

BonJour and the myth of the given

Ted Poston*

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Abstract

The Sellarsian dilemma is a powerful argument against internalistic foundationalist views that aim to end the regress of reasons in experiential states. Laurence BonJour once defended the soundness of this dilemma as part of a larger argument for epistemic coherentism. BonJour has now renounced his earlier conclusions about the dilemma and has offered an account of internalistic foundationalism aimed, in part, at showing the errors of his former ways. I contend that BonJour's early concerns about the Sellarsian dilemma are correct, and that his latest position does not adequately handle the dilemma. I focus my attention on BonJour's claim that a nonconceptual experiential state can provide a subject with a reason to believe some proposition. It is crucial for the viability of internalistic foundationalism to evaluate whether this claim is true. I argue it is false. The requirement that the states that provide justification give reasons to a subject conflicts with the idea that these states are nonconceptual. In the final section I consider David Chalmers's attempt to defend a view closely similar to BonJour's. Chalmers's useful theory of phenomenal concepts provides a helpful framework for identifying a crucial problem with attempts to end the regress of reasons in pure experiential states.

Laurence BonJour's epistemology is marked by careful reflection on the consequences of epistemic internalism for an overall theory of epistemic justification. Epistemic internalism requires that the facts which determine whether a subject's belief is justified are internal or mental facts, facts that, in some sense, a subject is aware of. BonJour formerly argued that epistemic internalism implied epistemic coherentism. A crucial part of this overall argument

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was a defense of the Sellarsian dilemma. This dilemma attacks foundationalist internalist views which attempt to ground basic beliefs in experiential states such as appearances, seemings, immediate apprehensions, direct awarenesses, or intuitions. BonJour argued that the requirement that these states do not require further reasons conflicts with the internalist requirement that these states provide reasons for a subject to believe that some proposition is true.¹

BonJour has now renounced this argument and has defended a form of internalistic foundationalism.² My goal in this paper is to defend BonJour's earlier coherentist epistemology from his later foundationalist epistemology. I seek to accomplish this by arguing that his latest attempt to solve the Sellarsian dilemma does not succeed. I begin with an overview of BonJour's anti-foundationalist argument and his defense of the Sellarsian dilemma contained in his book *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*. This will set the stage for evaluating his latest position, which comes in the second section. In the final section, I consider David Chalmers's recent attempt to defend a position closely similar to BonJour's by appeal to phenomenal concepts. I argue that Chalmers's view faces similar problems to BonJour's. It is not possible to consider every attempt to defend the doctrine of the given, but, as the last section aims to show, there is a common core to many attempts to defend that doctrine. I argue that the common core conflicts with the requirements of epistemic internalism. Thus, I take this argument to have shifted the burden of argument back to epistemic internalists who aim to defend a foundationalist view.

1 BonJour's Anti-foundationalist Argument & The Sellarsian Dilemma

In chapter 2 of BonJour's book *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* he formulates an argument against foundationalism. The argument aims to show that epistemic internalism implies that foundationalism is false.³ The following

¹see (BonJour 1978) and (BonJour 1985, Ch. 4)

²(BonJour 1999, 2000, 2001b,a, 2004; BonJour and Sosa 2003)

³BonJour's argument is heavily influenced by Wilfrid Sellars's essay 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind' (Sellars 1963). In section VIII 'Does empirical knowledge have a foundation?' Sellars argues that knowledge requires justification that in some sense must be recognized by the knower. Sellars writes, "We have seen that to be the expression of knowledge, a report must not only *have* authority, this authority must *in some sense* be recognized by the person whose report it is" (Sellars 1963, 168). This conflicts, Sellars claims, with the requirement that there can be basic knowledge. William Alston accuses Sellars's argument of a levels confusion (Alston 1980). I think Sellars' argument is defensible against Alston's charge but that is a story for another occasion.

is BonJour's formulation of the argument.

BonJour's Anti-Foundationalist Argument:⁴

1. Suppose that there are basic empirical beliefs, that is, empirical beliefs (a) which are epistemically justified, and (b) whose justification does not depend on that of any further empirical beliefs.
2. For a belief to be epistemically justified requires that there be a reason why it is likely to be true.
3. For a belief to be epistemically justified for a particular person requires that this person be himself in cognitive possession of such a reason.
4. The only way to be in cognitive possession of such a reason is to believe with justification the premises from which it follows that the belief is likely to be true.
5. The premises of such a justifying argument for an empirical belief cannot be entirely a priori; at least one such premise must be empirical.
Therefore,
6. The justification of a supposed basic empirical belief must depend on the justification of at least one other empirical belief, contradicting (1); it follows that there can be no basic empirical beliefs.

