

EVIDENTIALISM, INTERNALISM, DISJUNCTIVISM

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ABSTRACT. This paper explores a key commitment of the evidentialist position defended by Conee and Feldman. It is argued that by abandoning this commitment a new type of epistemic internalism appears—a form of epistemological disjunctivism—which can answer to many of the motivations behind Conee and Feldman’s view, but which has some significant theoretical advantages.

0. In their important and influential book, *Evidentialism*, Earl Conee and Richard Feldman (2004) offer a powerful defence of a distinctive evidentialist variety of epistemic internalism. What I propose to do here is not so much confront this position directly, but rather describe an alternative view—a form of epistemological disjunctivism—a position which could also be cast as an evidentialist variety of epistemic internalism, but which is strikingly different to the view that Conee and Feldman defend and which also, crucially, has a number of theoretical advantages over Conee and Feldman’s position. Along the way, I will consider some objections to disjunctivism more generally that Conee (2007; cf., Conee 2008) has put forward, some of which are relevant to the view that I describe here.

1. Many in epistemology will want to grant the claim that justification is a function of one’s supporting evidence, in the sense that it is only when one’s belief is adequately supported by evidence that one is justified.¹ In general terms, anyone who endorses such a position is an evidentialist. In contrast, those who wish to hold that some forms of justification are non-evidential—for example, Crispin Wright (2004)—would be non-evidentialists. Even amongst evidentialists, however, there will be a wide range of views. In particular, one key contrast is

between those who understand evidence in a broadly ‘internal’ fashion and those who understand it in an ‘external’ fashion. Timothy Williamson (1995; cf. 2000a; 2000b, *passim*) is an obvious example of someone who fits into the second category, since on his view one’s evidence is to be identified with one’s knowledge, and all will surely agree that knowledge is an ‘external’ notion in the relevant sense. If one is attracted to epistemological internalism, however, then one will be tempted towards the view that Conee and Feldman describe, for on this picture one’s evidence is certainly ‘internal’ in the relevant sense, since it includes such items as one’s beliefs and one’s experiences.

For Conee and Feldman, what makes their view properly epistemically internalist is that it is committed to a thesis that they refer to as *mentalism*. According to the mentalist, two subjects with exactly the same mental states are necessarily alike epistemically. Or, as Conee and Feldman (2004, 56) put it, “if any two possible individuals are exactly alike mentally, then they are alike justificationaly”. Given their wider evidentialism, such that justification is a function solely of one’s evidence, this view entails that any two possible individuals who are exactly alike mentally are also alike with respect to the evidence that they possess.

There is a very natural motivation for both claims. For consider an agent who is experiencing the world in roughly the way that he thinks he is experiencing the world, and a counterpart agent who is radically deceived, but in such a way that he is unable to tell the difference between these deceived experiences and normal experiences. On one standard view of what constitutes an agent’s mental life, given that the two kinds of experiences are *ex hypothesi* indiscriminable it follows that the two agents in question have the same mental states (or, at least, that they are exactly ‘alike’ mentally, if this is thought to be a different notion). If this is right, then it follows on this view that such subjects are alike epistemically as well—in particular, that they are alike with respect to their evidence and thus with respect to whether they are justified in what they believe—and that seems to accord with intuition on this score.

Interestingly, most standard forms of epistemic internalism do not explicitly commit themselves to this mentalist thesis, but rather to the (potentially) distinct view of *accessibilism*. According to this thesis (construed as a thesis specifically about justification, which is our concern here), justification is a function solely of what is reflectively accessible to the subject. Hence, an accessibilist evidentialist would hold that one is justified only if one has adequate evidence, where what constitutes one’s evidence is understood in turn along

accessibilist lines.

As it happens, Conee and Feldman's mentalist evidentialism is almost certainly extensionally equivalent to accessibilism evidentialism. On their view, the kind of mental states that are relevant to determining one's evidence—essentially, one's beliefs and experiences—are also the kind of states that are reflectively accessible if any states are. Thus, their mentalist evidentialism is not meant to be inconsistent with accessibilist evidentialism. The point they are making, I take it, is rather that it is the mentalist thesis which is constitutive of epistemic internalism, even when it is extensionally equivalent to the accessibilist thesis.

2. I find the idea that mentalism is more central to the epistemic internalist position than accessibilism very questionable. After all, one could imagine a type of content externalism which, while endorsing mentalism, nevertheless regarded some of the mental states in question as being inaccessible to the agent. Would such a view count as epistemically internalist? I think that this is unlikely, and this suggests that it is the accessibilist thesis which is more central to epistemic internalism. We will come back to this point in a moment.

First, though, we need to put another thesis on the table that is central to Conee and Feldman's view. Following Keith Lehrer and Steward Cohen (1983), we will call this thesis the 'New Evil Genius' (NEG) thesis:

(NEG) The extent to which *S* is justified at *t* in believing that *p* is just the same as the extent to which *S*'s envatted duplicate is justified at *t* in believing that *p*.

