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In Defence of a Doxastic Account of Experience

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Today, many philosophers think that perceptual experiences are conscious mental states with representational content and phenomenal character. Subscribers to this view often go on to construe experience more precisely as a propositional attitude *sui generis* ascribing sensible properties to ordinary material objects. I argue that experience is better construed as a kind of belief ascribing ‘phenomenal’ properties to such objects. A belief theory of this kind deals as well with the traditional arguments against doxastic accounts as the *sui generis* view. Moreover, in contrast to *sui generis* views, it can quite easily account for the rational or reason providing role of experience.

According to an account currently very popular in the philosophical literature, perceptual experiences are conscious mental states with representational content and

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distinctive phenomenal character. If we accept such an account, we should be able to provide answers to the following two questions: First, the ‘state question’: What *kind* of a mental state is experience? And second, the ‘content question’: What *form* does its content take?

Both of these questions, it seems to me, have been somewhat neglected in recent debates. These debates have focused instead on the relation between phenomenal character and representational content, and the kind of content experiences have. Thus, we have seen the ‘qualia-wars’ and the search for a viable notion of non-conceptual content. These clearly are intriguing issues, but they have diverted attention from the more fundamental concerns mentioned above. The question I shall be most concerned with in this paper is the state question: What kind of mental state is experience? However, as we shall see, answering this question directly implicates the content question, the question what form the content of experience takes.

Most people seem to agree on at least the following negative answer to the state question: Experiences are *not beliefs*.¹ And indeed, there are well-established, prima facie convincing arguments against what we might call ‘belief theories’, or ‘doxastic accounts’, of experience. The most well known of these arguments concern the so-

¹ As far as I can tell, the position that experience is a kind of belief is presently not occupied by anyone (but me). Armstrong, 1968, used to hold a version of the belief theory, as did Pitcher, 1971. However, they never identified perception, or experience, as a kind of belief; rather, they conceived of perception as an event, the event of forming a belief, or the inclination, or disposition to do so (Armstrong, 1968, ch. 10). In the end, Armstrong settled for a counterfactual analysis of perception as ‘the acquiring of a potential belief: We come to be in a certain state which would be a belief-state but for the inhibiting effects of other, contrary, beliefs’ (1968, 223). Clearly, such a state is not a belief. The last to have defended a claim at least closely related to the claim that experience is a kind of belief is Craig (1976) who held that ‘sensory experiences actually are judgements about our environment’ (1976, 8).

called ‘modularity’ or ‘belief-independence’ of experience. On the assumption that experience nevertheless is a state representing the world as being a certain way, many conclude that experience must be a propositional attitude *sui generis*.²

In this paper, I shall argue that these conclusions are at least hasty. As far as I can see, the anti-doxastic arguments on the market all presuppose a certain construal of the contents of experience. They all hinge on the premise that experiences take what I shall call ‘naive contents’: They ascribe sensible properties like redness or roundness to ordinary material objects. Though intuitive, such a ‘naive semantics’ is by no means mandatory. I suggest replacing it by a ‘phenomenal semantics’, a semantics according to which experiences do not ascribe sensible properties like redness or roundness to ordinary material objects, but ‘phenomenal’ ones: properties like looking red or looking round. Equipped with such a semantics, a doxastic account of experience is not only back in business, but even outperforms any *sui generis* account, arguably its strongest competitor.

I shall proceed as follows: In section 1, I shall outline both a basic characterization of experience assumed as common ground in this paper, as well as the more precise version of it that is standard in the literature. In section 2, I shall outline the most important arguments against doxastic construals of experience. These arguments concern the ways in which experience relates to empirical belief: Experience both shows a characteristic independence from, while at the same time providing justification or reasons for, empirical belief. These arguments point towards *sui generis*, but depend on the assumption that experience has a naive semantics. In section 3, I shall suggest an

² *Sui generis* accounts have been more or less explicitly suggested by, amongst others, Gareth Evans, Tim Crane, John McDowell, Fred Dretske, Michael Tye, Jim Pryor, and Susanna Siegel.

alternative ‘phenomenal semantics’ for experience, and show how it brings the belief theory back into business vis á vis ‘belief independence’. In section 4, I shall then argue that, equipped with a phenomenal semantics, doxastic accounts have a decisive advantage over sui generis accounts when it comes to accommodating the rational role of experience.

