and observation beliefs

⁴ The staunchest critic of the Given in all its forms was, of course, Sellars. Much of the criticism of DRF in this paper is Sellarsian in spirit, if not in detail.

about simple perceptible qualities *likely*) display a type of theory-ladenness that prevents them from being epistemologically foundational. I will then argue in Part III that the defender of DRF faces a fatal dilemma: there is a possible escape from the criticism of Part I of the paper, but only at the cost of conceding the argument from Part II of the paper, and vice versa. That is, the defender of DRF can potentially refute my epistemic priority thesis given in Part I, but only at the cost of conceding that ‘foundational’ beliefs are theory laden in a way that itself amounts to another version of the epistemic priority thesis. Thus, we will see that whichever version of DRF is endorsed—the version on which our foundational beliefs are complex, or the version on which they are about the simple perceptible qualities of objects (like shape and color), DRF is untenable.

A brief terminological point is in order: as my sole target here is DRF, when I employ phrases like ‘observation belief’ or ‘the Given,’ these phrases should be understood to refer to these items as they function with DRF. Obviously, indirect realist foundationalists make use of both of these, but as this latter theory is not my target (and as it is unwieldy to say ‘observation beliefs as understood within DRF theory’ each time), my critical comments should be understood as limited to the role that these terms and concepts play within DRF. Again, discussing the role the Given plays within indirect realist foundationalism is beyond the scope of this paper.

I. GIVENNESS AND EPISTEMIC PRIORITY

As noted above, on some versions of DRF, our basic beliefs are held to be about the basic perceptible qualities of objects (shape, color, etc.), and more complex reports (“That is a grizzly bear,” “That is a policeman,” etc.) are based upon these foundational beliefs. Part I will primarily be aimed at versions of DRF that take our foundational beliefs to be about the simple perceptible qualities of objects. We are conceding, for the sake of argument, that

perceptual experiences can play a role in justifying these observation beliefs. The question to be asked is, “What else needs to be in place before these perceptual experiences can serve such a justificatory role, and what is the relation of epistemic priority between this ‘something else’ and the observation beliefs justified by these perceptual experiences?” I will argue that we must possess other knowledge before our observation beliefs can be justified, and that this other knowledge is, in an important sense, *epistemically prior* to the observation beliefs.

A. *Conceptual Mastery*

What knowledge is epistemically prior to our observation beliefs? Plausibly, if you have not appropriately mastered an observational concept, then you cannot render justified observation judgments using that concept. It will turn out that mastering most (perhaps all) observational concepts requires possessing a good deal of other knowledge; and so one’s ability to render justified observation judgments using concept *C* will depend on a good deal of other knowledge one possesses.

One can have a fairly solid theoretical understanding of a concept without being competent to apply this concept non-inferentially, without being able to make justified observation judgments essentially involving this concept. For example, one can imagine a trainee doctor who understands the various causes of pneumonia, its effects on the lungs and other organs of the body, the preferred treatments, etc.—but who cannot recognize the signs of pneumonia on an x-ray image, or distinguish (say) the labored breathing of a pneumonia patient from a COPD sufferer. Such a trainee physician cannot *with justification* observe that a patient has pneumonia (although if informed that a patient has pneumonia, he might competently recommend a course of treatment).

It is this sort of perceptual mastery that is required to make justified observation judgments. But as it turns out, with most of our basic observation terms, perceptual mastery of a particular term can only be achieved by also achieving conceptual and perceptual mastery of many related observation terms and concepts. Thus, the ability to render justified observation judgments essentially involving one concept presupposes a great deal of other knowledge.

This point is demonstrated by the case of Jones. Consider his judgments as to whether objects are (say) black. Suppose Jones has no understanding of standard viewing conditions, and so reports “Lo! A black object!” whenever he has a certain type of perceptual experience (the perceptual experience typically caused by black objects in standard viewing conditions). Are Jones’s reports justified? It seems that they are not. For if Jones is like most of us, he spends a substantial proportion of his time in non-standard viewing conditions (such as at night). By night, for example, many non-black objects appear black; other lighting conditions (such as back-lighting and poor illumination) may also make a non-black object appear black. Most dark colors (dark blue, etc.) appear black under such conditions. Thus, if Jones has no understanding of standard viewing conditions, and always judges black-looking objects to be black, *then Jones is never justified in reporting that an object is black, even if the object is in fact black.* What this illustrates is that in order to master a perceptual concept so that one can actually successfully deploy it in observational judgments, one must master a whole range of other concepts (like darkness, standard viewing conditions, etc.), which affect how the property associated with this concept appears to the viewer. Thus, one cannot simply master an observational concept; one must master an entire array of associated observational concepts. Since Jones has failed to master these associated concepts, he thus cannot discriminate between black objects and objects that merely seem black; and thus he has not actually mastered the concept *black*, even though he forms the belief “Lo! A black object!”

when confronted with a black sensation.⁵ For (since we are discussing DRF, and not indirect realism) Jones is attempting to make judgments about the world (about objects that *are* black), not about the nature of sensation (not merely about *seeming* black or being *appeared to* blackly); and so his inability to make these sorts of discriminations shows he cannot consistently apply the concept *black*; he has not mastered it, and therefore his observation judgments involving it (which essentially involve *application* of this concept) are not justified.

And, of course, it is not merely absence of light that alters how color properties appear to us. We spend much of our time in conditions where there is a good deal of light, but it is of a poor quality. To give a humble example, my wife and I recently decided to paint a spare bedroom a pale yellow, and painted a portion of the wall to see how the color looked. We returned a few hours later to see how the color looked once it had dried. We were initially unable to see where we had painted, and although several seconds of staring at the wall revealed where we had painted, we could not adequately discern the color. Why? Because it was dark outside, and we were relying on our indoor lighting which, while plentiful, was of a poor quality for distinguishing colors. Of course, rather than decide that the paint had turned off-white during the last few hours, or deciding that paint varied its colors, chameleon-like, during different portions of the day, we merely withheld judgment. Upon viewing the paint by daylight the next day, we were able not only to see easily where we had painted, but were able to discern that the yellow had too much green in it, and was therefore not suitable for the room.

⁵ One reader suggests that Jones, lacking such conceptual mastery, might not even be able to form beliefs about black objects. If this is so, then so much the better for the present account. But my argument is more modest: I assume that he can, but argue that such beliefs are not justified since Jones has failed to master the conditions under which a language-entry transition (as Sellars would call it) is appropriate—that is, Jones hasn't mastered the related concepts that allow him to make proper *application* of the concept black in perceptual judgment, in appropriate conditions.

In order to have mastered an observational concept—in order to be able to *successfully apply* this concept in observational judgments and hence produce justified perceptual judgments—a perceptual judge needs to understand more than adequate lighting. If we consider the nature of sensation, and the judgments that these sensations justify, we realize that we must have a great deal of background knowledge if we are to form justified perceptual judgments. Let us give some examples:

1) A person who did not understand *motion* and *blurring* would judge that the spokes on a car disappeared or radically changed in composition when the car was in motion, as the spokes would cease to be (individually) visible. The same considerations would apply to a number of familiar objects, such as the rotors on a helicopter, or a jump-rope, or a whip, or the limbs of a runner, or a spinning top, or...

2) A person who did not understand *light* and *shadow* would think the grass under a tree was mottled. Indeed, someone who didn't understand shadow would be an exceedingly poor judge of color, since everywhere we look (especially outdoors during the daytime, which is supposed to be the paradigm of standard viewing conditions!) we see color variations caused by shadows. A large percentage of such a person's color judgments would be faulty, since the person would suppose objects to be mottled, or striped, or would assume various objects to be darker in color than they in fact were (due to their being in shadow), etc.⁶

3) A person who did not understand *distance* (and the effect distance has on perception) would assume that people and objects radically change size inexplicably.

4) A person who did not have at least a rudimentary understanding of *backlighting* would assume that people's features disappeared when indoors and in front of a window.

⁶ These points I am raising may seem trivial, but anyone who has seen one of the various YouTube videos of (e.g.) dogs attacking their own shadows, or even of young children baffled upon encountering their shadow for the first time (typically outdoors on a sunny day), will realize that it is quite conceivable for a sentient creature not to understand the concept of shadow (or any of the other concepts mentioned in this section), and that such a failure of comprehension can have real cognitive and behavioral consequences. While the world causes different stimuli in us (and perhaps we don't need to learn how to receive these stimuli), we do need to learn how to *see* what the world contains.

5) Many glass surfaces in my environment (including the glass in my office window, and several home windows) have imperfections and variations that cause objects outside to appear wavy, etc. Lack of correction for this phenomenon would result in my judging that the objects I observed actually *were* wavy, blurry, etc. Further, the effect is dynamic: if I see Smith through my window, and then a few minutes later he walks into my office, I would (without the concepts *glass*, *blurry*, etc.) assume that Smith had wavy hair and an oddly-shaped skull, but that his hair and skull returned to ‘normal’ sometime between my seeing him through the window and his entering my office.

6) All of the shiny or glossy objects around you—including plastic bottles, objects painted with glossy paint, glass shelf doors, books, file cabinets, thumbtacks, and so forth—reflect, to a greater or lesser degree, other nearby objects. A person who did not understand the notions of *reflection*, *shiny*, etc. would judge that these objects were not uniform in color, that their color changed as she moved in relation to them, and so forth.

The list could go on indefinitely. But I think the point is clear. In order to navigate the world, in order competently to make perceptual judgments, one must have mastered a wide variety of concepts. Various observational judgments rely epistemically on the notions of shadow, reflectance, glass, motion, distance, etc. If you do not understand distance, then you have not mastered the application of the concept *size*, and so your observational judgments involving this judgment are not justified in a wide range of conditions. There is a relation of epistemic priority. Without mastery of the concepts of motion and blurring, your judgments about the existence and composition of rapidly-moving objects demonstrate a similar failure of conceptual mastery, and again such judgments are not justified. Again, certain bits of empirical knowledge (about motion, etc.) are epistemically prior to certain observation judgments: the latter cannot be justified without the former. So the justification of our observation judgments relies on much other knowledge. There is a clear sense in which “if

there is a logical dimension in which other empirical propositions rest on observation reports, there is another logical dimension in which the latter rest on the former” (Sellars 1997: 78/§38).