Epistemic externalists famously deny (NEG). Consider, for example, process reliabilism, which is a paradigm example of an epistemic externalist view.² According to this view, the justification for one's belief depends on whether that belief was formed in a reliable fashion. On this proposal, then, one would expect there to be an epistemic difference between the beliefs held by *S* and by her envatted counterpart, since one would expect there to be a far greater degree of reliability exhibited in the former case than in the latter case. Thus, (NEG) is incompatible with process reliabilism. Moreover, given that whether or not one's beliefs are reliable will (usually) not be constituted by one's mental states, and given that it is (usually) not reflectively accessible to one that one's beliefs are reliably formed, it follows

that process reliabilism will deny accessibilism and mentalism too.

In contrast, epistemic internalists typically take (NEG) as a datum that needs to be explained, and which can only satisfactorily be explained by an internalist view. Indeed, once one endorses mentalism and accessibilism, as Conee and Feldman do, then a very straightforward explanation of why (NEG) is true manifests itself. After all, one might plausibly hold that one shares the same mental states as one's envatted counterpart.³ Moreover, one might also plausibly hold that it is only one's mental states that are reflectively accessible. Accordingly, if one's justification is constituted by one's mental states—the only kind of thing that is reflectively accessible to one—then it is no surprise that there is no epistemic difference between one's beliefs and the beliefs of one's recently envatted counterpart. This, at any rate, seems to be the sort of reasoning that is driving Conee and Feldman's adoption of (NEG).

A paradigm form of epistemic externalism is thus committed to the denial of accessibilism, mentalism and (NEG), while a paradigm form of epistemic internalism is committed to the adoption of accessibilism, mentalism and (NEG). If there were no viable epistemic positions lying between these two extremes, then we could take these paradigm types of epistemic externalism and epistemic internalism as summing up the epistemic externalism/internalism distinction. As we will now see, however, there are a number of viable positions lying between these two poles, and this complicates the picture somewhat.

3. It will be useful to specify the three claims in play here a little more formally. Mentalism can be understood as the following thesis:

(MENT) If S and S^* do not differ in their mental states then they will not differ in the degree of epistemic justification that they have for their beliefs.

Accessibilism can be understood as the following thesis:

(ACCESS) If S and S^* do not differ in the facts that they are able to know by reflection alone then they will not differ in the degree of epistemic justification that they have for their beliefs.

Finally, I take it that the thesis that underlies (NEG) is the following:

(DISC) If the experiences had by S and S^* are indiscriminable then S and S^* will not differ in the degree of epistemic justification that they have for their beliefs.⁴

After all, what motivates (NEG) is the idea that the subject is unable to discriminate between her non-envatted experiences and the envatted experiences of her counterpart. Thus, what goes for the envatted counterpart applies with equal force to any counterpart whose experiences are indiscriminable from the experiences that our subject is presently undergoing.

We will call the view which denies all three of these theses *classical epistemic externalism*, and we will call the view which endorses all three of these theses *classical epistemic internalism*. The question that now faces us is whether there are interesting versions of epistemic externalism and internalism which are not of the classical variety.

Since there are three theses in play here, there are in principle eight views available in this regard:

- (1) (ACCESS) + (MENT) + (DISC)
- (2) (ACCESS) + (MENT) + ¬(DISC)
- (3) (ACCESS) + ¬(MENT) + (DISC)
- (4) (ACCESS) + ¬(MENT) + ¬(DISC)
- (5) ¬(ACCESS) + (MENT) + (DISC)
- (6) ¬(ACCESS) + (MENT) + ¬(DISC)
- (7) ¬(ACCESS) + ¬(MENT) + (DISC)
- (8) ¬(ACCESS) + ¬(MENT) + ¬(DISC)

Views (1) and (8) are classical epistemic internalism and classical epistemic externalism, respectively. What about views (2)-(7)? Are any of them plausible?

Some of them clearly aren't. Views (3) and (4), for instance, both of which endorse (ACCESS) while denying (MENT), do not seem to hold water. After all, I take it that every party to the debate will want to argue that it is only one's mental states that are in the market for being reflectively accessible. Accordingly, it would be perverse to endorse (ACCESS) while denying (MENT), since it would commit one to allowing that one's justification is constituted by factors that one can know by reflection alone while at the same time treating the range of the relevant factors to extend *beyond* what is reflectively accessible to one.

View (7) also looks like a pretty odd mix of theses. If one denies both (ACCESS) and (MENT), then what would be the motivation for endorsing (DISC)? That is, why would one hold that the properties that one shares with one's envatted counterpart determine one's epistemic standing if one does not hold that one's epistemic standing is either constituted by

what one has reflective access to or one's mental states?

Finally, while view (5) is not as implausible as views (2), (3) and (7), it is far from being an attractive position to hold. After all, whatever reason one has for denying (ACCESS) while accepting (MENT) will almost certainly count against (DISC). In particular, the natural explanation of why (ACCESS) might be false even though (MENT) is true would be because one endorses a form of content externalism which ensures that one's mental states—which, on this view, constitute one's justification—are not generally reflectively accessible. If one endorses a content externalism of this variety, however, then one will inevitably be suspicious of (DISC). In particular, one will naturally suppose that the agent in question does have at least some different mental states when compared with her envatted counterpart, even though the difference in question is indiscriminable. Hence, given (MENT), it follows that (DISC) has to go.⁵

Let's simplify our discussion then by focussing on the remaining four views, two which we have already identified as classical versions of epistemic externalism and internalism:

- (1) (ACCESS) + (MENT) + (DISC) *Classical Epistemic Internalism*
- (2) (ACCESS) + (MENT) + ¬(DISC)
- (6) ¬(ACCESS) + (MENT) + ¬(DISC)
- (8) ¬(ACCESS) + ¬(MENT) + ¬(DISC) *Classical Epistemic Externalism*

Interestingly, both of the remaining unidentified views constitute plausible epistemological proposals. Moreover, as we will see, one of these views—view (2)—is also very close in spirit to the account of justification offered by Conee and Feldman.