1. The Standard Account of Experience

Here is a basic characterization of perceptual experience that is widely accepted today:

- (E) A perceptual experience
- i) is a conscious mental state,
 - ii) with a representational content, and
 - iii) a distinctive phenomenal character.

In this paper, I shall neither challenge, nor defend (E). Rather, I shall take (E) as common ground that all parties to this particular discussion agree on.³ What I shall be concerned with is the further analysis of i) and ii), more precisely, the answers subscribers to (E) should give to the state and content questions as I have formulated them above: the questions what *kind* of mental state experience is, and what *form* its contents take. And I am going to challenge the most widely accepted answers to these questions: These are the claim that the representational content of experience takes a

³ The following considerations thus do not engage accounts of experience according to which these do not have representational content (as found, for instance, in Campbell 2002, Martin 2002, Travis 2004, Brewer 2008); for very instructive recent discussion see Siegel 2005.

certain, 'naive' form, and the claim that experiences are not beliefs. Let's start with the content question.

Experiences, many people these days think, are about things out there, about the world of ordinary material objects. And intuitively, they 'tell' us something about that world. What they 'say' might be the truth, but it doesn't have to be. 'A perceptual experience', Christopher Peacocke, among many others, writes, 'represents the world as being a certain way' (1992, 61). A perceptual experience, that is, 'tells us' that the world fulfils a certain condition, for instance the condition of containing a red tomato or a pink elephant right in front of us. The intuition that experiences 'tell us' such things can thus be partly accounted for by construing them as having *representational contents*: Contents with conditions of truth or correctness. In this very basic and innocent sense, saying that experiences have representational content is saying that they have *propositional content*.⁴

Just saying that experience has representational, or propositional, content leaves open what I have called the 'content question' above, however: The question what *form* this content takes. The arguably most important issues here are: What are the objects of

⁴ This is innocent in so far as it does not yet tell us as what kind of propositions the contents of experiences are best construed, precisely what kind of relation their subjects are required to stand in towards them, or what kind of medium of representation experience employs; these are questions I shall remain neutral on. To the extent that the question whether experience content is *conceptual* or *non-conceptual* turns on any of these issues, I shall thus remain neutral on that question, too. There is a sense of conceptual, however, on which beliefs, by definition, have conceptual content (Byrne (2005) calls this the 'pleonastic sense of concept'). In this sense, defending a belief theory of experience amounts to construing experiences as having conceptual content. I do not think, however, that this, by itself, commits the belief theorist to take a stand on any of the aforementioned issues. Thanks to Tim Crane for helping me to get clearer on these issues.

experience? What kind of properties do experiences ascribe to these objects? And are these contents singular or general? Since we are concerned with assigning truth conditions to representations here, I shall call any answer to these issues a ‘semantics’ for experience.⁵

As already hinted, there is *some* consensus on the content question amongst subscribers to (E). That is, there is widespread agreement that the objects of experience are ordinary material objects such as chairs, books, and (most important from an evolutionary perspective) fruit. There also is quite some agreement on the kinds of properties that experiences ascribe to such objects: These are the so-called sensible properties (or relations), properties like redness or roundness.⁶ I shall call any semantics that accepts these two claims a ‘naive semantics’:

(NS) Experiences have contents of the form x is F , where x ranges over ordinary material objects, and F over sensible properties.⁷

⁵ Note that this does not commit me to a *lingua mentis*. The assumption is merely that as soon as there are representational contents, these contents are represented *somehow*, in *some* medium of representation. That alone is enough to justify talking about ‘semantics’ here; no assumptions about that medium’s character or structure are required.

⁶ Consensus ends when it comes to distinguishing the sensible from the non-sensible properties. The relevant question here is which properties an object can look to have, in the phenomenal sense of ‘look’ (cf. Jackson 1977: 33). For our present concerns, the precise answer to this question is of no further importance.

⁷ Strictly speaking, and on the assumption that there are sensible relations, (NS) should be replaced by (NS’) Experiences have contents of the form $F(x_1, \dots, x_n)$, where x_i ($1 \leq i \leq n$) ranges over material objects and F over sensible properties and relations.

Consensus ends when it comes to questions like whether (the most basic) experiential contents are singular or general, object-dependent or object-independent. This, however, will not matter here, and I shall remain (almost completely) neutral on these issues.⁸

What does matter here are the objects of experience, and the kinds of properties ascribed to them. And while it certainly seems quite natural and intuitive to adopt a naive semantics in response to the content question, it is important to note that (E) does not commit us to such a semantics. As far as (E) is concerned, the objects of experience might as well be sense data as ordinary material objects. Nor does (E) commit us to sensible properties.