One might charge that I am confusing conceptual with epistemic priority, a confusion which Alston, Pryor, and Bonevac all warn against. The chief target of their criticism is Sellars, who seems to think that conceptual priority entails epistemic priority; such a position is implicit in his argument that because is-talk is conceptually prior to looks-talk, talk about how things are is epistemically prior to talk of appearances. The authors listed above all reject this line of reasoning. Pryor, for example, writes:

the fact that you have immediate justification to believe P does not entail that no other beliefs are required for you to be able *to form or entertain* the belief that P. Having the concepts involved in the belief that P may require believing certain other propositions; it does not follow that any justification you have to believe P must be mediated by those other propositions. (Pryor 2005: 183)

Bonevac also argues that the foundationalist “can resist the move from logical priority to epistemic priority” (Bonevac 2002: 9). Alston argues for a similar conclusion (Alston 1983: 78-9).

But I am not making the same fallacious argument as Sellars; I am not conflating conceptual priority with epistemic priority. I am arguing that the presence of certain properties and objects alter how other properties and objects appear to us and so, for a perceiver to be able to apply in observation concepts relating to the latter, she must have knowledge—*empirical* knowledge—of how the former bears on the latter. Failure to possess this knowledge means one has not in fact mastered the latter concepts—one does not know how to apply them in observation (which is, after all, in large part what observation concepts are for)—and so the observations one renders using these observational concepts are not justified. Thus, there is clearly a relation of epistemic priority: adequate mastery of observational concepts, and therefore the ability to render justified observational judgments,

presupposes and requires a body of *empirical knowledge*, including knowledge of distance, motion, etc., as the above examples illustrate.

Sellars (and his critics) are wont to put the point about epistemic priority in terms of standard viewing conditions. Here is Sellars:

Now, it won't do to reply that to have the concept of green, to know what it is for something to be green, it is sufficient to respond, when one is *in point of fact* in standard conditions, to green objects with the vocable "This is green." Not only must the conditions be of a sort that is appropriate for determining the color of an object by looking, the subject must *know* that conditions of this sort *are* appropriate. (Sellars 1997: 44/§19)

Critics also restrict their attention to the notion of standard viewing conditions. Bonevac writes, "Why...does this require any more than knowledge that conditions are normally suitable for color perception, or that, for example, it is day? In short, one cannot get much from the requirement of knowledge of standard conditions" (Bonevac 2002: 14). But both Sellars and Bonevac understate the amount of knowledge that is required before one can make justified perceptual judgments. Certainly, one must know that conditions are standard. But even *within* standard viewing conditions, one must have a mastery of various concepts—motion, reflection, shadow, and so forth—which alter the normal appearance of perceptible objects. So it is not enough to know that "conditions are normally suitable for color perception." For most of the examples I gave above are of concepts that one must grasp before making perceptual judgments (and not just color judgments) *in standard conditions*.

Thus, a competent perceiver will have mastered concepts like *red*, but such mastery presupposes mastery of other concepts like *shadow*, *blurring*, *insufficient lighting*, and so forth. Crucially, a competent perceiver will therefore also know when to withhold applying primary perceptual concepts like red due to the instantiation of one of these other properties. That is, the competent perceiver knows when to apply a primary perceptual concept and when to withhold it, and she knows this because of other perceptual concepts she has mastered. And even if conditions are standard (and hence the concepts pertaining to the

perception-altering factors are not deployed), the agent's application of a particular primary perceptual concept (such as *red*) is only justified because the agent has mastered these other concepts, even though they are not currently being applied in perception. *That is, the agent's current perceptual judgment is only justified because of other conceptual mastery the agent possesses, even if this knowledge is not being applied in the current perceptual judgment.* If the agent did not have mastery of these perception-altering factors (and could not apply the relevant concepts in perception), then she cannot count as having mastered these primary perceptual concepts, and hence her perceptual judgments would not be justified even if true.

We can now see more clearly the relation between conceptual interdependence and epistemic priority. As we noted above, Alston, Bonevac, and Pryor all argue that conceptual interdependence does not entail epistemic interdependence. But we need to distinguish between varieties of ways in which concepts can be interdependent on each other. The most familiar way is conceptual holism: one concept has its meaning only in virtue of being part of a network of other concepts. Alston, Bonevac, and Pryor all argue that two concepts can be interdependent in this way without being epistemically dependent on each other. But the type of interdependence at work in my argument is interdependence in *application* (not necessarily interdependence in meaning): certain features of the world (such as color and shadow) cannot be coinstantiated without altering the manner in which each appears to us. That is, shadow cannot appear with color without altering the appearance of the color. Thus, one who wishes to apply the concept of color in perception must also be able to apply the concept of shadow, since the presence of shadow alters the appearance of color. As I have argued above, there are enough such perceptual factors (motion, shadow, reflection, etc.) which alter the appearance of our normal perceptual concepts (color, shape, size, etc.) that if we did not know how to apply the former, then one would not count as having mastered perceptual application of the latter concepts, and one would therefore not be able to make justified observational

judgments using these latter concepts. Thus, whereas one type of conceptual interdependence (the type embodied by meaning holism) might not entail epistemic interdependence, a different type of conceptual interdependence—*interdependence in perceptual application*—does have epistemic consequences. This latter type of interdependence shows that the justification of observational judgments presupposes mastery of a wide variety of other empirical concepts.

Sellars's anti-foundationalist argument was that even if we possess perceptual concepts (such as green), our *observation judgments* employing these concepts rely (in part) for their justification on other knowledge we have, namely, knowledge of standard viewing conditions. Here, I am arguing that knowledge of standard viewing conditions is not the only knowledge required for us to render justified observational reports. There are many other concepts which we must have mastered before our standard observational judgments can count as justified. Observation judgments are therefore epistemically dependent not just on knowledge of standard viewing conditions, but also on knowledge of other factors which bear on the nature of our perceptual experience.

B. Epistemic Priority

Up until this point, I have been arguing that to be able to render *justified* observational judgments about basic perceptual qualities (like 'red'), one must have *mastered* many other empirical concepts, in the sense that one is able to apply these concepts in perception (and thus know, based on the coinstantiation of these perception altering factors, when to withhold or alter a judgment using a concept like 'red'). But I have been intentionally vague about what this mastery entails. To be able to judge, with justification, that certain objects are red, or solid, etc., do I have to be able to *justifiably believe* on certain occasions that objects X, Y, and Z are in shadow, in motion, reflective, etc.? Or does mastery of these concepts consist in

know-how, which does not generate beliefs (or at least not justified beliefs), but which merely generates dispositions to believe (or withhold belief) when other, primary perceptual concepts (like 'red', etc.) are employed? It seems as though much rides on the answer to this question.

As I noted in the very introduction of this essay, "A belief is noninferentially justified when its justification is not constituted, even in part, by the having of other justified beliefs" (Fumerton 2006: 681). Ergo, to show that a supposedly foundational belief essentially involving concept C is not foundational because application of C requires mastery of other concepts, we must show that mastery of these concepts consists of having justified beliefs (or knowledge). Thus, for our anti-foundationalist argument to succeed, we must show that an agent's justified observational judgments about objects' basic perceptible qualities (color, shape, etc.) depend for their justification on *justified beliefs* or *knowledge* about the perception-altering factors (shadow, motion, blurring, etc.) discussed in the previous subsection.

This would seem to be the Achilles' heel of the above argument: the reader might be left thinking that although a competent perceiver has indeed learned to make perceptual judgments that take into account the above perception-altering factors, it is nevertheless inaccurate to say that in forming such perceptual judgments the perceiver has *justified beliefs* or *knowledge* about these perception-altering factors. That is, when I observe a person seeming to change shape as he walks past my window, or cease to clearly discern a rapidly-moving jump rope, the reader might still doubt it is accurate to say I know or justifiably believe that the glass is uneven, or the blurring of the rope is caused by its rapid movement. Granted, the competent perceiver alters her perceptual judgment to take account of these factors, but (it might be argued) this alteration takes place at a sufficiently low cognitive level that it is inappropriate to ascribe any knowledge or any beliefs to the perceiver. Thus, the

critic will argue, the epistemically prior concepts (motion, blurring, shadow, etc.) are merely dispositions to alter one's perceptual judgments; they do not serve as free-standing beliefs (much less justified beliefs or bits of knowledge) which are epistemically prior to the perceptual judgment justified by the sensation.

There are at least two ways to respond to this worry. I will only sketch the first response, for I think it is the second response that is decisive. The first response is to argue that when a factor such as motion or blurring causes one to withhold assent from a perceptual judgment (say, the judgment that a helicopter's rotors have disappeared or changed radically in constitution), the judgment-altering factor really is present, say as a belief that motion and blurring change the appearance of the rotors.

Consider an analogy. In the philosophy of action, it is widely accepted that a belief need not have a particular phenomenal character. Rather, we often attribute a belief to someone to explain her action even if the person does not consciously entertain the belief in question. For example, if I walk in the door and turn on my light, we might (by way of explaining my behavior) attribute to me the belief that the switch on the wall operates the light, even if I consciously entertain no such belief.⁷

Similar attribution of beliefs is appropriate in epistemology, not just in action theory. Consider a further example. While standing in the door of a colleague's office, I noticed that when I moved slightly, the bricks in the building I was observing through the office window appeared to change in shape and size. Of course, I did not form the belief that the bricks were changing shape and size. Now suppose someone were to explain my refusal to form this perceptual belief. The person would no doubt say, "Well, he knows that bricks don't change shape and size like that; bricks simply don't display that sort of behavior under normal circumstances." He might add, "He knows that it is merely irregularities in the glass that are

⁷ I borrow this example from Feldman 2003: 58.

distorting the appearance of the bricks.” So the cases of action and judgment are analogous: just as it is appropriate to attribute beliefs to someone to explain action, it is appropriate to attribute beliefs (and even knowledge) to someone to explain why they formed (or didn’t form) a particular observational judgment.