4. Let's start with view (6). I noted in the last section that there was something odd about any position which accepted (ACCESS) while denying (MENT). Given that, as we will now see, there is nothing odd about accepting (MENT) while denying (ACCESS), and given that such a proposal is in addition naturally classified as a version of epistemic externalism, there seems every reason to hold, *contra* Conee and Feldman, that it is (ACCESS) which is the central thesis of epistemic internalism, rather than (MENT).

Indeed, we can get a flavour of the kind of argument in play here by considering the question of whether view (5), which we have just noted to be unattractive, is naturally taken

to be an epistemically internalist or externalist position. I think it is hard to see why we would consider such a position an internalist view, given that it denies (ACCESS), and so makes one's epistemic standing a function of, in part at least, factors that are opaque to one.

The same goes for view (6). Like view (5), one might be tempted by such a position because one endorses a version of content externalism. As with view (5), one might then plausibly argue that (ACCESS) is false since many of one's mental states will not be reflectively accessible. Nevertheless, one might still maintain that one's justification is constituted by one's mental states. Furthermore, since this view denies (DISC), it doesn't face the problem that faced view (5) of how to consistently deny (ACCESS) while endorsing both (MENT) and (DISC). On this proposal, just as it follows from the content externalism in play that many of one's mental states are not reflectively accessible, so it also follows that one does not share the same mental states with one's envatted counterpart.⁶

Indeed, one could regard view (6) as being motivated by some of the theses argued for by Williamson. Williamson famously holds that knowledge is a mental state and that one's knowledge is to be identified with one's evidence.⁷ Suppose one now held that one's justification was constituted by one's evidence. This would mean that it is constituted by what one knew, where that in turn meant that it was constituted by one's mental states. Such a view is therefore naturally allied to (MENT). Moreover, it is not hard to see why someone who held such a position would want to deny (ACCESS), since on this conception of one's mental states they are not obviously generally reflectively accessible.⁸ Finally, any view of this sort would be required to deny (DISC). After all, many of the beliefs held by one's envatted counterpart are false, and so one would naturally expect that one's counterpart therefore has less knowledge that one has, and therefore has less evidence too. It follows, therefore, that one's counterpart's beliefs are justified to a lesser degree.⁹

Clearly, however, despite the commitment to (MENT) here, no one would describe this Williamsonian conception of epistemic justification as an epistemically internalist position. Instead, this view would be regarded as a form of epistemic externalism, albeit one that diverged through its endorsement of (MENT) from classical epistemic externalism. Again, then, we find that it is a commitment to (ACCESS) that is more central to epistemic internalism, *contra* Conee and Feldman.

5. In any case, it is not this non-classical form of epistemic externalism that is our main interest here, but rather the non-classical form of epistemic internalism represented by view (2). That is, given that we have now granted that it is a commitment to (ACCESS) that determines whether one's view is a version of epistemic internalism or epistemic externalism, we can categorise our four positions as follows:

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|-----|-------------------------------|--|
| (1) | (ACCESS) + (MENT) + (DISC) | <i>Classical Epistemic Internalism</i> |
| (2) | (ACCESS) + (MENT) + ¬(DISC) | <i>Non-Classical Epistemic Internalism</i> |
| (6) | ¬(ACCESS) + (MENT) + ¬(DISC) | <i>Non-Classical Epistemic Externalism</i> |
| (8) | ¬(ACCESS) + ¬(MENT) + ¬(DISC) | <i>Classical Epistemic Externalism</i> |

With this taxonomy of views in mind, let us turn our attentions to the case that can be made for non-classical epistemic internalism, a view which departs from the position advocated by Conee and Feldman only in its rejection of (DISC).

This position does exist in the literature, and it is usually motivated via appeal to *disjunctivism*. Disjunctivism is standardly understood as a (broadly speaking) metaphysical proposal about the content of perceptual experience, though the position potentially has application beyond perception. In essence, the guiding claim is that cases of veridical perception share no content in common with corresponding cases (indiscernible to the subject) where the perception is 'subverted', such as cases of hallucination.¹⁰ A characteristic feature of such a position is therefore to deny that two experiences which are indiscernible to the subject must thereby share content.

Such a position seems to directly motivate a specifically *epistemological* disjunctivism which is the view that most concerns us here.¹¹ After all, it follows on this view that the contents of one's mental states will be different in deceived and non-deceived cases. Thus, if one endorses (MENT) from a disjunctivist perspective, then one will treat the subject and her deceived counterpart as having different mental states and hence as having beliefs with different epistemic standings. Clearly, then, (MENT) on this view will entail the denial of (DISC). But what about (ACCESS)? This is where the view gets interesting, since it is characteristic of epistemological disjunctivism to retain this thesis and argue that the content of one's experiences is in the relevant sense reflectively accessible to the subject. Of course, the subject cannot discriminate between deceived and non-deceived cases, but the thought is that this fact does not suffice to show that in the non-deceived case the subject lacks the relevant reflective access.