It might also be noted that (E) is neutral on questions concerning what we might call the ‘foundational semantics’ of experience contents: By itself, (E) does not commit us to take a stand on controversial questions regarding the *determination* of these contents. For instance, you can subscribe to (E) regardless of whether you think that the content of red-experiences is *externalistically* determined by the microstructural properties of the red-looking things in the (local) environment. Both externalistic and internalistic content determination are compatible with (E).

What about the ‘kind question’, then, the question what kind of a mental state experience is? (E) tells us that experience is *a* conscious mental state. Moreover, it is one of those that have representational or propositional content, so it clearly is *some kind of propositional attitude*. But *which*? What kind of attitude is this? This question needs to be distinguished from the question of whether (E), so to speak, captures all and only the experiences. Even if it did that, even if it were extensionally correct, it would

⁸ That is why I shall mostly represent contents by means of open sentence schemas (like *x is F*); see note 53 below, however.

not tell us which propositional attitude experience is. Take belief. (E) guarantees that experience and belief is not just the same thing: Every experience has a certain phenomenal character, and that is simply not true of every belief. Nevertheless, (E) is perfectly compatible with experience being *a kind, a subspecies, of belief*. At the same time, (E) is equally compatible with experience *not* being a kind of belief. And the same would seem to hold for any other kind of attitude. Even if extensionally correct, (E) thus leaves it completely open what kind of a propositional attitude experience is.

Nevertheless, there is widespread agreement at least on the following negative answer to the kind question: Experience is *not* a kind of belief. But since there does not seem to be any other kind of propositional attitude experience could plausibly be subsumed under, many conclude that experience is a propositional attitude *sui generis*. Incorporating naive semantics and sui generity into our basic account (E) of experience results in the more precise version of (E) that is fairly standard today. As we shall soon see, as long as we work with a naive semantics it is very plausible indeed to not only hold that experiences are not beliefs, but to construe them as sui generis. In what follows, I shall therefore treat sui generis accounts as the strongest standard competitors to the doxastic account of experience I ultimately want to defend. First, however, I shall take a closer look at the more or less traditional arguments against belief theories of experience.

2. Against Belief Theories

2.1 Anti-Doxastic Arguments

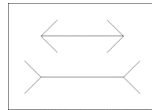
The anti-doxastic arguments on the market can all be construed as *reductio ad absurdum* arguments. Each of them focuses on a particular aspect or characteristic of the relation

between experience and empirical belief, arguing that construing experiences themselves as a kind of belief cannot accommodate this aspect or characteristic: Trying to combine the two results in absurdity.

Amongst these arguments, I shall roughly distinguish between two kinds. The first, more traditional kind is phenomenological; it starts from certain phenomena readily 'observable' by any reflective subject of experience. As we shall see, the phenomena in question all seem to support the idea that perception is, in a certain sense, modular or 'belief-independent', and I shall therefore call them the 'modularity phenomena'. The first kind of anti-doxastic argument concludes that doxastic accounts cannot accommodate the modularity phenomena. The second kind of anti-doxastic argument starts from a desideratum deriving not from the phenomenology, but from our pre-theoretic notion of experience: According to this notion, experiences justify or provide reasons for empirical beliefs. This second kind of anti-doxastic argument concludes that doxastic accounts cannot account for experience's reason-providing role.

Let's start with the more traditional arguments from modularity phenomena. These are often presented as arguments for the *modularity* of perception. What is meant here is modularity in Fodor's sense, where the perceptual system would be seen as a hard-wired, informationally encapsulated module in the cognitive architecture of the mind. What is interesting for our concerns, however, is only that part of modularity that is concerned with, so to speak, putting experiences in a box of their own, a box different from the belief box. For our purposes, that is, modularity is equally well captured by what Evans called the 'belief-independence' of experience (Evans, 1982, 123). We shall have to take some care, however, not to describe the relevant phenomena in ways that beg the question against doxastic accounts.