So when I refuse to form the belief that the grass under a tree is mottled in color, it is because I *know* that shadows alter the appearance of color. When I refuse to form the belief that a car’s spokes have disappeared, it is because I *know* that spokes don’t normally behave that way and their appearance is due merely to blurring caused by their rapid motion. When I refuse to conclude that the paint on the wall of our spare bedroom disappeared since I applied it, it is because I *know* that the illumination conditions are poor for making color judgments. And I needn’t consciously entertain these beliefs for these bits of knowledge to be appropriately attributed to me. Nor does my inability to report this knowledge, if asked, entail that I don’t possess this knowledge in the first place.

The above example brings out another element of epistemic priority. My refusal to form beliefs about the changing shape of bricks is not solely attributable to my knowledge of perception-altering factors (like *distortion due to uneven glass*). It is also in part attributable to my knowledge of the physical behavior of solid objects like bricks. Thus, my refusal to judge that (say) the rotors on a helicopter disappear at high speeds, or the bricks in the building outside my colleague’s office change shape randomly, or that normal objects change colors at different times of the day is explainable in part by my mastery of perception-altering factors, but also in part by my knowledge of how different classes of objects behave. Once again, we see that the beliefs we form in response to perceptual stimuli—and the beliefs we are *justified* in so forming—are determined in part by what we are justified in believing about how various constituents of the world normally behave.

Pryor would argue that my knowledge of the behavior of bricks defeating my belief that the bricks are changing shape is not a case of epistemic priority. He argues:

On my view, the immediate justification you get from your experiences is only *prima facie* justification. I'm quite happy to say that your background beliefs play a role in determining when that *prima facie* justification is defeated or undermined, and when it isn't. (Pryor 2000: 540)

As I have been arguing, though, for one's perceptual judgments to be justified in normal circumstances, one must know how to withhold assent from judgments with the same content in non-normal circumstances (those where the perception-altering factors are in play). Because the interplay of observational concepts is so complex, one cannot claim to have mastered an observational concept that one can only apply when it is not co-instantiated with any other factor that would alter its appearance. That is not 'mastery,' and one venturing out into the world with such a low level of conceptual mastery will have beliefs which, if true, are only accidentally true. Thus, one's knowledge of perception-altering factors serves a more complex epistemological role than that of mere defeaters: without knowledge of these factors, one cannot make justified perceptual judgments *even in non-defeated circumstances*. So knowledge of these factors is presupposed by all justified perceptual judgments. Again, we see the clear relation of epistemic dependence.

Thus, the first response to the above objection is to argue that when we apply these perception-altering factors, we do have beliefs (even justified beliefs, even knowledge) about them. If this response is acceptable, then this gives us a clear argument against the version of foundationalism that takes basic perceptible qualities of objects to be the subjects of our foundational beliefs: any such allegedly foundational belief is only justified because of my knowledge of perception-altering factors, and my ability to deploy such knowledge, whether there is a need to deploy them in the present judgment or not.

As I indicated above, there is a second and decisive answer to this worry (the worry that deploying these perception altering factors does not involve the formation of justified

beliefs or the justification of propositions). This answer takes a complicated form. It will turn out that defending the Given along the lines just described (arguing that the processing of perception-altering factors takes place at a cognitively-low level, and does not rise to the level of actual belief) proves fatal to the notion of the Given, and decisively establishes the thesis of epistemic priority. But we will not be ready to present this argument until we present the defender of DRF with the final, fatal dilemma in Part III. Let us now turn to versions of DRF which take our basic observation beliefs to be not about simple perceptible qualities of objects, but to be more complex beliefs.

II. THEORY-LADENNESS AND EPISTEMIC PRIORITY

There is a final way we might cash out Sellars's claim that "if there is a logical dimension in which other empirical propositions rest on observation reports, there is another logical dimension in which the latter rest on the former" (Sellars 1997: 78/§38). This objection is stated by James Pryor as follows:

All observation is theory-laden. Hence none of your perceptual beliefs can be justified just by your having the experiences you do. Your justification for any perceptual belief always derives in part from the background theory you hold. (Pryor 2000: 540)

Pryor goes on to identify several ways in which observation can be theory-laden, and argues that none of the ways in which observation is in fact theory-laden represent a threat to the theory of the immediate justification.⁸ For example, he writes, "The claim that 'observation is theory-laden' might mean that you need to have certain beliefs before you're even able to entertain or form certain observation beliefs" (Pryor 2000: 541). But we have already seen that several authors (Pryor included) attack the idea that conceptual dependence entails epistemic dependence of the sort needed for an attack on DRF. As Pryor writes,

⁸ For Pryor, the theory of immediate justification is simply the view that the contents of perception directly justify propositions for us, and this justification does not rest upon anything else we know or believe.

“Having the concepts involved in the belief that P may require believing certain other propositions; it does not follow that any justification you have to believe P must be mediated by those other propositions” (Pryor 2005: 198 fn. 5).

Pryor, however, identifies one sort of theory-ladenness that would represent a threat to DRF: “Finally, the claim ‘observation is theory-laden’ might mean that background theory necessarily plays a role in your acquisition of even *prima facie* justification from your senses. This does contradict the view I’m defending” (Pryor 2000: 541). However, Pryor states that there is no good reason to believe that observation is theory-laden in this way, and that most arguments for the theory-ladenness of observation are aimed at establishing one of the other, innocuous versions of theory-ladenness (that is, one of the versions he thinks does not conflict with the idea of immediate justification).

But Pryor is perhaps too quick in his dismissal of this sort of theory-ladenness. Perhaps there is a way in which one’s background theory determines the justification for one’s observational beliefs. Let us consider, to start with, a slightly different form of theory-ladenness (one that presumably Pryor would find inoffensive). According to this type of theory-ladenness, what observation belief one forms given a particular set of sensory stimuli is causally determined by the theories one holds.⁹ For example, two of my students told me of a recent visit to the emergency room in which they observed a woman trying to cast demons out of someone who was experiencing a seizure in the waiting area. Clearly, this woman (upon reception of a certain set of stimuli) formed the belief that she was observing the outward signs of demonic possession. Presumably, a person better-versed in modern

⁹ This is similar to (but perhaps a bit stronger than) the form of theory-ladenness mentioned above in my discussion of Pryor, according to which “you need to have certain theoretical beliefs before you’re even able to *entertain* or *form* certain observational beliefs” (Pryor 2000: 541), which is in turn similar to a type of theory-ladenness discussed by Mark Johnston, who writes, “Given increasing conceptual sophistication, the range of states and conditions of external objects that one can be immediately aware of increases. And this means that one is presented with richer and richer truthmakers for one’s immediate perceptual judgements. More and more of the world lies immediately open to view” (Johnston 2004: 155). An anonymous referee for *JPR* pointed out this passage from Johnston.

medicine would form the belief that the person was suffering from a specific type of (perhaps epileptic) seizure. So again, one's theory of the world can causally affect the content of one's perceptual beliefs.

But this form of theory-ladenness is connected to the one that (by Pryor's admission) is threatening to the notion of immediate justification. Let us see how these two versions of theory-ladenness interact in ways that are relevant for foundationalist epistemology. Consider, as an example, the phenomenon of St. Elmo's fire, which is a glowing region of atmospheric electricity that appears on pointed objects (church steeples, airplane wings or propellers, etc.) during thunderstorms. Now consider two people, Smith and Jones, each observing the same phenomenon during a thunderstorm. Let us further suppose that Smith is well-read in science, is familiar with this type of atmospheric disturbance, and without hesitation judges the observed phenomenon to be St. Elmo's fire. Thus, we see the non-threatening form of theory-ladenness at work here: because of Smith's background theories, the stimulus he is presented with causes him to form a belief that is consonant with those theories. Jones's worldview, on the other hand, is a poorly-supported pastiche of superstition and the paranormal, which he has acquired from poorly-sourced websites and unreliable supermarket tabloids (tabloids of the sort that specialize in absurd stories about Elvis sightings, people giving birth to alien babies, and bizarre tales of the supernatural). With this background, Jones without hesitation judges the observed phenomenon to be a ghost. Again, the causal role of the background theories in determining what belief issues from a particular sensory stimulus is clear. But this is not the end of the story: this harmless-seeming form of theory-ladenness has serious consequences for foundationalism. It is clear, in this case, that Smith's observation is justified, and I think it is equally clear that it is justified because Smith's theory of the world that generates this particular belief in response to this visual stimulus is itself justified. Jones's perceptual belief, on the other hand, is clearly not justified,

and it is not justified because it is generated by a theory that is itself not justified. Thus, the observational predicates ('ghost,' 'St. Elmo's fire,' etc.) we employ stand and fall with the theories that stand behind them; and their employment in observation is only justified if the corresponding theories are justified.¹⁰

One might argue that we are not quite being fair to Pryor.¹¹ For Pryor, perceptual experience is fundamentally constituted by a representational state:

Your experiences represent the world to you as being a certain way, and the way they represent the world as being is their propositional content. This propositional content is present to your mind simply by virtue of your having the experience, independently of any beliefs you might have about what external states of affairs the experience is reliably connected with. (Pryor 2000: 519)

Increasing conceptual sophistication allows us to represent more at the perceptual level—for example, increased conceptual sophistication might allow us to represent in perception a particular state of affairs as containing an expressionist painting, or an instance of St. Elmo's fire. But the important thing for Pryor is that this perceptual *experience* and its propositional content constitutes the entire justification for my perceptual *belief*, and no further background beliefs are required to explain why I am justified in so believing. The fact that I represent the world as so-and-so in perception explains, *by itself*, why my perception *belief* is justified.

But even if we grant Pryor this view of perception, the deeper point about epistemic priority remains. For suppose that my conceptual system allows me to represent the world a particular way in perception. But the essential point is that the ability to have perceptual states with a certain propositional content tells us nothing about the network of theories which dispose one to represent the world in this way rather than that way—that is, to have a perceptual experience with this propositional content rather than that. For, of course, a theme

¹⁰ I discuss this type of theory-ladenness with respect to basic beliefs in greater detail in my (2011).