Premise (1) of this argument is a stipulation. Premises (2) and (3) function to specify epistemic internalism. Premise (5) indicates that the justification of any empirical belief cannot be entirely a priori. The key premise is (4). BonJour supports this premise by the Sellarsian dilemma. The conclusion of the dilemma states that experience can provide a subject with a reason for a belief only if it is the kind of thing that itself requires justification. The core dilemma can be formulated as follows.⁵

The Sellarsian dilemma

7. Either a potentially justifying state has assertive, propositional content or it does not have assertive, propositional content.
8. If a state has assertive, propositional content then, while it can provide justification, it also requires justification.
9. If a state does not have assertive, propositional content then it cannot provide justification.
Consequently,

⁴(BonJour 1985, 32)

⁵See BonJour's summary of the basic problem with givenness on (BonJour 1985, 78)

10. Only states with assertive, propositional content can provide justification and these states also require justification.

For our purposes of evaluating BonJour's later attempt to refute the dilemma, it will be helpful to consider how BonJour formerly defended this argument. I will focus on BonJour's argument against C.I. Lewis's doctrine of the given.⁶ Lewis defends a sophisticated foundationalist account of empirical knowledge which rests upon statements whose truth is determined only by experience.⁷ BonJour argues that Lewis's view fails because the apprehension of the given can provide epistemic support only if it is construed in a way that it thereby requires support.⁸

How does C.I. Lewis understand 'the given'? In *An Analysis of Knowledge & Valuation* Lewis characterizes the given by that which is picked out by the use of expressive language. This application of language includes constructions like 'it appears as though,' 'it seems to be that', and 'it looks as if'. This usage of language signifies *appearances*, which is 'confined to the description of the content of presentation itself'.⁹

Appearances, according to Lewis, are the subject matter of foundational beliefs. For example, the belief that *it appears that there is a red item before me* may be justified by the appeal to the given. For this belief to be justified, however, it's not sufficient that a subject believe it or even that the subject be in the particular appearance state. Rather a subject must *grasp* or *apprehend* that the content is present. As BonJour observes, it is this *grasp* or *apprehension* of the given that does the justificatory work.¹⁰ C.I. Lewis himself finds it necessary to talk of the 'apprehension of the given', though he is not explicit about the relation between the given and the apprehension of the given.¹¹

BonJour then presses the Sellarsian dilemma against the claim that *the apprehension of the given* provides basic justification. Is this a propositional, conceptual state or is it a non-propositional, nonconceptual state? If the former then the apprehension *that* there is something red before one can provide justification but it is the kind of thing that one requires justification. If, however, the apprehension of the given is construed as a non-propositional, nonconceptual state then it does not give the subject a truth-evaluable reason to believe that some proposition is true. Thus, it's difficult to see how the apprehension of the given can provide basic justification.

⁶What follows is based on (BonJour 1985, 72-79)

⁷See (Lewis 1946, 172)

⁸(BonJour 1985, 72)

⁹(Lewis 1946, 179)

¹⁰(BonJour 1985, 74-5)

¹¹BonJour observes this too. (BonJour 1985, 75)

BonJour profitably discusses two potential replies a defender of Lewis may offer.¹² The first reply denies that there is a substantive distinction between ‘the given’ and ‘the apprehension of the given’. One may hold that the given is by its nature *self-apprehending*. The given thus doesn’t require a separate act of apprehension.

BonJour acknowledges that this reply has ‘a certain intuitive plausibility,’¹³ but, he argues, it ultimately fails. He contends that the same dilemma can be offered to this response. BonJour asks, “Is the apprehension which is allegedly built into the given experience cognitive or noncognitive, judgmental or non-judgmental?”¹⁴ If the apprehension is cognitive or judgmental then there is a logical distinction between a red experiential content and the apprehension of it. For on this option the apprehension of the given is “propositionally formed, capable of being true or false, and capable of serving as the premise of an inference,” whereas the given is “literally red”.¹⁵ Against the noncognitive, nonjudgmental option, BonJour contends that there seems to be no clear reason for distinguishing between the given and its apprehension. The motivation for moving to the requirement that the given be apprehended is that the noncognitive state of givenness was insufficient for the justification. Because we lack a clear conception of noncognitive apprehension, this move inherits the original problems with the given itself.¹⁶

The second potential reply available to a defender of Lewis is to attack the distinction between cognitive states and noncognitive states. Perhaps, the apprehension of the given is a special kind of state that is not strictly cognitive nor strictly noncognitive.¹⁷ This state would most likely be a state a subject can be in prior to language use, and, yet, also a state that involves a representation that something is the case. But, BonJour argues, if a state involves the representation that something is the case then there is logical space to distinguish between correct and incorrect representation. Given this space, one needs justification for thinking that the representation is correct.¹⁸

The logical space between the given and its apprehension is significant. One way to press this further (in a way BonJour doesn’t) is to consider the given in connection with the specious present. The specious present is the duration one is immediately aware of, a temporal length in which (intuitively) mem-

¹²(BonJour 1985, 75-78). The following discussion relies heavily on BonJour at this point. I explicitly indicate where my discussion diverges from BonJour’s discussion.