So construed, epistemological disjunctivism is motivated by metaphysical disjunctivism. Interestingly, one can also regard the view as being motivated by independent considerations. Indeed, the foremost exponent of epistemological disjunctivism in the contemporary literature, John McDowell (see especially 1995, but also McDowell 1982; 1994; 2002*a*; *forthcoming*), these days almost exclusively motivates the position by appeal to independent considerations. The distinctive thesis that McDowell offers is that the reflectively accessible rational support that one has for one's beliefs can be both factive (i.e., entail that which it is a reason for) and yet be empirical (i.e., it can be a reason for belief in an empirical proposition).

Before we get into some of the detail of McDowell's position, I want to make a few simplifying assumptions that will keep our discussion manageable. First, we will focus on perceptual justification. McDowell's epistemological disjunctivism is meant to be a more general thesis (see, e.g., McDowell 1994), but it would take us too far afield to explain how this view manifests itself across different types of justification. If one is sceptical about the application of McDowell's view to other types of justification, then one should regard the debate here as being specifically about Conee and Feldman-style classical epistemic internalism about perceptual justification *versus* McDowellian non-classical epistemic internalism about perceptual justification. This debate is important enough for our purposes.

Second, I want to take it that we can freely move between talk of reasons and talk of evidence without too much concern. If we allow this assumption, then it enables us to make a direct comparison of epistemological disjunctivism and Conee and Feldman-style evidentialism. Still, one might think this move contentious.¹² If so, then one should simply reinterpret my defence of epistemological disjunctivism, and thus my critique of Conee and Feldman, in non-evidentialist terms. That is, the attack is merely on the classical form of epistemic internalism that Conee and Feldman endorse, rather than specifically on the evidentialist variety of classical epistemic internalism that they espouse. Such a critique is surely substantive enough for our purposes.

Finally, third, in what follows the version of epistemological disjunctivism that I describe is not meant to faithfully represent the McDowellian position, even though it is meant to embody the key features of that view. This is partly because I do not want to get bogged down in the murky world of McDowellian exegesis, partly because there are some details of McDowell's view that are not particularly salient to us here, and partly because

there are some issues where it may be that the view presented diverges in detail from McDowell's avowed position. Thus, while it is reasonable to think of the view presented as 'McDowellian', this should not be thought to imply that it is a view that McDowell himself would sign up to in its entirety.

6. With these points in mind, let us now look at McDowell's position in a little more detail. First, let us distinguish between pairs of 'good' and 'bad' cases. A 'good' case, as we are using the term, is a case in which the agent's veridical perception takes place in epistemically advantageous conditions, and consequently results in knowledge (and, thereby, justified belief). In contrast, the corresponding 'bad' case is a scenario which (i) is indiscriminable to the subject from the good case, (ii) is such that the subject's perception is non-veridical, and (iii) takes place in epistemically *disadvantageous* conditions. Since the subject is unaware of being in the bad case she forms the same belief that she forms in the good case. Clearly, gaining perceptual justification for belief in the target proposition is impossible in the bad case.

Here is an example to illustrate the distinction. First the good case. Our agent sees a barn in good cognitive conditions (e.g., there are no undefeated misleading defeaters present, she's not in barn façade county, and so on). Consequently, she thereby comes to know, and so justifiably believe, that there is a barn before her. In contrast, the corresponding bad case could be where the same agent merely seems to see a barn in bad cognitive conditions (e.g., she is, unbeknownst to her, in barn façade county, and looking at a fake barn). Since the subject cannot discriminate between the good and bad cases, she believes that there is a barn before her in the bad case, while lacking a justified belief in (and hence knowledge of) this proposition.

Note that there are cases which are neither good nor bad (i.e., the distinction is not meant to be exhaustive of the options available). For example, one's perception could be both veridical and formed in epistemically disadvantageous conditions, as when one sees a barn while in barn façade county.¹³ In order to offer a complete description of what epistemological disjunctivism involves would require us to deal with these cases as well, but we can side-step this task here. What is important for our purposes is just to identify a range of cases in which the epistemological disjunctivist tells a different epistemological story to

the classical evidential epistemic internalist. If this alternative account can be motivated even in this restricted range of cases, then that would suffice to motivate taking the view seriously as an alternative to classical evidential epistemic internalism.

The key claim made by the epistemological disjunctivist is that in the good case the rational support available for the agent's belief is that you *see that* there is a barn before you, where seeing that p entails p . Moreover, the epistemological disjunctivist also claims that the rational basis for one's belief is reflectively accessible. Accordingly, in the good case the agent has a reflectively accessible factive reason. In contrast, in the bad case the rational basis for the agent's belief cannot be that she sees that p , since, of course, this is not the case.¹⁴ It follows that even though the agent is unable to distinguish between the good and bad case, the rational support that the agent possesses in each case is radically different.

We can illustrate this point further by considering a sceptical pairing of good and bad cases, such as a good case in which one sees that one has two hands and a bad case in which one has been envatted and merely seems to see that one has two hands. According to the epistemological disjunctivist, in the good case the agent's reflectively accessible epistemic support for her belief that she has two hands will be that she sees that she has two hands, while in the bad case the agent will lack this kind of epistemic support for her belief.