¹¹ A referee for *JPR* pressed this objection.

of this paper (a theme which I will develop more shortly) is the Kantian idea that perception does not merely passively receive data about how the world is. Rather, how we conceptualize the world in experience depends on our theory of what the world contains in the first place.¹² Ergo, the question of how perception represents the world to us cannot be separated from the conceptual and theoretical apparatus we already possess when we open our eyes to the world. Does perception represent the world as containing a ghost, or St. Elmo's fire? Does perception represent the world as containing a deer, or as containing an instance of the Great Forest God, or an embodiment of the goddess Saraswati, or a transfigured Actaeon? The point is that the mere fact that perception represents the world as a particular way does not settle the question of justification. If the background theory that causes us to represent the world as so-and-so in perception is itself badly-justified, then (as I have been arguing), since the perceptual belief's own credibility indirectly rests on the justification of this background theory, the perceptual belief itself is not justified. To assert that the belief is justified wholly by the perceptual experience in question does not help the case, for we cannot ignore the question of why the perceptual experience represents the world this way rather than that way. The answer to this latter question will always be, "Because the perceiver possesses this theory of the world, or that theory of the world, which helps dictate the content of her perceptual experience." Thus, in looking at the ability of the perceptual experience in question to confer justification on purportedly basic beliefs, we cannot ignore the status (as justified or not) of the theories that stand behind and, to a large extent, dictate the propositional content of those perceptual experiences. Thus, while perceptual experiences

¹² Pryor seems to acknowledge the reliance of perceptual contents on background beliefs, but doesn't acknowledge that it has important epistemological consequences. "Worry: But if I have different background beliefs than you, then we might be subjected to the same stimulus, and yet end up with different experiences, and so different perceptual beliefs. Can *both* of our beliefs be justified? Answer: Why not? I see no reason to rule out the possibility that one and the same causal stimulus will result in people having justification for incompatible beliefs" (Pryor 2000: 547 fn. 39). But as I am arguing, whether these background beliefs are justified has a bearing on whether these experiences (and their propositional contents) are justification-conferring, and on whether the resulting perceptual beliefs are themselves justified.

(and their propositional content) may be neither justified nor unjustified, their ability to confer justification depends, as I have been arguing, on the theories standing behind the concepts they embed (and that allow us to represent the world this way, rather than that way, which allow our experience to have this propositional content rather than that).

So Pryor is correct that what theory of the world we hold plays a large role in determining what beliefs we form in response to particular visual stimuli. But this is not without normative consequences: if the background theory determining this causal chain is itself poorly-justified, then the perceptual beliefs that it determines in response to visual stimuli will be poorly-justified. Crucially for foundationalism, we see that our complex observation judgments display an epistemic dependence upon our background theories, in that these judgments' justification depends in part on the justification of the theories standing behind the observational terms embedded in our observational judgments. Thus, these observation judgments are not really basic at all, but are *epistemically dependent* upon an entire body of theory.

Pryor himself admits that in the case of more complex perceptual beliefs, one's justification for the belief is not itself wholly perceptual. For example, Pryor writes:

Some of the beliefs we form by perception are clearly more epistemologically sophisticated than others. I gave the example earlier of looking at my gas gauge, seeing that it reads "E," and forming the belief that I'm out of gas. This belief was formed by perception, but it seems to go beyond the strict deliverances of my perceptual experiences. My justification for believing the car is out of gas isn't wholly perceptual. It also rests on background knowledge I have about cars and gas gauges. It's true that I needn't have *inferred* the belief that I'm out of gas from any other premises. I might have formed it as a natural and spontaneous result of seeing the gas gauge. Nonetheless, my justification for the belief that I'm out of gas seems to draw on more than just what's provided by my visual experiences. Contrast the case where I have an experience as of there being a light ahead, and form the belief that there is a light ahead. Here it seems I do have justification for my belief which is wholly perceptual. (Pryor 2000: 538)

Thus, while Pryor is willing to concede the epistemic priority thesis with regard to some perceptual beliefs, he is not willing to concede it with respect to all of them. Well, what class of beliefs is, to use Pryor's terminology, "perceptually basic"? Pryor writes:

Perceptually basic propositions are...about the manifest observable properties of objects in the world...It is likely that what is perceptually basic will vary for different people, and it may also vary for the same person over time. (Certain kinds of training or aging might cause you to represent some phenomena by sight which your experiences did not previously represent. These phenomena may turn out to be *conceptually* quite sophisticated. For instance, it may be possible to have visual experiences which basically represent a given painting as being expressionist.) (Pryor 2000: 539)

At this point, Pryor seems to be restricting perceptually basic beliefs to non-inferential beliefs where the object of which the judgment is made is actually in view (which would explain why he denies basic status to the belief that one's gas tank is empty). But the same problem as was described above recurs: the beliefs Pryor identifies as perceptually basic are not, in fact, epistemically basic: their justification relies on the justification of other background beliefs. Take Pryor's own example of the person who can non-inferentially form the belief that a particular painting is expressionist. One can only be justified in judging that X is an expressionist painting if one is antecedently justified in believing that there is such a thing as paint or paintings and artwork, which are all contingent empirical claims one knows through experience. Again, it is not a question of merely having the appropriate background beliefs to be able to make the judgment in question: these background beliefs must be justified if they are to generate a justified perceptual belief. Thus, it would seem that the conceptually complex perceptual beliefs Pryor identifies as epistemically basic are in fact epistemically dependent: for this conceptual dependence will in almost all cases (perhaps all) involve a web of conceptual relations that are theoretical in character, and the perceptual judgment will only be justified to the extent that the predicates employed in that judgment embody justified theories and background beliefs. The phenomenon is no different in the painting case than in the St. Elmo's fire case. The cases appear different because theories

about electricity are more recent additions to our empirical repertoire. But the question of how wide-spread, well-grounded, or old a belief is should not be confused with the question of the belief's status as empirical and theoretical or not. To give an extreme example, if the objects you judged as expressionist paintings I judged to be magical portals to a parallel world (and did so non-inferentially, based on a poorly-justified but well-entrenched theory I have), my perceptual beliefs would not be justified, even if arrived at non-inferentially. And the obvious reason they would not be justified is that they rely on an ill-justified theory of what the world is like and what objects it contains, whereas your theory of the world (which is populated with expressionist paintings rather than magical portals) is much better on this count (and hence capable of justifying perceptual judgments). It may be that, on Pryor's theory, perceptual experience represents the world to me in a particular way—as containing magical portals—and has this propositional content as a result of the particular conceptual system I have acquired. But as I argued a few pages back, even if we grant Pryor this view of perception, this doesn't mean we should grant that any perceptual experience that represents the world as so-and-so will (in the absence of defeat) justify a belief with the corresponding content. I take it that the *reductio ad absurdum* is fairly obvious. This means that no matter how badly-justified or irresponsibly formed a person's theory of the world is, so long as it allows the person to form perceptual experiences that represent the world as being a particular way—as containing unicorns disguised as mules, or fairies (which appear to the rest of us as dandelion seeds), or wood nymphs (which we would call 'trees'), or whatever—then we must call the observation beliefs that are based on these perceptual experiences justified. And again, it is not merely a question of defeat or override—the theories standing behind the concepts embedded in the propositional content of these perceptual experiences are themselves so badly justified that they rob the perceptual experiences of any capacity

themselves to confer justification on observation beliefs. To deny this is to embrace a wildly permissive view of justification.¹³

So perhaps, if we are in search of immediate justification, we should look not at conceptually complex perceptual judgments, but at conceptually simple ones.¹⁴ This suggests that in order to make the case for the DRF and immediate justification as strong as possible, we should focus on those elements of perception that are most plausibly perceptually basic (because most plausibly conceptually simple), and thus most resistant to intuitions about epistemic priority: direct perception of an object's primary or secondary qualities, like shape or colors. As Richard Fumerton writes, "[T]he direct realist would probably be well-advised to...restrict the contents of [non-inferentially justified] beliefs to those involving the application of relatively simple concepts such as color and shape" (Fumerton 2006: 681). I argued in Part I of the paper that these do not represent a viable option for the foundationalist; but I left open a possible avenue of escape for the foundationalist at the end of Part I. Can the case be made that there is something epistemically prior to judgments involving even these very basic perceptual elements? I believe it can. Let us discuss this argument before moving on to the final dilemma for the advocate of DRF.

We don't tend to think (for instance) that color is a theoretical concept, one that relies on a theory that is justified (or in need of justification). But in fact color is such a concept. A child seeing red objects does not know what this redness is. A child *learns* that red is a color, and not a temperature or a texture. (It is not implausible that a creature wired to see in the infrared spectrum could see temperature as well as feel it, much as we can both see and feel shapes. Such a creature would see temperatures rather than colors. On this, see Churchland 1979. We will return to this in a moment.) But that red is a color is factual knowledge that is

¹³ I address these issues in more depth in my (2011).

¹⁴ As noted above, Pryor himself expresses some doubts as to where the basic/non-basic line is to be drawn: "It is difficult to say in any particular case exactly which propositions are perceptually basic. This is because it is very difficult to distinguish between the content of one's experiences, and the contents of the beliefs that one forms as a result of having those experiences" (Pryor 2000: 539).

learned, and justified experientially. And when the child reaches an age where she is able to form a justified perceptual belief (such as “this apple is red”), this judgment is justified because the child has learned that the predicate in question (‘is red’) denotes a color (rather than temperature, distance, or some other characteristic). A child probably does not understand why the blades on a fan become difficult to see when the fan is turned on; or why objects viewed through certain panes of glass take on odd and shifting shapes; or why familiar objects present a different color at different times. The child learns; but the important thing is that the child is learning facts about the world, and the beliefs the child is acquiring are justified as are any other such beliefs—empirically. Thus, when a person makes a perceptual judgment—“That apple is red,” “John is far away,” “Amelia is in the shade”—she is employing a sophisticated theoretical apparatus, and her perceptual judgments are only justified because her theoretical apparatus is justified.