¹³(BonJour 1985, 76)

¹⁴(BonJour 1985, 76)

¹⁵(BonJour 1985, 76)

¹⁶(BonJour 1985, 76)

¹⁷(BonJour 1985, 76)

¹⁸(BonJour 1985, 78)

ory plays no role. Acts of apprehending the given occur within the specious present. Given the distinction between the given and its apprehension, one can legitimately seek out the nature of one's justification for thinking that when one putatively apprehends that *there is a red appearance* the appearance is the same as the way red things have appeared in the past? The defender of the given can answer this question only by appealing to items within the specious present. But within the confines of the present *now* there is little to support the thought that my belief that this appearance is red tracks my former belief that red things appear this way. Thus, the defender of a view like Lewis's is caught between reducing the content of the apprehension of the given to only that which can be defended within the specious present or allowing one to rely on beliefs that cannot be justified within the specious present.¹⁹

In summary the Sellarsian dilemma is a powerful argument against foundationalism. Given a commitment to epistemic internalism, the view that epistemic reasons arise only from within a subject's perspective, the dilemma attacks foundationalism. As we've seen from discussing BonJour's defense of the dilemma, it is a compelling case against internalistic foundationalism views that aim to end the regress of reasons in experiential states. In the next section I turn to BonJour's new foundationalist view, which, he claims, solves the Sellarsian dilemma.

2 BonJour's New Foundationalism

Given BonJour's former defense of the Sellarsian dilemma, it is surprising to find that he has changed his mind and has now adopted a form of C.I. Lewis's view.²⁰ BonJour's change in view is akin to a Gestalt switch; what he formerly saw as an inherent difficulty with an internalist foundationalist views, he now sees as no longer problematic. My goal in this section is to layout BonJour's considered response to the dilemma and then to argue that his new response fails. I will focus on his claim that a non-propositional, nonconceptual awareness of sensory content can provide a subject with a basic reason for belief.²¹ I argue that experience can provide justification only if a subject can recognize the fit between the character of her experience and a conceptual description of it. This recognition requirement conflicts with BonJour's nonconceptualist solution to the dilemma, and it introduces adequacy conditions on experiential justification which cannot be justified within the specious present.

¹⁹As we will see below, Chalmers' account of direct phenomenal beliefs has this consequence.

²⁰(BonJour 1999, 2000, 2001b,a, 2004; BonJour and Sosa 2003)

²¹I will not discuss BonJour's account of the justification of metabeliefs, which constitutes a different response to the Sellarsian dilemma. See (BonJour and Sosa 2003, 61-65).

2.1 BonJour's nonconceptualism

BonJour's new nonconceptualist response to the Sellarsian dilemma aims to show that a nonconceptual experience can provide a subject with a reason to believe that some specific proposition is true. At the outset we should set aside a trivial objection. There is a banal sense in which a nonconceptual experience provides a subject with a reason to believe some proposition. For any experience, a subject has a reason to believe the proposition 'I am experiencing.' This is not relevant to the debate because the main issue is whether a nonconceptual experience can provide a subject with a reason to believe some specific proposition concerning the character of one's experience. The main issue is whether a nonconceptual experience can provide a subject with a reason to believe that (e.g.,) one is experiencing a red, round object. BonJour's task is to formulate a view that yields a positive answer to this question.

BonJour formulates this view in his recent book with Ernest Sosa.²² He presents a view of justification with three components, which together form an argument against the non-conceptualist horn of the Sellarsian dilemma.

BonJour's Nonconceptualist Argument²³

11. One has a constitutive or built-in awareness of nonconceptual sensory content.
12. A relation of description exists between a nonconceptual object—an experience that has a nonconceptual character—and a conceptual description.
13. If this relation holds and one is aware of the nonconceptual character of the sensory experience then one has a reason for thinking that the relevant proposition—the proposition that is the conceptual description of the nonconceptual character of one's sensory experience—is true.
These three claims imply,
14. If one has an experience with such and such nonconceptual character then one has a reason for thinking that the relevant proposition—the proposition that is the conceptual description of the nonconceptual character of one's sensory experience—is true.