The probably most influential such argument might be called ‘the argument from known illusion’. There are certain illusions that are extremely robust, the Müller-Lyer illusion, for instance:



We all know that the two horizontal lines are of equal length. But knowing this does not change the experience: One of the lines looks longer than the other, no matter what we know or believe about their length. No amount of reflection can do anything about that. It is thus very natural and plausible to think that a visual experience of a Müller-Lyer diagram is *independent of background belief* in the following sense: Its content does not vary or change with relevant background belief. Whether we know that we are subject to an illusion or not, our experience has precisely the same content.

And now, we can run an argument to the conclusion that experiences are not beliefs. Assume, for reductio, that experiences are beliefs. And assume that (at least some) experiences are independent from background belief. Now, take someone, Peter, who is subject to a known illusion: Peter is looking at a Müller-Lyer diagram and Peter has a firm background belief that those two lines are of equal length. But they *look* as if one of them was longer than the other. They look, that is, as if they were not of equal length. By assumption, that is another belief. Thus, Peter ends up believing both that the two lines are of equal length and that the two lines are not of equal length – a straight contradiction. On the assumption that experiences are beliefs, independence from background belief thus leads to the conclusion that subjects of known illusions have contradictory beliefs.

This conclusion is bad, but maybe not yet clearly absurd. However, in cases of known illusion the subject can be fully aware of both his experience and his background belief. Peter is fully aware of believing what he, at the same time, knows to be false. No amount of reflection can change this. For those still inclined to think that this is bad, but not clearly absurd, here is what clinches the matter: Even perfectly rational subjects can be subjects of known illusions. Peter is such a one: There is no plausible psychological explanation whatsoever for his holding beliefs with very simple, clearly contradictory contents, beliefs that he is fully aware of. This *is* absurd. Beliefs just don't behave like that.⁹ The argument from known illusion concludes that experiences are not beliefs.¹⁰

A rather similar argument might be called 'the argument from falsely believed illusion'. Consider the following example: You are in a store trying to choose a necktie. The tie you are looking at looks green to you. However, you believe that the lighting in the store is nonstandard and therefore withhold judgment as to the tie's color. Assume further that that background belief is false, and the lighting in fact is standard. On the assumption that experiences are beliefs, you now are in the following situation: The tie looks green to you. This is a belief, more precisely the belief that the tie is green. At the same time, the background belief is supposed to have the effect of your withholding the

⁹ Note, that it therefore is not an option to construe the known illusion subject as compartmentalized. Compartmentalization is a form of irrationality where contradictory beliefs are somehow 'walled off' from each other. Being subject to a known illusion is not sufficient for irrationality. In particular, there is nothing 'irrational' about the lines looking of different length; given the structure of the diagram and given that the subject's visual system is in working order, this is what the lines 'should' look like.

¹⁰ This argument can be found already in Broad, 1923, and Armstrong, 1968. For more recent uses of it, see for instance Jackson, 1977, 38ff and Crane, 1992, 149ff . See also Crane 2001, 150f where the point is put in terms of Moore's paradox: While asserting a content of the form *I believe that p but not-p* is Moore-paradoxical, there is no such oddity in asserting 'I experience that p but not-p'.

belief that the tie is green. Consequently, you end up simultaneously both believing and not believing that the necktie is green.¹¹ This is absurd. The argument from falsely believed illusion concludes that experiences are not beliefs.

Another modularity phenomenon is provided by Tim Crane (cf. Crane, 1988; 1992, 150). He describes a type of illusion called the ‘waterfall illusion’. In this illusion, it actually looks as if something was both moving and not moving at the same time. This shows, Crane argues, that experiences can have outrightly contradictory contents: We can, for instance, have an experience with the content *x is moving and not moving*. On the assumption that experiences are beliefs it would therefore be possible to have beliefs with outrightly contradictory contents. But this is absurd; no such beliefs are possible. Therefore, the ‘waterfall-argument’ concludes, experiences are not beliefs.

The anti-doxastic arguments presented so far all use phenomenological data about experiences either familiar to, or easily reproducible by, every reflective subject of experience to derive absurd consequences from the assumption that experience is a kind

¹¹ Strictly speaking, it is inessential here whether the background belief about the lighting is false or not. All that matters for our purposes is that the belief that the tie is green is withheld. However, an argument like this can be extracted from the use John McDowell (2004) makes of the necktie example (originally from Sellars 1963, 143). There, McDowell argues that experience does not provide inferential reasons for beliefs. Rather, having a (veridical) experience is having a certain sort of *entitlement* to belief, an entitlement that cannot be overridden by background belief. In the necktie case, McDowell submits, no belief that the necktie is green is formed, but the subject nevertheless is entitled to such a belief. And this, of course, is only the case if the background belief about the lighting is *false*. But McDowell not only argues that there is entitlement to the belief that the necktie is green in this case, he also concludes that the experience, as ‘the entitling circumstance’, cannot be that belief: ‘that the entitling circumstance itself needs to be distinguished from that belief is brought out by the fact that one can have the entitlement without realizing that one does, and so without having the belief at all’ (2004, 215).