Pryor would (I suspect) claim that this merely shows the agent has to have the correct beliefs to form perceptual judgments in the first place. As we noted above, Pryor acknowledges that observation is theory-laden in the sense that an agent must have certain beliefs in order to be able to form certain types of perceptual judgments. But Pryor is careful to cast his entire discussion of this point in terms of belief, not in terms of knowledge or even justified belief. He writes:

For instance, in order to be able to entertain the proposition that the table is solid, you need the concept of solidity, and to have that, you may need to believe a certain “folk physics.” You may need to have beliefs about how solid objects interact with other things...You may need certain background beliefs to entertain your perceptual beliefs. I’m only claiming that your justification for your perceptual beliefs doesn’t rest on those background beliefs. (Pryor 2000: 541)

At most, Pryor might concede that having perceptual knowledge requires that one have *true* background beliefs, but does not require that these background beliefs be

justified.¹⁵ But both of these lines of argument require too little. Forming *justified* perceptual beliefs requires more than just possessing the (true) background beliefs required to form the perceptual belief in the first place. For if these background beliefs are not justified, then the perceptual belief is not either. Consider an example: imagine a person who, from birth, had every sense but that of taste, but was given this sense by an operation.¹⁶ The patient doesn't know what the various tastes signify, and has limited theoretical understanding of food composition (having never taken much of an interest before now). Suppose that, without taking time to investigate, the patient arbitrarily assigns correlates to the various taste sensations—sweetness signifies the presence of fat, saltiness the presence of sugar, sourness the presence of acidity, and bitterness the presence of milk. Now, these assignments are arbitrary, and without any evidential basis; but let us assume that our patient (being epistemically irresponsible) really believes them. These assignments give our patient the correct background beliefs to be able to (non-inferentially) form the belief, “This substance is acidic” when tasting sour foods like lemon and vinegar. And, of course, these judgments are correct, since in fact sourness is the taste that allows us to detect acidity (although this was a purely fortuitous assignment on the part of our patient). Should we say, then, that the patient's perceptual experiences of sourness confer non-inferential justification on this narrow class of perceptual beliefs? Of course not. It is not enough to have the correct beliefs, if these beliefs are wholly lacking in justification. So the background beliefs that determine what perceptual beliefs we form in response to sensory stimuli must themselves have some degree of justification if they are to confer justification on these perceptual beliefs.

At this point, the defender of the Given will argue that even if our hypothetical taster lacked certain information about what sourness really signifies, he nevertheless was in a position to acquire some empirical knowledge from his newly-acquired sense of taste. “After

¹⁵ An anonymous referee for *JPR* suggested this line of argument on behalf of Pryor.

¹⁶ Ignore for the moment the fact that the person's brain would be unable to process gustatory stimuli.

all,” one might object, “even if your hypothetical taster doesn’t know that the objects that taste sour are acidic, he does know that they are *sour*.” To know that, one need only know that the item in question causes a sensation of sourness. This gives one direct empirical information, the kind of information that is an excellent candidate for immediate justification.

This is an interesting objection. After all, is there really any more to (say) knowing that something is red than knowing that the object causes a sensation of redness? As a matter of fact, there is. If all you know is that an object causes a sensation, a sensation you can classify with other similar sensations as being of type RED, then you don’t really know anything substantive about the world. At least, you don’t know anything substantive about the world insofar as the predicate ‘is red’ is concerned. For this example is not an example of the application of the empirical concept *red*. It is a phenomenal report masquerading as an empirical report. Because if all you know is that the object in question causes a particular sensation (similar to other sensations which you classify as RED) then you don’t in fact know that the object in question is red. For if you only know that the object in question causes in you a sensation classifiable as RED, but you don’t know what this tells you about the object (temperature? distance? density? caloric pressure?), then you don’t understand the predicate ‘is red’—you haven’t mastered the concept *red*. In order for your application of the predicate ‘is red’ in observation to represent *empirical* knowledge, you must understand that ‘is red’ signifies a *color*—that is, you must have some grasp of the theory that is evoked by utterances of the word ‘red’. So in fact you do not know that something is red if all you know is that the object evokes in you a particular sensation. And you don’t know it precisely because, unless you understand some of the theoretical commitments involved in the application of red (e.g., that ‘red’ signifies a color, and not some other empirical feature of objects in the world), you can’t really be said to be applying the concept *red* in observation.

Of course, to understand that ‘red’ signifies a color, this doesn’t require that one have an elaborate understanding of secondary qualities, etc.—but it does require that one understand that ‘red,’ ‘green,’ ‘blue,’ etc., are colors, rather than (say) temperatures, distances, or textures. And this information is not merely given in sensation. That is: the meaning of the word ‘red’ is not given in sensation, but is instead given by the network of conceptual connections with which it is involved. As Paul Churchland puts the point,

The meaning of...observation terms has nothing to do with the intrinsic qualitative identity of whatever sensations just happen to prompt their non-inferential application in singular empirical judgments. Rather, their position in semantic space appears to be determined by the network of sentences containing them accepted by the speakers who use them. (Churchland 1979: 11-12)

Churchland himself demonstrates this point by imagining a race of creatures who can only see light in the far infrared, and thus can see the temperature of objects. Imagine that the sensations they experience range from incandescent white (for hot objects) to black (for cold objects). Churchland points out that it would be absurd to translate their observation sentences as reporting colors (black, white, and gray) rather than temperatures. And indeed it would; the content of their observation sentences is determined by the role the sensation plays in the theory it evokes in observational judgments, not by the intrinsic quality of the sensation itself.

But isn’t this just the familiar—and harmless—point that Pryor has already conceded? Isn’t this just the point that formation of an observation belief requires that one possess other concepts? As Pryor points out, though, conceptual dependence is not the same as epistemic dependence or priority.

But once you allow that the formation of perceptual judgments relies on this conceptual network, you are conceding epistemic dependence. For the concepts that are evoked in observation are theoretical, and as such contestable; and the justification of our perceptual judgments depends on the justification of the theories they embody. Just as Smith

was justified in forming the judgment, “There is St. Elmo’s fire” *because* his background theories regarding atmospheric electricity were justified—and just as Jones was not justified in forming the belief “There is a ghost” because his background theories regarding the supernatural were not justified—our application of common observation predicates is only justified because and to the extent that these predicates exemplify theories that are themselves justified. If I judge “The apple is red,” where ‘is red’ is taken to be a color predicate, this judgment is not justified unless I am justified in believing in color as a theoretical concept.

It is hard to conceive of our simple observational predicates as being embedded in theories that are justified, or in need of justification. Ironically (given the historical appeal of infallibilism) we seem to think that in order for our background beliefs to count as a theory, or to count as justified, they need to be in principle contestable. It is hard to imagine how our simplest observation predicates could embody a contestable theory. And yet they can. Churchland gives a simple example, governing the simple bodily sensation of heat. Churchland writes:

Consider the following homilies, all of which, I take it, are non-peripheral elements in our naïve or common-sense conception of heat.

- 1) If a given body is warmer than a second body, and that body is warmer than a third, then the first body is warmer than the third body.
- 2) If a given body is warmer than a second body, then it is not the case that the second body is warmer than the first.
- 3) The warmer of two bodies is the one that will cause the other to *warm up*, at least somewhat, when placed in contact with it.
- 4) The warmer of two bodies (of the same weight) is the one that will warm up a third body the most.
- 5) The warmer of two bodies is the one that *feels* warmer, to normal observers in normal circumstances. (Churchland 1979: 23)

Unfortunately for our common-sense theory of heat, these elements create fatal inconsistencies. Churchland asks us to consider a kilogram of green wood at 130°F, a kilogram of iron at 120°F, and a kilogram of water at 110°F. Churchland writes,

Applying criterion (3) to these objects, pairwise, we will find we must rank them in order of decreasing warmth, as follows: wood, iron, water...If we apply criterion (4), however, we shall have to rank them as follows: water,

wood, iron...And lastly, if we apply criterion (5) we shall have to rank them thus: iron, water, wood...Given principles (1) and (2), however, these diverse results generate multiple inconsistencies. (Churchland 1979: 23-4)

Churchland draws the following conclusion:

The conviction that the world instantiates our ordinary observation predicates cannot be defended by a simple appeal to the “manifest deliverance of sense.” *Whether or not the world instantiates them is in the first instance a question of whether the theory which imbeds them is true*, and this question in turn is primarily a matter of the relative power and adequacy of the theory as a means of rendering the world intelligible...[We cannot] expect that the conceptual frameworks involved with the other [sensory] modalities will differ in any relevant way from the framework just indicted. Though the principles and assumptions which constitute them are indeed basic to our current conception of the observable world, their status as such affords them no proof against modification or rejection in light of new information and fresh understanding. However familiar, entrenched, or successful they may be, they remain essentially speculative. (Churchland 1979: 24-5. Emphasis in original.)

So the content of a given observation judgment is going to depend on the content of the observation predicates (e.g., ‘is red’) employed in that judgment. And as we have argued, the content of an observation predicate depends not on its connection to a particular phenomenal state, but to the place of this predicate in a complex network of commitments. And as Churchland has argued, these commitments are essentially theoretical commitments, albeit extremely well-entrenched ones. And so when you experience a red stimulus, you are (under certain circumstances) justified in making a color judgment (as opposed to a judgment of temperature or distance or...) because of the theory in which color predicates like ‘is red’ are embedded. So again, that you are justified in judging that the object is *red* (where this is taken to be a judgment of *color* and not, as we saw above, merely a phenomenal report masquerading as an empirical report) depends, crucially, not only on what is observed, but on the theories that give content to the observation in the first place. Again, you are making a judgment with a particular empirical content, not merely with a particular phenomenal content. And to make a judgment with that empirical content requires that the theory behind that empirical content is itself justified. (And of course in Part I we argued that there is

another type of epistemic dependence when it comes to observation reports involving basic perceptual elements such as color and shape.)