What justification does BonJour offer for the premises? He argues for (11) by an analogy between the awareness of belief content and the awareness of sensory content. He begins by suggesting that "an essential and intrinsic aspect of having any occurrent belief just *is* being consciously aware of . . . two correlative aspects of its content: first, its propositional content . . . and, second, the

²²(BonJour and Sosa 2003)

²³This is my formulation of BonJour's argument.

assertory rather than, e.g., questioning or doubting character of one's entertaining the content."²⁴ These two aspects of occurrent belief can be referred to the *constitutive awareness of the assertive character of one's occurrent beliefs*.²⁵ For example, when one occurrently believes that *it is raining* one is thereby aware of the thought that *it is raining*. To be consciously aware of that thought it is sufficient that one occurrently hosts the thought; one need not have a second-order thought the content of which is *one believes that it is raining*. Belief, according to BonJour, is itself a form of conscious awareness of content.²⁶

Next, BonJour suggests that we have a similar built-in constitutive awareness to the content of one's own experiences.²⁷ When one has an experience, that experience has a certain character. Because experience is a form of awareness, it follows that one has an awareness of the character of one's experience in virtue of having that experience. BonJour observes that this kind of built-in awareness is infallible because there is no logical room for one to experience something with a specific character and *not* experience something with a specific character.²⁸ As BonJour understands it, (11) should be understood as the statement that when one undergoes a specific experience, one has an experiential awareness of the specific content of the experience.

Understood in this way (11) is the triviality that *experience makes one experientially aware of the character of one's experience*. This is trivial because, regardless of the complexity of the character of one's experience, one is always experientially aware of its complexity. No one, however, is moved to think that a normal subject has basic justification for thinking that (e.g.,) a hen has 39 speckles when one is in the relevant experiential state. As we will see in a moment BonJour modifies (11) to avoid this objection.

Premise (12) states that a relation of description exists between a non-conceptual object and a conceptual description. This relation is a descriptive relation "having to do with the accuracy or inaccuracy of fit between a conceptual description and a non-conceptual object that the description purports to describe."²⁹ If, for example, one perceptually experiences a red square then one is in a state whose nonconceptual object fits the description a red square. His aim in specifying this descriptive relation is to argue that in virtue of having a constitutive awareness of the nonconceptual character of one's experience one has a reason to believe that this description is true. This is precisely what

²⁴(BonJour and Sosa 2003, 62)

²⁵(BonJour and Sosa 2003, 63)

²⁶(BonJour and Sosa 2003, 62-63)

²⁷(BonJour and Sosa 2003, 70)

²⁸(BonJour and Sosa 2003, 70)

²⁹(BonJour and Sosa 2003, 72)

premise (13) does; it connects the descriptive relation and constitutive awareness of the nonconceptual character of one's experience with having a reason to believe that a conceptual description is true.

2.2 Nonconceptualism & Justification

The core problem with (13) is that constitutive awareness of nonconceptual sensory content does not have the right kind of cognitive significance for justification. As we just saw, BonJour understands this built-in constitutive awareness to be infallible. It is the kind of awareness one has of experiential content simply in virtue of experiencing. This suggestion runs up against the problem of the speckled hen.³⁰ When one perceptually experiences a 39-speckled hen one is in a visual state that registers information that the hen has 39 speckles. But that perceptual information is too detailed and specific to provide normal subjects like us a basic reason for believing that the hen has 39-speckles. BonJour recognizes the force of this problem and significantly modifies his view to handle it, but the changes he makes ends up abandoning nonconceptualism.³¹

BonJour acknowledges that in speckled hen type cases the constitutive awareness of the nonconceptual character of experience does not provide one with a reason to believe the associated speckled hen type description.³² To have justification one must *attend to* the relevant feature of one's experience. BonJour considers, as an example, a large painting containing various colored shapes.³³ You look at the painting at close range and in good light. Someone suggests to you that there is a dark green equilateral triangle in the painting. Initially you do not spot the triangle, but after looking around you see it. BonJour suggests that the change in your experience is that you went from having an experiential awareness of the feature to *recognizing* the agreement between this aspect of your experience and a conceptual description. To have basic justification via experiential awareness BonJour claims one must "apprehend or recognize the agreement . . . between the aspect of experience being attended to and the conceptual description given by the belief."³⁴

This apprehension requirement is similar to Lewis's move from the given to the apprehension of the given. How does BonJour's later view escape the argument that Lewis's appeal to the apprehension of the given is unsuccessful?

³⁰See (Chisholm 1942) for the original discussion of the speckled hen problem and see (Fumerton 2005) for a recent discussion of the problem.

³¹See section 10.3 (BonJour and Sosa 2003, 190-197) entitled "Sosa's Critique of the Appeal to the Given."