Given that the epistemological disjunctivist holds that the rational basis for one's belief is reflectively accessible to one, it follows that she clearly endorses (ACCESS). Moreover, since she holds that the epistemic support that an agent's belief enjoys is very different in good and bad cases, it follows that she also clearly rejects (DISC). Finally, there is nothing in the epistemological disjunctivist line that prevents her from endorsing (MENT). In particular, insofar as epistemological disjunctivism is motivated by appeal to metaphysical disjunctivism, then the grounds for endorsing (MENT) are straightforward indeed. On this view, the reason why the rational support is both reflectively accessible and so very different in good and bad cases is because the relevant mental states of the subjects in these cases—in particular, the content of their perceptual experiences—is so very different.

But even if epistemological disjunctivism is not allied to metaphysical disjunctivism, then there could still be a basis for endorsing (MENT). For example, suppose one denied metaphysical disjunctivism and so held that the perceptual experiences of an agent in corresponding good and bad cases shared content. It needn't follow that the content of the agent's perceptual experience is the same in the two cases, and thus that her mental states are

the same. Indeed, that would depend on the account of perceptual experience that one offered. If, for example, one opted for a causal theory of perceptual experience—of a sort most famously championed by H. P. Grice (1961), for example—then one would still regard the two experiences as having different contents because of the different causal settings of those experiences, even though they shared some content. What is important to the epistemological disjunctivist who wishes to retain (MENT) is thus not that they endorse metaphysical disjunctivism, but only that they resist the idea that the shared content of perceptual experiences in corresponding good and bad cases constitutes the common rational basis for both beliefs.¹⁵

7. McDowell tends to motivate epistemological disjunctivism in largely negative terms. That is, rather than offering arguments which specifically support this position, instead his general dialectical approach is to argue that such a view has many attractions when compared with its rivals and that it is theoretically open to us.¹⁶ On the former point, one such attraction that McDowell emphasises is the fact that such a view accords with commonsense. It is certainly true that outside of philosophical discussions it is natural to describe the epistemic support one has in favour of one's belief in good cases in factive terms. It is only when impressed by philosophical arguments, such as sceptical arguments, or arguments from illusion, that one feels inclined to re-describe that epistemic support in non-factive terms. The import of this consideration is moot, of course, since perhaps we shouldn't put all that much stock in the verdicts of commonsense. Still, I take it that the thought in play here is that commonsense occupies a 'default' position in our theoretical thinking, in the sense that we require good reasons to deny commonsense, and that absent such reasons we should endorse commonsense views.

In addition, McDowell argues that once we endorse epistemological disjunctivism then some of the key problems of epistemology simply disappear. Consider, for example, the problem of radical scepticism. First, there is the epistemological disjunctivist's claim that as far as other epistemological proposals go this problem looks unsolvable. In particular, the claim is that epistemological proposals which do not take the epistemological disjunctivist route will have to swallow one of two bitter pills. On the one hand, epistemically externalist positions will only be able to evade the sceptical problem by making the epistemic support

for our beliefs opaque to us, even in epistemically optimal conditions. On the other hand, classical epistemically internalist positions seem unable to say very much at all in response to the sceptical problem, since for them the reflectively accessible epistemic support we have for our beliefs is no better than the epistemic support possessed by our envatted counterparts. Thus, the sceptical problem seems inevitable.

We can get a flavour of this last point by noting how Conee and Feldman (2004, ch. 12) struggle with the sceptical problem. After all, on their view it is hard to see how the reflectively accessible evidence that an agent might have in support of her beliefs could ever suffice to give her an epistemic basis for her everyday beliefs as opposed to their sceptical alternatives, something which Conee and Feldman in effect admit (2004, 303). Ultimately, the manoeuvre that Conee and Feldman are forced into attempting is to bring to bear some sort of inference to the best explanation strategy. That is, we have better evidence for our everyday beliefs than for their sceptical alternatives because we have additional abductive evidence in favour of the former. Even Conee and Feldman agree that this is a fairly contentious strategy to employ, particularly in this regard. Even they would surely admit, then, that if there is a better anti-sceptical response available to the epistemic internalist then it should be taken.

The next key step is to argue that epistemological disjunctivism is in a far better position than its rivals on this score. In particular, the claim is that epistemological disjunctivism has an easier time with the sceptical problem since it denies a key prop in the sceptic's reasoning—*viz.*, the idea that the reflectively accessible epistemic support that one has for one's beliefs is no better than the reflectively accessible epistemic support available to one's counterparts who are the victims of sceptical scenarios. Thus, even though it is true that we are unable to discriminate between, say, our normal experiences and the experiences of an envatted counterpart, it does not follow that we are epistemically no better off. Moreover, since this epistemic standing is reflectively accessible, one does not face the problem of conceding, with the epistemic externalist, that the nature of one's epistemic support is opaque to one.

More generally, I take it that a key attraction of epistemological disjunctivism is that it appears to enable us to incorporate the best features of both epistemological internalism and epistemological externalism. In the case of the former, we retain the idea that where one's belief is justified the epistemic support for that belief must be reflectively accessible to

one. In the case of the latter, we retain the idea that one's epistemic support is paradigmatically truth-conducive.