of belief.¹² The last anti-doxastic argument I shall look at can be set up as a *reductio ad absurdum* as well, but the premises it employs in combination with the assumption that experiences are beliefs are of a different nature. The argument I have in mind might be called ‘the stuttering inference argument’, and we find it in McDowell’s writings. The stuttering inference argument turns on the rational or reason-providing role of experience, and therefore requires some stage setting.

Like few others, McDowell has long insisted on the importance of experience’s reason-providing or rational role. That experience provides us with reasons for empirical beliefs, he argues in *Mind and World* (1994), is a condition on the very possibility of having any mental states with empirical content. What he said in *Mind and World* was interpreted by many as an attempt to extend a certain intuitive conception of having reasons to experience. According to this conception, having reasons for a belief that *p* is understood on an inferential model: Those reasons are such

¹² Another phenomenological datum that is sometimes presented as evidence against doxastic accounts is the characteristic ‘richness’ of experiential content. As Crane puts it: ‘The content of experience is *replete* in a way the content of belief is not’ (2001, 151). But this conclusion clearly does not follow from the mere datum of richness – unless we already assume that experiences are not beliefs. The characteristic richness of experiential content might, or might not, be a good argument for the non-conceptual character of this content (as Evans was first to argue (1982, 229); but see for instance McDowell (1994, 56ff) for arguments to the contrary). In that case, the belief theorist would have to say that there are beliefs with non-conceptual contents (as, indeed, many proponents of non-conceptual content (such as Tye (2002)) hold anyway). Another, arguably more plausible option, would be to consider richness a matter of the *medium of representation*; Dretske, for instance, tries to account for richness in terms of ‘analog’ (as opposed to ‘digital’) coding (1981, 135ff). But again, this would only be an argument against a belief theory if it was already established that beliefs cannot employ analog coding.

that they could be used as premises in a valid (logical or material) inference to the conclusion that p .¹³

In the ensuing discussion, however, McDowell pointed out that absurd consequences arise from such an account of the rational role of experience. More precisely, absurd consequences arise if we combine an ‘inferential’ conception of reasons with the following observation about the strength of experiential reasons. Intuitively, an experience as of p provides its subject with a rather strong reason for believing that p . However, such a reason can be overridden by background belief. This is precisely what happens when you believe, for instance, that lighting conditions are non-standard. In general, experiential reasons can be overridden by background belief to the effect that conditions are such that the senses are not to be trusted. Experiences, in other words, seem to provide *defeasible* reasons for empirical belief.

Let’s call those empirical beliefs most directly supported by, or formed most directly on the basis of, experience ‘basic perceptual beliefs’. Now, in order for experience to provide defeasible ‘inferential’ reasons for such beliefs, the degree to which an experience inferentially supports a basic perceptual belief must be less than 1. But, as McDowell repeatedly points out, when it comes to experience and basic perceptual belief, what we actually seem to be concerned with are two propositional attitudes *with the same content*. The degree to which p evidentially supports p is 1. An inference from

¹³ Among those that understood McDowell in this way are Brewer, 1999, Wright, 1998, and Glüer 2004. Such an interpretation surely is at least invited when McDowell exemplifies the relevant relations: ‘rational relations, such as implication or probabilification’ (1994, 53).

p to p thus is not defeasible; there is no kind of background belief that could (rationally) override such an inference.¹⁴ McDowell writes:

[W]hat matters is the rationality exemplified in judging whether things are thus and so in the light of whether things are (observably) thus and so. The content of the item in the light of which a judgement of this kind has its rational standing is the same as the content of the judgment itself. The only inferences corresponding to the rational connection in question would be of the “stuttering” form, “P, so P.” No doubt that inference-form (if we allow it the title) cannot lead one astray, but its freedom from risk seems a quite unhelpful model for the rationality of observational judgment (1998, 405; cf. also 1997, 161).