³²(BonJour and Sosa 2003, 191-192)

³³(BonJour and Sosa 2003, 191)

³⁴(BonJour and Sosa 2003, 193)

The objection to Lewis's view was that any representation capable of providing justification must involve propositional representation, a representation *that* something is the case. But propositional representations have accuracy conditions and one needs justification for thinking that those accuracy conditions are satisfied. BonJour's new position holds that experiential awareness is infallible; one cannot have an experience with a specific character and fail to be experientially aware of that character. BonJour now adds to this requirement that one focus on the specific feature and come to see that that feature fits a particular description. He claims, though, that one does not need a separate cognitive act to realize this. Rather BonJour claims that the experiential awareness *itself* allows one to come to see that a feature of one's experience satisfies a particular conceptual description.³⁵

BonJour's suggestion that no independent cognitive act is required to satisfy the recognition requirement is not plausible. BonJour's own case of the painting with various colored shapes shows that at one time a subject is in a specific experiential state which includes the presence of a green equilateral triangle and the subject *does not* realize it is there. At another time the subject is in the same experiential state and the subject *does* realize it is there. This is excellent evidence that the subject's *realization* that there's a triangle is a separate state from the original experiential awareness. When a subject comes to see *that* a particular description fits the character of her experience this is a distinct propositional state from an infallible experiential awareness.³⁶

BonJour now concedes that the act of 'seeing the fit' is a distinct cognitive act.³⁷ But he resists the idea that this impugns foundationalism. He argues that this additional cognitive act does not require any additional justification because the original infallible experiential awareness is sufficient to provide all the justification necessary. He claims that the cognitive act of 'seeing the fit' enables one "to grasp both the content of the proposition and the non-propositional situation that make it true, and see directly and immediately that the truth conditions for the proposition are satisfied."³⁸ The result is that a propositional judgement is justified entirely by a cognitive act that takes into account the feature of one's experience.

I find BonJour's reasoning at this point difficult to follow. The claim that the original experiential awareness is sufficient to provide justification is wrong. BonJour admits as much. How then does the original experiential awareness provide justification for the more complex cognitive act of 'seeing the fit'?

³⁵(BonJour and Sosa 2003, 193)

³⁶see (Bergmann 2006, 686-7) for a similar argument against BonJour's new position

³⁷(BonJour 2006, 746)

³⁸(BonJour 2006, 747)

Perhaps, the most charitable understanding of BonJour's remark is that the cognitive act of 'seeing the fit' is an infallible propositional awareness. The infallibility is guaranteed by the factive nature of 'seeing the fit' rather than the kind of assurance such a kind of awareness offers. One cannot 'see the fit' between a conceptual description and a nonconceptual feature of one's experience unless one's experience has that feature and the relation between that feature and the conceptual description holds. But, as reflection on the specious present shows, one can have an awareness that is phenomenologically indistinguishable from 'seeing the fit' without actually 'seeing the fit'.

Suppose one's phenomenal concepts are switched so that what you formerly classified as a green appearance you now classify as a red appearance (and vice versa). When presented by a paradigm red object, you think that you are undergoing a green appearance. There is nothing within the specious present to correct for this error. In a normal case one's justification for thinking that you are undergoing a red appearance depends on one's justification for thinking that one is undergoing an appearance whose character is similar to the way red things have appeared in the past. But in this case appearances are deceptive. Your standing phenomenal concepts have been switched so that what formerly conceived of as a red appearance, you now conceive of as a green appearance. To be sure, the character of your experience is the same as before but it's uptake in cognition has switched. We will see below in Chalmers' framework a vindication of this argument.

There is a fundamental tension in BonJour's new foundationalist epistemology between internalism and foundationalism. Internalism claims that every justified belief has a reason that is possessed by a subject. Foundationalism claims that the justification of some beliefs need not depend on the justification of any other belief. BonJour attempts to bring these views together by an infallible propositional awareness of the nonconceptual character of sensory experience. If there were such an awareness then this would provide a basis for internalism and foundationalism. But the problem is that any propositional awareness has adequacy conditions which cannot be adequately justified within the confines of the specious present.

3 The Phenomenal Concept Strategy

David Chalmers has recently taken up the defense of an acquaintance theory of the justification of phenomenal states.³⁹ Chalmers lays out a detailed theory

³⁹See (Chalmers 2010, Ch 8 & 9). See also (Gertler 2001, 2011) for a similar defense of an acquaintance theory.

of phenomenal concepts and argues that direct phenomenal beliefs are foundationally justified. His account of phenomenal concepts clarifies some of the difficult issues in this debate as well as helps to identify a crucial problem with the justification of phenomenal beliefs. The upshot of the argument in this section is that the difficulty we found in BonJour's view is not idiosyncratic; it lies at the center of foundationalist attempts to justify phenomenal beliefs by direct awareness or direct acquaintance with phenomenal states.