Given these putative theoretical advantages, the natural question that arises is why more people aren't epistemological disjunctivists. This is where the point that McDowell makes about how epistemological disjunctivism is theoretically open becomes important, since he charges that we are led towards the opposing position by reasoning which is far from compelling. In particular, he argues that while the opposing line is often presented as the inevitable outcome of philosophical theorising, it is in fact nothing of the sort. Indeed, he claims that it is only when we are in the grip of (what he regards as) a faulty 'highest common factor' conception of epistemic support that one is led to deny epistemological disjunctivism, and that the way this conception of epistemic support is motivated has an important lacuna, such that it is resistible. I take it that what McDowell has in mind in this regard is reasoning something like as follows:

The Highest Common Factor Argument

- (1) In the bad case, the epistemic support for one's belief is weaker than factive epistemic support. [Premise]
- (2) Agents are unable to discriminate between the good case and the corresponding bad case. [Premise]
- (C1) So, the epistemic support that the agent has in favour of her belief in the good case can be no better than it is in the bad case. [From (2)]
- (C2) So, in the good case, the epistemic support for one's belief is weaker than factive epistemic support. [From (1), (C1)]

I think McDowell is right to find this style of reasoning dubious, as it stands, for why should we grant that the epistemic standing of one's belief in the bad case dictates the epistemic standing of one's belief in the good case?

Note that the motivation for this move cannot come from epistemological internalism, since epistemological disjunctivism itself endorses the two key epistemic internalist theses of (ACCESS) and (MENT). Indeed, it ought to be clear that the motivation in fact comes from the contested (DISC), since what underlies this principle is the thought that where a subject is unable to discriminate between her actual experiences and the experiences of her deceived counterpart then there can be no difference in epistemic standing in the two cases. Since all will agree that the epistemic support available in the bad case is fairly limited, it follows that the epistemic support available in the good case will also be similarly limited. But given that (DISC) is the key suppressed premise in play in this argument, then there is no reason why an

epistemological disjunctivist, one who explicitly rejects (DISC), should be persuaded by it. In particular, the inference from premise (2) to (C1) is blocked.

The highest common factor conception of epistemic support thus does not give one grounds to reject epistemological disjunctivism, and so this option is still live. But if epistemological disjunctivism has significant theoretical advantages when compared to its rivals, and also accords better with commonsense, then why not endorse it?

8. As it happens, I think there are some serious problems with the way McDowell presents his form of epistemological disjunctivism. In particular, I think McDowell owes us an explanation of why his view is not subject to a ‘McKinsey-style’ argument to the effect that we are able to have *a priori* knowledge of specific external world propositions. After all, if we have reflective access to factive empirical reasons then, given that one can surely come to know *a priori* that these factive empirical reasons entail specific empirical facts, why isn’t it possible on this basis to acquire *a priori* knowledge of the target specific empirical facts? Relatedly, I think there is an unresolved tension between allowing reflectively accessible empirical reasons and endorsing the truism that one is unable to discriminate between good and bad cases. For given the former thesis it surely follows that the rational basis for one’s belief when one is in the good case actually entails that one is not in the bad case. But given that this rational basis is reflectively accessible, why isn’t one in a position to make the relevant discrimination? Finally, I think there is a problem for McDowell’s view as it stands when it comes to explaining why flat-out anti-sceptical assertions of a broadly ‘Moorean’ stripe seem so inappropriate. After all, in good cases at least such assertions are not only true but also supported by reflectively accessible factive reasons, so it is hard to understand what the source of such impropriety is supposed to be.

Indeed, I think there are other, less central, problems with McDowell’s presentation of the epistemological disjunctivism (for example, some of his more philosophically quietistic remarks). Crucially, however, I also think that there are some pretty compelling things that one can say in response to these problems. For example, I think that one can draw an independently plausible distinction between favouring and discriminating epistemic support that offers the basis on which one can deal with the three core problems just outlined. Moreover, as I have argued quite extensively elsewhere, once epistemological disjunctivism

is given the additional support that it needs to avoid these problems then it starts to look like a very attractive thesis indeed (and so the philosophical quietism so associated with McDowell's work in this regard becomes unnecessary).¹⁷ Rather than review the nature of this additional support here, however, I want instead to focus on the very specific series of objections that Conee (2007; cf. Conee 2008) raises to disjunctivism—interestingly, he doesn't appear to be troubled by the concerns just raised—since these will obviously be more salient for our present purposes.

9. For the most part, Conee's critique of disjunctivism focuses on metaphysical disjunctivism. As noted above, it is not obvious that the specifically epistemological disjunctivism that we are interested in is hostage to metaphysical disjunctivism, and Conee himself doesn't argue that it has to be, so the import of much of his critique of disjunctivism is therefore moot.¹⁸ That said, Conee does raise three key objections against epistemological disjunctivism which would apply regardless of whether the position were wedded to metaphysical disjunctivism, so let us focus on them here. We will take them in turn.