McDowell is quite right in complaining that, intuitively, basing beliefs on experience is not ‘riskfree’ in the sense of experience, just by itself, providing indefeasible, or conclusive, reasons: Surely, reasoning on the basis of experience does not stutter.

On the face of it, this is an argument against modelling the rational role of experience by the inferential conception of reasons. However, very little needs to be added to make the stuttering inference argument into an argument against a belief theory of experience. For if experience itself is a kind of belief, then its rational role is precisely that of belief providing reasons for (further) empirical beliefs. And I take it to be uncontroversial that the model of choice here is (some version of) the inferential model.¹⁵ Consequently, the

¹⁴ Note that the point holds even if we think of experiential contents as typically (or even necessarily) much richer than the contents of any perceptual beliefs. Experiential contents then could be understood on the model of very long conjunctions, and basic perceptual beliefs as (necessarily, or typically) having only some of the conjuncts as their contents. Nothing can defeat an inference from $p \ \& \ q$ to p .

¹⁵ There is controversy about the degree to which such reasoning should be construed externalistically. Williamson (2000), for instance, argues that only those beliefs that are in fact knowledge provide

assumptions that experiences are beliefs, and that they provide reasons for further empirical beliefs, lead to the absurd consequence that the relevant inferences would be of the ‘stuttering’ kind. The stuttering inference argument concludes that experiences are not beliefs.

All in all, it now looks as if doxastic accounts led to an impressive range of rather absurd consequences: They cannot account for the modularity phenomena. Coming with the inferential model of reasons ‘built in’, they might have some initial promise when it comes to accounting for experience’s reason-providing role, but a closer look reveals the absurd consequences of thus extending this model to experiences. These arguments are very powerful. To my mind at least, both accommodating experience’s independence from background belief and accommodating its reason-providing role simply are desiderata on any satisfactory account of experience. So, if the anti-doxastic arguments presented are good ones, we have every reason to think that experience is not a kind of belief. Moreover, as we shall see next, there also would be very good reason to conclude that experience is a propositional attitude *sui generis*.

2.2 On Representing the World as Being a Certain Way

Experience not only has representational content, it represents the world *as being a certain way*. An experience with the content that p represents the world as being such that p is true. Experience therefore is what I shall call a ‘strongly representational state’:

- (SR) A mental state is strongly representational iff
- i) it has a propositional content p , and

evidence. But this is a controversy about which states provide reasons or evidence, not about the inferential nature of the reasons or the evidence provided.

- ii) it represents the world as being such that p is true.

I shall call a mental state ‘weakly representational’ iff i) is satisfied.

The distinction between weakly and strongly representational states is most easily illustrated by means of examples such as desires, imaginings, assumings and entertainings. Desires have representational content, but they do not represent the world as being the desired way. Entertaining a proposition involves tokening a representation, but does not amount to representing the world as being the entertained way. Making an assumption, for instance to see what follows from it, or to prove that it has a certain (logical) consequence, is not representing the world as being the assumed way. Imagining the world to be a certain way is not representing it as being the imagined way. But believing the world to be a certain way *is* representing it as being that way; belief is the paradigmatic case of a strongly representational state.

Saying that experience represents the world as being a certain way thus is saying that experiences are *like beliefs* in this respect: both are strongly representational states. Experience is more like belief than like desire, or imagining, or entertaining a proposition when it comes to representing the world as being a certain way. This much, I take it, is uncontroversial.¹⁶ It is also overwhelmingly intuitive; it is the most natural

¹⁶ The distinction between weakly and strongly representational states more or less precisely coincides with that between ‘semantic’ and ‘stative’ representation (Martin 2002, 386f), and that between ‘assertively’ and ‘non-assertively’ representing that p (Pryor 2005, 187f). Heck is clear about that this is a matter of the *attitude* towards p , and distinguishes accordingly between ‘assertive, or presentational’ and non-assertive attitudes (2000, 509). Strongly representational states could also be characterized in the somewhat metaphorical terms of Searlian ‘direction of fit’: Strongly representational states have mind-to-world direction of fit, while desires and intentions have world-to-mind direction of fit (cf. Searle 1983, 7f; imaginings and entertainings, I take it, have ‘the null direction of fit’ (Searle 1983, 8)). Not less

way for anyone subscribing to our basic account of experience (E) to accommodate that aspect of the phenomenology of experience that has been called its ‘immediacy’.¹⁷ Visual experience, for instance, is immediate in the sense that ‘[v]isual phenomenology makes it for a subject as if a scene is simply presented’ (Sturgeon 2000, 9). As Martin points out, even if the subject suspects that he is having an illusion, or even that he is hallucinating, ‘the fact that he draws that conclusion need not be sufficient to alter how the situation strikes him phenomenologically: it may still seem to him *as if things are so*’ (Martin 2002, 401; *emph. mine*). For anyone who thinks that experiences do have propositional contents, the natural way of cashing out their immediacy is to say that they represent or, as Searle would have it, ‘present’ the world as being such that that content is true.