Let us begin with the notion of a *phenomenal concept*. A phenomenal concept is a concept of the phenomenal character of an experience. When one has an experience of a characteristic red object in normal conditions, one's experience has a certain character; there is something-it-is-like to undergo that experience. The phenomenal character of experience is what it's like to undergo the experience.

In what follows it will be helpful to be familiar with Frank Jackson's famous thought experiment about Mary. Mary is a neuroscientist specializing in color vision who knows every physical fact about color vision. Mary has been raised in a black and white room and has never seen a red tomato in normal conditions. One day, Mary leaves the black and white room and sees for the first time a ripe tomato. Upon having this experience, Mary learns something new; she learns what it is like to see a red object. That is, she learns about the phenomenal character of typical red experiences.

Chalmers helpfully distinguishes between several types of phenomenal concepts.⁴⁰ When Mary steps outside the monochromatic room and attends to her new experience, her experience instantiates the property of phenomenal red, R. Chalmers distinguishes two relational phenomenal concepts about R. First, there is the *community relational concept*, red_C . This concept indicates "the phenomenal quality typically caused in normal subjects within my community by paradigmatic red things."⁴¹ The second type of phenomenal concept is the *individual relational concept*, red_I . This concept indicates "the phenomenal quality typically caused in me by paradigmatic red things."⁴² red_C and red_I are distinct concepts. An abnormal subject may have red-green color inversion in which case her concept red_I picks out a different phenomenal quality than red_C denotes.

Chalmers observes that R can also be picked out by using a demonstrative concept. One may refer to the phenomenal quality of one's experience by using the phrase 'this quality' or 'this sort of experience.' Let us refer to this demonstrative concept as $this_E$. This demonstrative concept picks out

⁴⁰(Chalmers 2010, 254-260)

⁴¹(Chalmers 2010, 255)

⁴²(Chalmers 2010, 255)

whatever quality is present on the specific occasion. It functions in the same way one may pick out one's location by 'I am here'. The function of that expression picks out one's location, wherever one happens to be.

Chalmers claims that each of these concepts fixes the reference to phenomenal redness relationally, either through external objects or acts of ostension. He then argues that there is a fourth phenomenal concept that picks out phenomenal redness "directly in terms of its intrinsic phenomenal nature."⁴³ He terms this a 'pure phenomenal concept.'

Chalmers argues that there are pure phenomenal concepts by reflection on the case of Mary. When Mary steps outside the black and white room she learns that red experiences have "such and such a quality." She learns that red experiences cause experiences of such and such quality and she learns that the quality is now extending is such and such. Chalmers refers to this as "Mary's 'such-and-such' concept."⁴⁴ This is Mary's pure phenomenal concept R . This concept R picks out the phenomenal quality R .

Chalmers then argues that the concept R is distinct from the concepts red_C , red_I , and $this_E$. His argument relies on using cognitive significance tests for difference between concepts. When Mary steps outside the monochromatic room and sees a red object in normal conditions she gains the following beliefs:

$red_C=R$,
 $red_I=R$, and
 $this_E=R$.

The first two beliefs are cognitively significant. She learns that the quality typically caused in normal subjects in her community by paradigmatic red things is R . Similarly, for the second identity, Mary learns that the quality caused in her by paradigmatic red things is R .

A crucial question is whether $this_E=R$ is cognitively significant. The belief expressed by this identity is the claim that "the quality she is now ostending is such-and-such."⁴⁵ Chalmers needs to successfully argue that this thought differs in content from the trivial thought that *this quality is whatever it happens to be*.

Two lines of argument support the cognitive significance of $this_E=R$. First, no a priori reasoning supports $this_E=R$ because a priori reasoning cannot rule out the possibility that the quality being ostended is different than it is. Compare the situation with the thought expressed by 'My location is here'. This thought has a character that implies one can know a priori that any

⁴³(Chalmers 2010, 256)

⁴⁴(Chalmers 2010, 256)

⁴⁵(Chalmers 2010, 257)

occasion of use will pick out a true sentence.⁴⁶ However, Mary's thought that $this_E=R$ picks out the phenomenal quality, R , which is not guaranteed by any a priori feature of the linguistic situation.