The first is that it epistemological disjunctivism unable to explain the intuition underlying (NEG). In particular, Conee (2007, 20) charges epistemological disjunctivism with being unable to explain the "equal reasonableness" of the beliefs held by the agent and her deceived counterpart. Thus far, we have represented the epistemological disjunctivist as simply rejecting this thesis, which naturally prompts the question of why so many find this claim so intuitive if it is meant to be baldly false. In particular, why is it that so many epistemologists who, like epistemological disjunctivists, are drawn to epistemological internalism find this thesis intuitive if it is baldly false?

Note, however, that there is a very straightforward explanation available to the epistemological disjunctivist as to why these two beliefs are equally reasonable, which is that both beliefs are equally epistemically blameless. After all, given the nature of the deception involved, it is no failing of the deceived subject that she believes what she does. Unless one further holds that two agents who are equally epistemically blameless are thereby of equal epistemic standing more generally, however, then accepting this claim is entirely consistent with endorsing epistemological disjunctivism.

It could be that Conee finds this distinction between epistemic blame and epistemic

standing more generally dubious but, if so, he doesn't explain why. Moreover, I take it that the distinction is at least *prima facie* plausible. Accordingly, as matters stand I don't see any reason why the epistemological disjunctivist cannot help herself to this distinction in order to account for why (NEG) can seem so intuitive. Hence, Conee's objection here lacks bite.¹⁹

10. The second criticism raised by Conee as regards epistemological disjunctivism concerns the problem posed by defeaters. Conee (2007, 19) argues that if epistemological disjunctivism were indeed to offer an epistemic advantage over rival views then it would have to be the case that a belief formed in response to a veridical perception is less susceptible to defeat than a belief formed in response to a non-veridical perception (by one's envatted counterpart, say). But this is not the case, argues Conee, since if one were reliably informed that one is subject to a deception then this would give one just as much reason to doubt the target proposition regardless of whether the belief was formed in response to a veridical perception.

Epistemological disjunctivism, as we are understanding the view here at least, is not susceptible to this problem. What is key to this view is only that in the good case the agent's epistemic support is both factive and reflectively accessible. Crucially, however, if one is in possession of an undefeated misleading defeater then one is not in the good case as we are understanding that notion, since the cognitive conditions are not then epistemically advantageous. Thus, since the epistemological advantages of epistemological disjunctivism are meant to be manifest only in the good case, it is by-the-by to evaluate the view by comparing the epistemic standing of two beliefs formed in non-good cases.

Still, Conee raises an important point here which concerns what to say about the range of cases that fall between good cases and bad cases as I have defined them here. In particular, let us focus on what we should say about the epistemic differences between (i) a good case, (ii) a case exactly alike the good case except that the agent is in possession of a misleading undefeated defeater, and (iii) a bad case. We argued above that the epistemic standing of the agent's respective beliefs in (i) and (iii) are different. The question, though, is what to say about (ii).

There are, it seems to me, two ways for the epistemological disjunctivist to go here. One way is to simply claim that in a type (ii) case the agent is not in the possession of the

target factive reason. An example in this regard of a type (ii) case is a situation where one is not in fact in barn façade county, and one forms one's belief that there is a barn before one by looking at a genuine barn, but where one is told, falsely, by a reliable informant that one is in barn façade county. The line just canvassed would say that in this case one does not see that there is a barn (even though one does obviously see a barn), and hence this cannot be the rational basis for one's belief.

Although I can see the attraction of such a proposal, on balance I think that it is not the right thing for the epistemological disjunctivist say about such cases. After all, from an 'objective' point of view at least, the cognitive conditions *are* epistemically advantageous, so why is it that the agent doesn't 'take in' the relevant fact? With that in mind, I think a second possible view in this regard is to allow that the agent does see that *p* in this case but argue that, nonetheless, one's seeing that *p* cannot form the rational basis of one's belief in the target proposition given the presence of the undefeated misleading defeater. Indeed, I think this line chimes better with what McDowell says at a number of junctures about "doxastic responsibility" (e.g., McDowell 1993, 429)—*viz.*, the idea that when an agent has knowledge then the target belief must be responsibly formed (as clearly it wouldn't be in the case just described). Moreover, if the idea driving (ACCESS) is that the rational basis of one's belief must be reflectively accessible to one, then there is no tension between taking this line while holding on to this thesis, since on this view one's seeing that *p* cannot be the rational basis of one's belief (even though one does see that *p*).

Viewing the matter in this way also enables to us to deal with a third problem that Conee (2007, 21) raises, which is that merely seeing that *p* will not suffice for knowledge in cases in which the target belief is not rationally formed on this basis. Hence, argues Conee, there is no epistemic advantage offered by epistemological disjunctivism, since even when one's belief is based on one's seeing that *p* it does not follow that knowledge is any more assured thereby than if one's belief has a different, non-factive, basis. But the cases that we are interested, the cases which mark the difference between epistemological disjunctivism and standard epistemic internalist views, are precisely those cases in which the belief is appropriately formed on the factive basis. Accordingly, that there may be no epistemic advantage in the cases that Conee describes does not entail that there is no epistemic advantage to be had by opting for epistemological disjunctivism.²⁰

11. In conclusion, then, I have argued that there is a viable epistemological proposal available which can incorporate the sort of epistemically internalist insights that drive Conee and Feldman's classically internalist view but which also delivers some distinctive theoretical advantages over its rivals. Moreover, I have argued that Conee's reasons for rejecting such a view do not convince.²¹

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NOTES

¹ Note that, in order to keep matters as simple as possible, I am here working with the specific notion of *doxastic* justification in mind.