But once we thus classify experience with belief as strongly representational, the step to thinking them a kind of propositional attitude *sui generis* is rather short, indeed. For one thing, it is by no means implausible to think that beliefs and experiences are the *only* strongly representational attitudes. And for another, even if they were not, there simply does not seem any other attitude with quite the same, rather peculiar relation to empirical belief. The underlying general idea here is to type attitudes by their *functional*

metaphorically, strongly representational states could be said to ‘aim at truth’. Thus Crane, for instance, writes: ‘[P]erceptions have this in common with judgement, or the formation of belief: they “aim” at truth’ (2001, 150).

¹⁷ Cf., among others, Martin 2002, 399; Searle 1983, 45; Sturgeon 2000, 9. Martin in fact suggests that conceiving of experiences as what he calls ‘stative’ representation is the only plausible way of accounting for immediacy available to the *intentionalist* (2002, 387f), where an intentionalist about perceptual experience holds that experience can have the same propositional content across veridical, illusory and hallucinatory cases. As far as I can see, the point, if good, would generalize to all accounts on which experience is a propositional attitude.

roles. Compare beliefs and experiences: Beliefs and experiences are quite alike when it comes to the ‘output’ side of their functional roles. Both ‘stand ready’ to make an impact on further cognitive states.¹⁸ Nevertheless, experiences are distinct; what they do not share with beliefs is the ‘input’ side of their functional role. Beliefs take input from other strongly representational attitudes, i.e. further beliefs or experiences, but experiences do not. They are caused by sub-personal cognitive processes.¹⁹

Thus far, the case for *sui generis* is rather weak, however. There is no obvious reason to think that an attitude is *sui generis* just because it is, so to speak, the first of a certain kind in the order of processing. That, in the order of processing, experiences are the first personal and strongly representational states, does not just by itself provide us with any reason to think that they are not beliefs. There is no reason in principle why it would be impossible for personal level processing to start with beliefs.²⁰

The case for *sui generis* only gets off the ground once we start describing the relevant functional roles *in terms of content*. At this level, beliefs clearly and distinctively are characterized by certain constraints of coherence: Individual beliefs do not tolerate outrightly contradictory contents, and belief systems are subject to constraints on their internal coherence. This induces certain behaviors in the face of newly acquired information: Beliefs can be ‘overridden’, but for a belief to be overridden means extinction. None of this seems to hold for experiences. This is

¹⁸ This ‘output’ side of their functional role, you might want to insist, is the naturalistic analogue, or counterpart, of the reason-providing role we have been talking about above. What is distinctive of reason-providing, of course, is that it is a *content-sensitive* relation.

¹⁹ Cf. for instance Tye 2002, 62f. That experience has this distinctive functional role is what he means when he calls the content of experience ‘poised’.

²⁰ As for instance Davidson held it to do, cf. Davidson 1983.

precisely what the modularity phenomena seem to show. If you know that the lines of a Müller-Lyer diagram are of equal length, your experience ‘telling you’ otherwise is overridden, but it does not cease to exist. Consequently, it looks as if the constraints on internal coherence governing belief did not reach experience. Individual experiences even seem to tolerate directly contradictory contents (witness the waterfall illusion). Once we characterize functional role at the level of content, it therefore seems very plausible to think that, as a matter of fact, the functional role of those states that are first in the order of personal processing is distinctive, indeed. Experience, it thus seems, is a strongly representational propositional attitude *sui generis*. The kind question cannot be answered by subsuming experience under any other kind of propositional attitude; if we want to know more about *which* kind of attitude experience is, what we should do instead is carefully describe its functional role in counterdistinction to that of its ‘closest cousin’: belief.

This whole line of anti-doxastic argument is very forceful. Nevertheless, I shall spend the remainder of this paper arguing that there not only is a way for the belief theory to make its comeback, but a way resulting in an account of experience superior to *sui generis* accounts. For starters, I shall bring out an important hidden premise which the whole anti-doxastic construction hinges on.