All of this flies in the face of an ordinary, direct realist way of conceiving of our perception of color: on this conception of color and color perception, colors are instantiated by physical objects, and we are directly acquainted with these sensible qualities in ordinary, non-hallucinatory visual experience. This direct acquaintance provides the subject's non-inferential justification for believing (say) that she is seeing a red object.¹⁷

But this picture of perception is fundamentally out of step with the alternate, Sellarsian picture that has been developed here. First, on the model of judgment that traces from Kant through Sellars to Churchland, all judgment (including observational judgment) is conceptually mediated (which is not, of course, the same thing as saying that perception is indirect). And, as Churchland argues, all of our perceptual concepts are essentially theoretical. So when I form an observation judgment about something—whether it is a ghost, a unicorn, or a color—this judgment is only as justified as the theoretical apparatus that stands behind the concepts I am deploying in perception. (Fortunately, I should say that the average person is quite justified in using color terminology in ordinary perception!) Thus, it is not enough for the defender of DRF to say that I am directly acquainted with (say) red objects, or instances of St. Elmo's fire, and that this direct acquaintance provides me with adequate justification for believing that I am seeing a red object or St. Elmo's fire. I do not deny that we are directly acquainted with objects and their qualities. But when I observe an object and its properties, I deploy in this observational judgment an inherently contestable set of observational concepts and, as I have argued at length, the question of whether this observational judgment is justified is not independent of the question of whether the theories in which these observational concepts are embedded are justified.

¹⁷ This line of argument was pushed by an anonymous referee for *JPR*.

Second, as I argued extensively in Part I, application of basic perceptual concepts like color concepts requires conceptual mastery, which presupposes mastery of other, related concepts. And hence direct acquaintance with a property, even in ordinary conditions, confers justification only in the context of other justified beliefs possessed by the agents. (Although remember that we concluded Part I with some doubts about this argument, doubts which I promised to resolve in Part III. But in resolving these doubts, we will hopefully lay to rest the idea that we have foundational, direct acquaintance with objects' perceptible qualities.)

There are, no doubt, various ways in which the defender of the Given can challenge these points.¹⁸ But I will not dwell further on the theory-ladenness of basic perceptual judgments of primary and secondary qualities. For I think the defender of the Given has a much more pressing worry waiting in the wings. It is to this final worry that we now turn.

III. THE DILEMMA FOR DIRECT REALIST FOUNDATIONALISM

Let us set aside for now the question of whether observational judgments of objects' simple perceptible qualities (such as color) are theory-laden in a way that commits us to the thesis of epistemic dependence. We have seen that, at the very least, complex perceptual beliefs (like the belief, "That is St. Elmo's Fire") display the type of theory-ladenness that commits us to epistemic priority. Given this fact, the best option for DRF is to say that our foundational beliefs involve direct perception of objects' primary and secondary qualities like shape and color. The crucial question to ask is this: what role (if any) do basic beliefs about these basic perceptible qualities of objects play in the justification of our (epistemically) complex non-inferential perceptual beliefs, such as the belief that there is St. Elmo's fire on that church steeple? Pryor himself doesn't think the answer is terribly important:

¹⁸ Indeed, as a referee for *JPR* has emphasized to me, not everyone agrees that colors even are properties of external objects, rather than merely qualities of the phenomenal character of our own experience. Of course, it is a long way from showing that this is true of color and showing that it is true of all basic perceptual qualities of objects about which Churchland's argument can be made. But at any rate, as I say, even if she can dismantle Churchland's argument, the defender of the Given has a more pressing worry waiting in the wings.

The official version of my view is that we have immediate *prima facie* justification for believing those propositions that our experiences basically represent to us—whichever propositions those turn out to be. Perhaps we don't *believe* very many perceptually basic propositions. However, our experiences *do* basically represent some propositions to us—that is, they represent some propositions to us not by virtue of representing other propositions to us—and I claim that when our experiences do this, we thereby acquire immediate justification for believing that those basically represented propositions are the case. Perhaps our minds pass over them to more sophisticated propositions, as in my example with the gas gauge. My claim is merely that our immediate justification for the perceptually basic propositions is playing a crucial role in the epistemological story. (Pryor 2000: 539)

But the answer turns out to be crucial, and it turns out to resolve the worry with which we were left at the end of Part I of the paper. The worry there was this: when we apply the perception altering concepts (like blurring, shadow, etc.) in an observational judgment, do we actually know or justifiably believe that the object in question is blurred, or in shadow, or whatever? Or is the adjustment of our perceptual judgment something that takes place at a sort of pre-cognitive level, where the factors altering our perception cannot really be characterized as knowledge or justified belief? If the latter is the case, then the application of simple perceptual concepts like 'red' may not presuppose any knowledge or justified belief, *per se*—merely the operation of mental processes that occur at too low a level to count as knowledge (even know-how).

But now we are in a position to see that the defender of DRF is thrown on the horns of a dilemma that is fatal to that position. Let us carefully consider the options with which the defender of DRF is faced. Given that we have complex observation beliefs about objects in the world ("There is a policeman," "That is a Ford Pinto," etc.), do these complex observation reports rest on perceptually basic simple beliefs (about color, shape, etc.)? As we will see, answering either "Yes" or "No" proves fatal to DRF.

Let us first consider the consequences of answering "Yes" to this question. As noted at the beginning of the article, Pryor takes no official stance on this question, but is at least open to an answer of "Yes"; whereas other foundationalists like Huemer explicitly answer in

the affirmative. Timothy McGrew argues that we in fact form beliefs about basic perceptual elements on our way to forming more complex perceptual beliefs (McGrew 2003). Although McGrew is a classical (i.e., indirect realist) foundationalist instead of an advocate of DRF, he is worth quoting as he makes the point in question in a very lucid way. In responding to an objection against the claim that we normally form beliefs about basic perceptual elements like color and shape, McGrew writes,

It is certainly true that the first explicit thought we have when looking at a garden is of the real, three dimensional physical garden, and it may be very difficult for us, unless we are professional artists, to create a mindset in which we can look out over the garden and be aware only of a collage of colors. But it is likewise difficult for a reader to focus on a line of clear prose and see it as a pattern of dark and light regions on a page. Yet when we look at a child learning to read it is obvious that this is precisely what is going on; and the development from a child to a mature reader is a continuous process. The moral we draw in the reading case is not that awareness of marks on the page is irrelevant to reading, but that increasing competence (mercifully) makes much of the process subconscious. Similarly, the answer to this challenge to strong foundationalism is that an adult's awareness of visual, tactile, and auditory stimuli is often subconscious but not therefore irrelevant to justification of empirical beliefs. (McGrew 2003: 200)

Thus, McGrew thinks that our justification for complex perceptual judgments rests in part on our justification for perceptual propositions about these basic perceptible elements. So, to use Pryor's example, although my perceptual judgment that there is a policeman ahead is justified in part by "certain background evidence about the way that members of our society typically dress" (Pryor 2000: 538), it may also be justified in part by the fact that I am justified in believing the proposition that there is a blue-coated figure standing ahead (even if I don't, contra McGrew, form the *belief* that there is a blue-coated figure standing ahead of me).

But in any case, on the option we are currently considering, the defender of DRF either holds that perception of basic perceptible qualities (like color and shape) of an object (a) immediately justifies *propositions* about these basic perceptible qualities, or (b) immediately justifies *beliefs* about these basic perceptible qualities; and, in either case, these

basic propositions or beliefs play a fundamental role in justifying more complex observational beliefs, such as “There is a policeman ahead of me.” But this is a crucial concession: for if these basic propositions (or beliefs) are justified for us, and these justified propositions play a role in our complex non-basic justified perceptual judgments, then the defender of the Given no longer has a sufficient reason for denying that in ordinary cases of perception we are justified in believing that the jump rope is blurred, the glass is wavy, the object is in shadow, etc.; and that these justified propositions play a role in the justified perceptual judgments with which they interact in complex ways. Stated otherwise: if the automatic processing of perceptible features of an object that occurs on the way to making a perceptual judgment *itself* justifies propositions, and if these justified propositions play a role in justifying said perceptual judgment, then the defender of the Given no longer has grounds for denying that the automatic processing of perceptual features such as blurring, shadow, and the other perceptual-altering factors justifies propositions, and that *these* justified propositions play a role in justifying basic perceptual judgments we might make about color and so forth. Thus, the justification of a proposition such as “That is red” will depend on justified propositions such as “That is in standard viewing conditions,” and it will be justified because in other circumstances the proposition “That is in shadow” or “It is too dark to tell what color it is,” etc., is justified for us. Thus, even if the justification of complex non-basic perceptual judgments rests on the justification of perceptual propositions that are allegedly basic, the justification for these propositions rests on other justified propositions (arising from perceptual processing), and also (as we saw) from propositions that are justified for us in other circumstances (but not in the present circumstances).

Let me state the point slightly differently. Remember what the nagging worry was at the end of Part I: the worry was that although a competent perceiver has indeed learned to make perceptual judgments that take into account the above perception-altering factors

(blurring, shadow, reflection, etc.), it is nevertheless inaccurate to say that in forming such perceptual judgments the perceiver has beliefs or knowledge about these perception-altering factors. Granted, the competent perceiver alters her perceptual judgment to take account of these factors, but this alteration takes place at a sufficiently low cognitive level that it is inappropriate to ascribe any knowledge or any beliefs to the perceiver. Thus, the critic argued in Part I, these concepts (e.g., motion, blurring, shadow, etc.) are merely dispositions to alter one's perceptual judgments; they do not serve as free-standing beliefs or bits of knowledge which are epistemically prior to the perceptual judgment which is justified by the sensation. But in embracing the first horn of the dilemma, the defender of DRF is essentially claiming that these automatic (and perhaps unconscious) sensory processes (such as our sensing of color) *do* give rise to justified beliefs, or that at the very least they justify propositions for us, and these justified beliefs or propositions play a crucial epistemic role in perceptual judgments. So embracing the first horn of the dilemma resolves the final worry of Part I in our favor!