² See, for example, Goldman (1986).

³ Whether one finds this sort of line generally plausible will depend, in part, on whether one is attracted to content externalism. For while many would grant that there could be no difference between one's mental states and the mental states of one's *recently* envatted physical duplicate, most content externalists would argue that, at least eventually, a difference would emerge. For more discussion of content externalism, see Nuccetelli (2003).

⁴ More precisely, *S* is unable to discriminate between her experiences and the experiences had by *S** (and, for that matter, *vice versa*).

⁵ At least, this follows if the relevant difference in mental states concerns states that have a bearing on one's epistemic standing. As far as the envatted case goes, I think it is a fair assumption that such a view would regard the difference in mental states between the agent and her envatted counterpart to be extensive enough to ensure that this is the case, though this will depend, in part, on how recent the envattment is (see endnote 3).

⁶ In particular—see endnote 5—it follows that the difference in mental states between the agent and her envatted counterpart is extensive enough to ensure that it makes the required epistemic difference.

⁷ See Williamson (1995; cf. Williamson 2000*a*, ch. 1) and Williamson (1997; cf. Williamson 2000*a*, ch. 9), respectively.

⁸ Williamson famously denies that one's mental states are 'luminous', of course, though a mental state could still be reflectively accessibly and yet not be luminous, so this does not decide the matter. See Williamson (1996; cf. Williamson 2000*b*, ch. 4).

⁹ Williamson is actually quite explicit that he denies (DISC). See, for example, Williamson (2000*b*; cf. Williamson 2000*a*, ch. 8). Just to be clear, however, I am not suggesting that the account of epistemic justification just described is one that Williamson would endorse, only that it is the sort of position that one who advocates some of the key theses that Williamson holds would find attractive. For further discussion of Williamson's epistemology, see Greenough & Pritchard (*forthcoming*).

¹⁰ Contemporary disjunctivism of this broadly metaphysical stripe largely owes its source to the work of Hinton (e.g., 1973). For some of the key more recent discussions, see Snowdon (1980-1; 1990-1), McDowell (1986) and Martin (2003; 2004). For an excellent recent anthology on disjunctivism, see Haddock & Macpherson (2008*a*). Note that I am here glossing over the issue of what to say about deceived perceptual experiences which are nonetheless veridical. I will return to this complication later on.

¹¹ For more on the contrast between metaphysical and epistemological disjunctivism, see Byrne & Logue (2008) and Haddock & Macpherson (2008*b*). As far as I am aware, Byrne & Logue (2008) and Pritchard (2008)—which appear in the same edited collection (Haddock & Macpherson (2008*a*))—were the first to use the phrase 'epistemological disjunctivism' to mark out a specific epistemological variant of the disjunctivist proposal which was not necessarily committed to metaphysical disjunctivism.

¹² As it happens, Conee (2007, pp32ff.; cf. Conee 2008, pp20ff.) finds such an equivalence contentious, and I'm inclined to agree with him,

¹³ Things get more complicated still once we bring in the distinction between whether the cognitive conditions are objectively or subjectively epistemically advantageous. For example, one could, in fact, be in very good cognitive conditions and yet be in possession of an undefeated misleading defeater. In such a case, the cognitive conditions would be subjectively epistemically disadvantageous and yet objectively epistemically advantageous. With this in mind, I think the epistemological disjunctivist will need a six-fold distinction between cases of this sort in order to accommodate the various nuances. I explore this issue more fully in Pritchard (2008*a*).

¹⁴ In order to keep matters as simple as possible, we will leave it open what the rational basis for the agent's belief in the bad case is. All that matters for our purposes is that it is much weaker than the epistemic support in play in the good case.

¹⁵ This is not the place to explore this possibility further. For additional discussion of this possibility, see Millar (2007; 2008; *forthcoming*). See also Haddock & Macpherson (2008*b*).

¹⁶ There is one exception in this regard, which is McDowell's transcendental argument to the effect that it is only if it is sometimes the case that one's perceptual experiences involve a 'taking in' of the relevant fact, such that one sees that *p*, that it could be intelligible that there exists perceptual experiences with representational content. This argument is subtle, as is the extent to which it presupposes metaphysical disjunctivism. In order to keep this discussion of a manageable size, I have set this motivation for the view to one side here. This

transcendental argument for epistemological disjunctivism is given its clearest expressions in McDowell (1982; 2008). For a helpful discussion, see Haddock & Macpherson (2008*b*, §2).

¹⁷ See in particular, Neta & Pritchard (2007) and Pritchard (2007; 2008*a*; 2008*b*; *forthcoming*).

¹⁸ As Conee himself concedes—see, for example, Conee (2007, 35).

¹⁹ Similar remarks apply to the parallel objection that Conee raises against Millar's account of what the epistemological disjunctivist should say about 'zebra' cases. See Conee (2007, 32).

²⁰ I discuss these issues further in Pritchard (2008*a*), where I distinguish between a range of different 'good' and 'bad' cases and discuss the epistemological differences that they generate. See also endnote 13.

²¹ I am grateful to Trent Dougherty, Adrian Haddock, Alan Millar and Ram Neta for helpful discussion on issues covered in this paper.