The second line of argument that $this_E=R$ is cognitively significant proceeds on analogy with other kinds of demonstrative knowledge.⁴⁷ Consider a demonstrative concept of a shape $this_S$, which intuitively picks out 'this shape, whatever it happens to be'. Jill tells Jack she is about to show him her favorite shape. She shows him a circle and Jack forms the thought that *Jill's favorite shape is this_S*. '*This_S*' picks out the shape of a circle. Jack can form the non-demonstrative thought that *Jill's favorite shape is a circle*. This thought uses a qualitative concept of a circle. Jack might also form the thought that *This_S is circle*. This thought takes the object of demonstration and attributes to it a substantive qualitative property. Chalmers claims that it's inessential to this example that the concept *circle* is a public language concept. He claims that Jack might acquire the qualitative concept of circularity for the first time and thereby be able to think the substantive thought that *This_S is circle*.

Chalmers asserts that Jack's thought that *this_S is circle* is analogous to Mary's thought that $this_E=R$. He explains "Like Jack's thought, Mary's thought involves attributing a certain substantive, qualitative nature to a type that is identified demonstratively. This qualitative nature is attributed using a qualitative concept of phenomenal redness, acquired upon having a red experience for the first time."⁴⁸ The qualitative nature of Mary's thought, though, is difficult to express in a language. The terms 'phenomenal redness' express the concepts of either red_C or red_I . The concept R , by contrast, is a non-relational concept which directly picks out the phenomenal quality currently instantiated in Mary's experience. The non-relational character of concept R makes it difficult to see how the thought that $this_E=R$ can have much cognitive significance. I turn to argue for this now.

Chalmers explicitly states that the lifetime of a direct phenomenal concept like R is "limited to the lifetime of the experience (or the instantiated quality) that constitutes it."⁴⁹ This implies that a direct phenomenal belief—a belief of the form $this_E=R$ —exists only within the lifetime of the experience. Direct phenomenal beliefs are beliefs that exist only within the specious present. Fur-

⁴⁶Arguably, the situation is more complicated. Imagine a person whose location changes every second but whose experience stays the same. It's not pellucid that the thought expressed by 'My location is here' is knowable a priori because the person's location changes so quickly. This suggests that some indexical expresses require a certain amount of stability. 'I' functions to pick out the subject of thought, but, arguably, it succeeds only if the subject of thought is somewhat constant.

⁴⁷(Chalmers 2010, 257-8). The following paragraph summarizes Chalmers' discussion.

⁴⁸(Chalmers 2010, 258)

⁴⁹(Chalmers 2010, 272)

thermore, as Chalmers acknowledges, beliefs of the form ‘ R is phenomenal red’ are not direct phenomenal beliefs. This kind of belief involves the pre-existing phenomenal concept expressed by ‘phenomenal red’ which is a relational phenomenal concept, red_C or red_I .⁵⁰ Similarly, a belief like ‘I am in pain’ involves a relational concept of pain, either the community relation concept of pain ($pain_C$) or the individual relational concept of pain ($pain_I$). This kind of belief is not a direct phenomenal belief.

The consequence that direct phenomenal beliefs exist only within the lifetime of the relevant experience puts significant pressure on Chalmers’s insistence that direct phenomenal beliefs are cognitively significant.⁵¹ Chalmers argues for the significance of these beliefs by claiming that a direct phenomenal belief constrains the class of a priori epistemic possibilities.⁵² His thought is that when Mary forms the belief that ‘ $this_E=R$ ’ her belief is false at all worlds (considered as actual) in which Mary is not experiencing phenomenal redness. Mary’s belief is cognitively significant because her new experience significantly constrains the possible worlds prior to having that experience. For instance, prior to leaving the black and white room it was epistemically possible that Mary form the belief that ‘ $this_E=G$ ’, but now, having had the relevant experience, that thought is no longer epistemically possible.

This sounds as if direct phenomenal beliefs are cognitively significant, but appearances are deceptive. The direct phenomenal beliefs exist only within the specious present, and so they only constrain epistemic possibilities within the present ‘now’. Mary’s thought that ‘ $this_E=R$ ’ constrains epistemic possibilities only for a fleeting moment; let it pass and it is an epistemic possibility that a similar thought ‘ $this_E=G$ ’ is true. What makes this an epistemic possibility is that judgments of identity, similarity, and difference are not direct phenomenal beliefs. When one thinks for instance that ‘ R is phenomenal red’ one identifies a present quality with a relational quality. One’s evidence that this identity is true relies on a host of information that is not contained within the specious present. If the relational quality is red_C then one needs evidence both that this quality exists (i.e., that the members of your community do not experience different properties when faced with red things) and that the members experience the same quality as you do.

There is a real puzzle here about how to understand the significance of Mary’s knowledge when she leaves the black and white room. She gains a new belief ‘ $this_E=R$ ’ which exists for the present ‘now’ of her experience. Suppose Mary stares at the ripe tomato thinking ‘wow, this is what it’s like’. On

⁵⁰(Chalmers 2010, 278).