What, then, of the other horn of the dilemma? The advocate of DRF can always answer "No" to the above question, and deny that complex perceptual judgments rest on justified beliefs or propositions about basic perceptible qualities. Thus, the defender of DRF would be arguing that experience directly justifies complex beliefs ("There is a policeman," "That is a Ford Pinto," etc.), and that such beliefs are the most basic observational beliefs that we form. This move would undercut the argument from Part I of this paper: by denying that experience justifies beliefs (or propositions) about the basic perceptible qualities of objects, the defender of DRF is at perfect liberty now to deny that experience justifies beliefs or propositions about the perception-altering factors detailed in Part I, and hence at liberty to deny the epistemic interdependence of observational beliefs on these factors. The advocate of DRF can now say that when we process perception-altering factors in making a perceptual

judgment, this processing does not give rise to justified beliefs or propositions regarding these factors, and hence these justified propositions do not play any role in the justification of perceptual judgments. But the cost of this move is high, for it means abandoning DRF entirely. For, as we have seen, the thesis of epistemic priority (in the form of theory-ladenness) *does* apply with respect to complex perceptual judgments. As we saw in our discussion above concerning terms like ‘expressionist painting,’ ‘St. Elmo’s fire,’ ‘ghost,’ ‘deer,’ or whatever, the degree to which we are justified in deploying such terms in our non-inferential perceptual judgments is heavily dependent on the justification of the background theories that stand behind these observation terms. So, the theory is no longer foundational, for at its ‘foundation’ are complex non-basic perceptual beliefs, beliefs whose justification relies on the prior justification of a body of background theory. And so if these complex perceptual judgments are the most basic form of perceptual judgment or proposition that is justified for the agent, then the most basic type of perceptual judgment displays epistemic dependence of the very sort that Pryor was attempting to deny.

Thus, the advocate of DRF faces a real dilemma. On the one horn, she can claim that complex perceptual judgments rest on justified beliefs or propositions that are about basic perceptible qualities. Thus, she can claim that our most epistemically basic propositions or beliefs are simple propositions or beliefs about the basic perceptible qualities of objects—propositions or beliefs that are justified by the automatic information processing of our sensory apparatus. But, as we saw, if we embrace this conclusion then we concede the anti-Given argument from Part I; for if we concede that the automatic processing of our sensory apparatus gives rise to justified beliefs or propositions about color, shape, etc., then we have no reason to deny that the automatic processing of perception-altering factors also gives rise to justified propositions about these factors. Thus, the best hope of staving off the argument of Part I was to deny that the processing of these factors gave rise to justified beliefs or

propositions—to argue instead that this processing was automatic and ‘sub-cognitive,’ so to speak. This suggested that our most basic beliefs are not about the simple perceptible qualities of objects after all. But of course choosing this route means embracing the other horn of the dilemma—acknowledging that the most basic justified perceptual beliefs or propositions for agents are actually more complex ones, the sorts of complex beliefs or propositions about which the thesis of epistemic dependence and priority is more easily established. Hence, the defender of DRF is truly between a rock and a hard place—either acknowledge that epistemically complex judgments are in fact the most basic perceptual judgments that we make; or acknowledge the existence and epistemic importance of perceptually basic propositions, while at the same time being forced to acknowledge their complex epistemic dependence on perceptually basic propositions regarding perception-altering factors (which amounts to acknowledging that none of these propositions are perceptually *basic* in any epistemological sense that is interesting to the defender of DRF).

There are still a couple of moves the defender of DRF could make. Here is the first: in embracing the first horn of our dilemma, the defender of DRF could argue that there is a difference between the way basic perceptual qualities (like shape and color) and perception-altering factors are processed. Our perception of shape and color might cause (and justify) beliefs (even unconscious beliefs, in the form dispositions to assent to propositions), but no beliefs are formed about perception-altering factors; these are a factor only at the non-conscious, information-processing level. Thus, perceptual experience doesn’t cause justified beliefs about these perception-altering factors.¹⁹

The defender of DRF can make this move, but it strikes me as *ad hoc*. It is *ad hoc* to deny that things like ‘being in shadow,’ ‘being reflective,’ ‘being blurred,’ etc., are themselves things that we see in perception, are perceptible qualities of objects (or the world

¹⁹ A referee for *JPR* suggested the defender of DRF might make this move.

we see). I have described these as ‘perception-altering factors,’ but this description is misleading—they are really just other perceptible qualities that interact in complex ways with the more ‘traditional’ philosophical sensible qualities of color, shape, and so forth. And so why should we form justified beliefs about one kind of perceptible quality, but not the other? Or why should experience justify propositions about one kind of perceptible quality, but not the other? Both kinds of qualities are manifest in experience, are in perception in the same way; a double-standard here seems ill-motivated. For someone who really thinks that our complex judgments about objects (“That is a Ford Pinto”) are built up out of simple judgments about more basic elements of perception, these complex judgments must be built up out of what is received in perception—and what is received in perception is not just color and shape, but distance, shadow, motion, blurring, reflection, and so forth. If I judge that the object before me is a Ford Pinto, and this judgment is built out of simple perceptual elements, let us be clear about what these elements are: I don’t just see the red of the paint, the black of the tires, and the curve of the hatchback; equally, I *see* the reflectivity of the chrome bumper and of the glass windscreen; I *see* the shadow on the ground underneath the car and in the wheel wells; I *see* the dark of the interior. There is parity here; and if I form justified beliefs about one set of properties, there is no principled reason for denying that I form justified beliefs about the other.

This allows us to emphasize, again, how one objection that has been raised against our account is insufficiently motivated. The objection (which we have touched on a couple of times) is that our foundational beliefs really are epistemically basic, because whatever other states are necessary for their justification must only exist as beliefs, or true beliefs, or something like that (whereas my anti-foundationalist argument asserts that our supposedly foundational beliefs are not foundational because they are epistemically dependent on other *justified* beliefs or bits of *knowledge*). But again, if we have justified beliefs about basic

perceptible qualities of objects (or perception justifies propositions about these qualities), then by parity of reasoning, perception also justifies beliefs (or propositions) about these perception-altering qualities. Thus, what our supposedly foundational beliefs depend on for their justification are *justified beliefs* or *propositions* that are epistemically prior to these beliefs about the basic perceptible qualities of objects. And again, it seems likely that these epistemically prior states must be justified. For as we argued extensively in Part I, for an epistemic agent to be able to render justified observational judgments involving objects' basic perceptible qualities (shape, color, etc.), the agent must have achieved perceptual mastery of these qualities, which requires having also achieved perceptual mastery of the perception-altering factors outlined in Part I (as well, no doubt, as countless other perception-altering factors not listed there).

Let me explain the argument as follows. For ease of expression (and to foreshadow our upcoming argument formalization), let Q stand for "Concepts relating to objects' simple perceptible qualities (shape, color, etc.)" and A stand for "Concepts relating to perception-altering factors (shadow, blurring, motion, etc.)" For the agent to have mastered Q, she must have mastered A. It is not sufficient that she apply these A haphazardly, in a hit-or-miss fashion. She must have achieved a sufficient level of mastery over these concepts to count as having mastered the relevant Q, and in order to be able to render justified observation judgments essentially involving these Q. And the first horn of our dilemma in Part III has argued that if this level of mastery of Q produces justified beliefs, then mastery over A must also produce justified beliefs. And hence, the ability to produce justified observation reports essentially involving Q presupposes the ability to produce justified observation reports involving these interdependent A-concepts as they interact with these Q in the ways described in Part I. Thus, our ability to produce justified Q-beliefs does depend on *justified* A-beliefs. Indeed, the argument can be formalized as follows:

- 1) The ability to render justified observational judgments involving Q requires mastery of Q. ($Oq \rightarrow Mq$)
- 2) Mastery of Q presupposes mastery of A. ($Mq \rightarrow Ma$)
- 3) If mastery of Q results in justified observation judgments involving Q, then mastery of A results in justified observation judgments involving A. ($Mq \rightarrow Oq \rightarrow (Ma \rightarrow Oa)$)
- 4) Mastery of Q results in justified observation judgments involving Q. ($Mq \rightarrow Oq$)
- 5) Mastery of A results in justified observation judgments involving A. ($Ma \rightarrow Oa$) (3, 4)
- C1) Therefore, mastery of Q presupposes the ability to render justified observation judgments involving A. ($Mq \rightarrow Oa$), (2, 5)
- C2) Therefore, the ability to render justified observation judgments involving Q presupposes the ability to render justified observation judgments involving A. ($Oq \rightarrow Oa$) (1, 6)

I argued for 1 and 2 in Part I. 3 is simply the argument we have been rehearsing in Part III: if the defender of DRF claims that experience produces justified beliefs or propositions about objects' basic perceptible qualities, then she has no principled reason to deny that it produces justified beliefs or propositions about the perception-altering factors described in Part I. 4 amounts to embracing the first horn of the dilemma—acknowledging that experience justifies beliefs or propositions about objects' basic perceptible qualities. But the conclusion is that our ability to form justified observation beliefs involving Q presupposes an ability to generate justified A-beliefs on which these Q-beliefs depend, epistemically. We saw, in Part I, the relation of epistemic dependence between A-beliefs and Q-beliefs (a relation reiterated in 2 above); the above argument shows that justified Q-beliefs epistemically depend on *justified* A-beliefs. Thus, we can conclude that if the defender of DRF embraces the first horn of the dilemma, supposedly basic beliefs do presuppose other justified beliefs for their justification, and are not basic at all.

So much for the first horn of the dilemma, in which the defender of DRF regards our most basic perceptual judgment as being about the basic perceptual qualities of objects. As for the second horn of the dilemma, I argued in Part II (with the example of the person who suddenly acquires the ability to taste) that if our most basic beliefs are more complex beliefs,

then the background theories that these beliefs are epistemically dependent upon must at least be justified for the basic beliefs themselves to be justified; it is not enough for them merely to be true. So whichever horn of the dilemma the defender of DRF chooses, our most basic beliefs are epistemically dependent not just on beliefs, or true beliefs, or subconscious information processing states, but on epistemically significant items like justified beliefs or propositions. Thus, these basic beliefs are not *epistemically* basic—not *foundational*—at all.