⁵¹(Chalmers 2010, 282)

⁵²(Chalmers 2010, 282)

Chalmers' account, this is a direct phenomenal belief only within the fleeting present. If Mary were to look away and attend to another red object, her belief that ' $this_E=R1$ ' would be a different direct phenomenal belief. But her belief that ' $R=R1$ ' is not a direct phenomenal belief. If Mary's knowledge is restricted to just direct phenomenal beliefs then she has no way to knowingly identify or compare any pure phenomenal qualities. To the extent that Mary can knowingly identify and compare phenomenal qualities she must rely on a wealth of information that is not contained within the specious present. She relies on her beliefs that memory is reliable, sensations don't change faster than I realize, and people experience the same sensations. None of these beliefs are given in the specious moment. But to the extent Mary gains new knowledge, she relies on these beliefs.

If you take these beliefs away and consider only about what Mary knows in the specious present via direct acquaintance with a phenomenal quality, the best one can do is get a belief like ' $this_E=R$ '. But, this belief has little cognitive significance. To the extent it constrains epistemic possibilities it constrains them momentarily. The space of epistemic possibilities contracts and expands with every passing moment. Mary cannot hook up this new belief with any other beliefs, at least apart from coherence considerations. She cannot, for instance, reason that 'phenomenal redness is R ' because 'phenomenal redness' is a public language term.

The problem here is similar to Descartes's problem in reaching a substantial ego via the indubitability of the cogito. Descartes could not doubt that on any occasion of use 'I think' picked out a true sentence, but he wondered 'what is this 'I' that thinks'? As many commentators have pointed out it's consistent with the indubitability of the cogito that the subject of thought changes with each token thought. Descartes cannot rule this possibility out by the method of doubt. If we think of the epistemic possibilities that are ruled out by the cogito we may think that they are significant. On the one hand, on each occasion of thought the epistemic possibilities are significantly constrained. Every possibility in which someone or something other than the actual thinker thinks are thereby eliminated. The function of 'I' picks out a single thinker and on each occasion of use the actual thinker is different from the many merely possible thinkers. But, on the other hand, this elimination of possibilities does nothing to identify or discriminate between possible thinkers. It does not pick out an actual thinker as Rene Descartes or David Hume. For Rene Descartes is a person with a particular history who endures over time. Nothing about that history is contained within the passing moment of thinking. Moreover, once the fleeting moment of the cogito passes, the epistemic possibilities expand again.

Part of the problem Descartes faces is supporting the inference from 'I

think' to 'I was thinking'.⁵³ This inference requires that the second use of 'I' has the same content as the former use. If there is an enduring self that is picked out by the two occasions of use of 'I' then the beliefs have the same content. But more than sameness of content is required for justification. One needs a reason for thinking that there is an enduring self. It's not sufficient that, in fact, there is an enduring self.

Similarly, direct phenomenal beliefs should support the inference from '*this_E is R*' to '*that was R*.' But, this requires that the second use of the concept *R* has the same content as the first use. This is not revealed within the specious present. And the fact that the first thought constrains epistemic possibilities does nothing to constrain the relevant epistemic possibilities for the second thought. Chalmers acknowledges that this is a problem for his account, but he claims that no one has "a good account of what is it is for one token of a concept to be a 'descendent' of another in a manner that allows it to inherit justification."⁵⁴ As he observes more than sameness of content is required for justification because a new concept with the same concept could be formed 'de novo.'⁵⁵ One needs a natural persistence relation between concepts. Furthermore, one needs some justification that such a persistence relation obtains. And yet the options for providing justification are quite limited. My belief is that the best option for this kind of justification is a conservative coherentist account, but that is a subject for another paper.⁵⁶

4 Conclusion

We have seen that BonJour's new solution of the Sellarsian dilemma does not adequately address the nonconceptualist horn. Furthermore, I have argued that reflection of Chalmers's detailed defense of an acquaintance theory of phenomenal concept vindicates this judgement. I've argued that reflection on the specious present undermines this account of justification. To the extent one can have a direct phenomenal belief it has little cognitive significance. The upshot of my argument is that cognitive significance requires a wealth of information that is not contained within the present 'now.'

⁵³The other part is to knowingly identify and discriminate the subject of thought from other possible thinkers.

⁵⁴(Chalmers 2010, 298)

⁵⁵(Chalmers 2010, 298)

⁵⁶See (Poston 2012) for an argument for epistemic conservatism. One of the particular advantages of conservatism is that it can provide justification for claims for which no epistemic improvement is possible.

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