But perhaps there is one final move that the defender of DRF can make. Recall that for Pryor, perceptual experiences have propositional content—they represent the world to us in a particular way, “and the way they represent the world as being is their propositional content” (Pryor 2000: 519). Pryor might still be able to embrace the first horn of the dilemma without conceding the argument of the first half of the paper.²⁰ Recall the earlier quote from Pryor, where he suggests that even if we don’t believe many perceptually basic propositions, perception represents these propositions to us and “we thereby acquire immediate justification for believing that those basically represented propositions are the case” (Pryor 2000: 539). Of course, if we also formed beliefs about these basic perceptible qualities, then (as I have been arguing) DRF fails, as there is no principled reason for denying that we also form beliefs about the various perception-altering factors, upon which our beliefs about the basic perceptible qualities of objects are epistemically dependent. But Pryor continues, “Perhaps our minds pass over them to more sophisticated propositions...My claim is merely that our immediate justification for the perceptually basic propositions is playing a crucial role in the story” (Pryor 2000: 539). The suggestion, then, is that Pryor offers the defender of DRF to embrace the first horn of the dilemma: perceptual experience represents for us basic perceptible qualities of objects (color, shape, etc.), and justifies these propositions for us. At the same time, perceptual experience also immediately justifies further propositions about

²⁰ This line of argument was suggested by a referee for *JPR*.

perception-altering factors ('This is blurry,' 'This is in shadow,' 'Viewing conditions are ordinary,' etc.). But—crucially—we don't form any *beliefs* about these basic perceptible qualities or about these perception altering factors. Rather, the "immediate justification for the perceptually basic propositions" justifies our complex beliefs about the world—'There is a policeman,' 'There is an expressionist painting,' 'That is St. Elmo's Fire,' etc. Thus, our most basic beliefs are the sort of complex beliefs discussed in Part II—but these complex beliefs rest on, and are entirely justified by, a stratum of immediately-justified, perceptually basic propositions, both about objects' basic perceptible qualities *and* about the sort of perception-altering factors discussed in Part I.

This is a clever theoretical move, and it is a testament to the innovativeness of Pryor's work that it allows for such suppleness in response to challenges. But I fear that this move will not save DRF. For consider the picture of justification that is envisioned on this theory: one has a perceptual experience—say, of a white, glowing area. One's perceptual experience immediately justifies for one various claims about basic perceptible qualities that are evident to one (white, glowing, roundish) and various perception-altering factors that may or may not be relevant under these circumstances (object at middle-distance, conditions are dark, etc.). Now, on the view we are considering here, one's "mind pass[es] over" these simpler propositions (i.e., one doesn't form beliefs about them) to a more sophisticated proposition—but of course, to *which* proposition? I am not suggesting that there is a process of inference going on here. Pryor suggests nothing of the kind, and I would certainly agree that our most perceptually basic *beliefs* are *psychologically* non-inferential. But the simple fact is that this gambit on behalf of the defender of DRF simply runs us head-on into the problem we encountered in Part II of this essay. If, in response to a perceptual experience (that justifies certain propositions about these basic perceptible qualities and those perception-altering factors), I non-inferentially form the basic belief, "There is a ghost!", whereas someone else

non-inferentially forms the belief, “There is St. Elmo’s fire!”, then of course we must ask the further question of which basic belief is *licensed* or *justified* by these simple propositions (about color, shape, and perception-altering factors) that are immediately justified by perceptual experience? And the mere fact that I am justified in believing propositions (even if I don’t believe them) about color, extension, glowing-ness, etc., etc., cannot justify me in the belief that I am seeing a ghost (or St. Elmo’s fire) unless the theory of ghosts (or the theory of St. Elmo’s fire) is itself justified. Or so I argued in Part II.

The fundamental problem is that the defender of DRF sees justification for basic beliefs as a one-way process: barring defeat, justification flows from psychologically non-inferential judgments to the superstructure of theory.²¹ But of course, as we have seen, justification flows in both directions—not only from cognitively spontaneous judgment up to theory, but from theory down to cognitively spontaneous judgment; each bears epistemically on the other. Crucially for our current point, background theory serves as an important check on our cognitively spontaneous judgments, so that the latter are not wholly epistemically prior to the former, but the latter depend on the former to some extent for their justification. This model of cognitively spontaneous judgment is out of step with foundationalism, and incompatible with the notion of an epistemically basic belief.

One might worry, however, that this view has the consequence that no unsophisticated person (i.e., a person who doesn’t reflectively consider his or her background theory) could ever have justified basic beliefs, as the background theory in question will also lack positive epistemic status.²² What it takes for a person’s background theories (a person’s theories about whether the world contains deer, or unicorns, or God, or ghosts) to be justified for that person is certainly a vexed issue, a larger one than can be addressed here. Whether the person in question must have evidence for these theories, or must be able to defend them discursively,

²¹ I discuss these issues in greater depth (and specifically in relation to the foundationalist theories of Plantinga) in my 2011.

²² An anonymous referee raised this concern.

is a matter for debate, involving issues of internalism, externalism, and other issues in epistemology. It may well be that an agent can have epistemic entitlement for her background theories without any sort of ability to reflectively defend or justify them. Or maybe she cannot. But resolution of this dispute does not affect the thesis under discussion in this paper. For what is clear is that whatever the source of the justification of this background theory, the justification of this theory is to some extent epistemically prior to the justification of the relevant psychologically non-inferential beliefs embedding the relevant theoretical terms; and such beliefs are therefore not epistemically basic. If the justification for the background theory depends on evidence and arguments, then the justification for the relevant psychologically non-inferential beliefs will, too (at least indirectly). Thus, this model of the structure of justification is fundamentally out of step with the DRF picture, which cannot admit the epistemic priority of theory to foundations.

Of course, perceptual beliefs can and do serve as evidence for (and against) background theories; to deny this would be absurd. But the credibility of any particular perceptual belief is always (and unavoidably) to be assessed in the light of background theory.²³ For this reason, we can say with Sellars, “If there is a logical dimension in which other empirical propositions rest on observation reports, there is another logical dimension in which the latter rest on the former” (Sellars 1997: 78/§38).

Thus, while this final gambit of the defender of DRF is ingenious, it does not allow the defender to escape from the fundamental dilemma: either our most basic beliefs are about objects’ basic perceptible qualities (and hence, also about perception-altering factors); or our most basic beliefs are complex beliefs (such as ‘There is a ghost!’). In neither case are these most basic beliefs epistemically basic in the way required for DRF to be true.

²³ This evaluation of observation in light of currently-accepted theory undoubtedly contributes a certain conservative element to our epistemological practice, but this does not preclude the revision or rejection of theory in the face of recalcitrant perceptual evidence. These issues have been addressed before, most famously by Kuhn 1959 and 1970.

IV: CONCLUSION: WHY THE GIVEN CAN'T DO WHAT THE GIVEN WAS SUPPOSED TO DO

As I noted in the introduction, Bonjour described the Given in epistemology as a proposed solution to the epistemic regress problem—it is supposed to enable foundational beliefs to be genuinely foundational. But for foundational beliefs to be genuine ‘regress stoppers,’ they cannot depend for their justification on any other belief (at least, not on any belief the agent is required to justifiably believe). For the Given to play its role in this scheme, it must *completely and all on its own* justify the observational belief in question. But if the argument of Part I is sound, the Given cannot play this role within DRF. Intuitions or immediate apprehensions might play a role in justifying foundational observational beliefs, but as we saw they can only play this role if the agent has mastered other, epistemically prior concepts—concepts like *shadow, motion, reflection, standard conditions*, and so on. Thus, the Given cannot enable observation beliefs to serve as regress-stoppers within DRF, since the Given can only serve its justificatory role in the presence of other, epistemically prior beliefs and concepts.

The chief conclusion to be noted is that the Given can only serve the role that foundationalists identified for it if it can by itself justify foundational beliefs, thereby rendering these beliefs genuinely foundational—that is, able to justify our other empirical beliefs without standing in need of justification by these same empirical beliefs. As we have seen in this paper, the Given cannot fulfill this function within DRF.

We did examine one possible way out for the defender of DRF: as we saw, the defender of DRF can deny that these perception-altering factors give rise to justified beliefs or propositions. If this is true, these factors do not give rise to epistemically significant items. But as we saw above, the cost of this is high, for by parity of reasoning this move seems to

undercut the idea that basic percepts of *any* sort give rise to epistemically significant items. Thus, this move seems to force us to acknowledge that the most basic perceptual beliefs we have are in fact quite epistemically complex ones that display a very non-foundational sort of epistemic dependence.

Thus, the defender of DRF is on the horns of a dilemma:

(1) She may argue that our basic beliefs are about basic perceptual qualities of objects. In this case, these beliefs display an epistemic dependence upon the perception-altering qualities (motion, blurring, shadow, etc.) described in Part I, such that even when these perception-altering qualities are not instantiated, an agent must know how to apply them if a perceptual belief about an object's basic qualities (say, its color) is to be justified. But this just shows that these perceptual beliefs about objects' basic qualities are not epistemically basic at all, but are epistemically dependent upon a great deal of other knowledge we possess, and on our ability to deploy that knowledge in both standard and non-standard conditions.

(2) She may argue that the processing of these perception-altering qualities occurs at such a low cognitive level that it doesn't give rise to justified beliefs or justified propositions. In this case, the defender of DRF has no grounds for thinking that we have any justified beliefs about any basic qualities of objects (color, extension, etc.), and must think that our most basic beliefs are of the more complex type discussed in Part II. But as we argued, these complex beliefs are not epistemically basic at all; they employ theoretically-laden terms that we are only justified in deploying in observation to the extent that the background theories embedding these terms are themselves justified. Thus, the thesis of epistemic dependence and priority applies with regard to these complex perceptual beliefs; they are not sound candidates for foundational beliefs either. And so regardless of which option the advocate of DRF chooses, she finds that the most basic perceptual beliefs are not, after all, foundational,

but display an epistemic dependence upon other knowledge possessed by the agent. I conclude that DRF does not succeed as a theory of the structure of knowledge.²⁴

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