2.3 The hidden premise

To see that there is a way in which the belief theorist can deal with both the modularity phenomena and ultimately even give a plausible account of the rational role of experience, we first need to realize that there is a *hidden premise* in the anti-doxastic arguments presented. In fact, there is the same hidden premise in all of them. This is the assumption that experience has a *naive semantics*.

According to naive semantics, experiences take ordinary material objects and ascribe sensible properties to them. And that is precisely what the beliefs relevant to the anti-doxastic arguments do, too: They ascribe the same properties to the same objects. For all of these beliefs it thus holds that they have *the same contents* as the relevant experiences.²¹ In the argument from known illusion, the relevant belief is a background belief that *not p* while the experience has the content *p*. Thus, contradiction. In the stuttering inference argument, the relevant belief is a basic perceptual belief that *p*, and the experience also has the content *p*. Thus, stuttering. Naive semantics is assumed in the argument from falsely believed illusion, as well. It is only on this assumption that the subject here ends up both having and not having the very same belief. And naive semantics is assumed in the waterfall argument: If experiences ascribe sensible properties to their objects, ‘waterfall contents’ are contradictory. To turn matters around, it is only on the assumption of naive semantics that these anti-doxastic arguments go through.

Moreover, naive semantics is crucial in the case for sui generis, too. As we saw in the previous section, it is only once the functional role of experience is described at the level of content that this case picks up speed. It is only on the premise that experiences have the naive contents that enable them to contradict background beliefs (and even to have contradictory contents) that their functional role appears so peculiar.

²¹ Note, again, that even if you think that experiential contents typically, or even necessarily, are much richer than those of the relevant beliefs, it will still hold, on a naive semantics, that the contents of these beliefs are *parts of* the experiential contents in question (see above, note 14). Such partial identity is enough to generate the modularity phenomena, and thus sufficient to implicate naive semantics in their generation.

The idea therefore is to give up this assumption. If we can find a plausible alternative semantics for experiences, a semantics that neither induces identity of content between suitably related experiences and (basic perceptual or background) beliefs, nor gives us contradictory contents in waterfall situations, we might be able to resuscitate the doxastic account of experience.

I do not mean to deny that the claim that experience has a naive semantics *prima facie* is rather plausible, however. It definitely is what many philosophers – at least those with a lot of training in contemporary philosophy of mind – would come up with off the top of their heads. And it definitely is what many such philosophers find intuitive. Not only that, it might also seem that intuition here is backed up by phenomenology again. Just as introspection reveals its independence from background belief, introspection is taken by many to show that experience is ‘transparent’: In having an experience, its subject is not (directly) aware of any inner objects or qualities of the experience itself. The only objects and properties she is (directly) aware of are external ones.²² On the assumption that what you are thus aware of is what is represented by your experience, you might then take transparency to back up naive semantics.²³ In sum, you might think that having a naive semantics is as non-negotiable a desideratum on an account of experience as accommodating the modularity phenomena. I do not agree; surely, assumptions about the precise form of the propositional content of a particular kind of propositional attitude are fairly theoretical claims.²⁴ The observation that certain

²² Cf. Harman 1990; Tye 2002, 47.

²³ Thanks to an anonymous referee for helping me get clearer about the potential role of transparency in this context.

²⁴ I shall come back to the issue of transparency, however, once I have actually sketched an alternative semantics.

experiences show a characteristic independence from background belief, on the other hand, is something every reflective human subject can introspectively ascertain once in a relevant situation. It is fairly clear, I think, that the intuitions behind naive semantics are of lesser weight than the modularity phenomena. Consequently, it would be quite wrong to reject the idea of an alternative semantics for experiences out of hand. Rather, we should assess its overall theoretical merits once a positive suggestion for such a semantics is on the table. Once we actually look at it, it might even turn out not to be so very counterintuitive. Let me therefore in the next section sketch an alternative semantics for experience.

3. Phenomenal Semantics and the Return of the Belief Theory

3.1 Phenomenal Semantics

We do not have to stray far in order to find a promising alternative to naive semantics. We can hold on to the extremely intuitive claim that the objects of experience are ordinary material objects. All we need to fiddle with is the properties (and relations) experience ascribes to them. Take visual experience. What remains constant regardless of background belief in the known or falsely believed illusion cases is *the way things look*. The Müller-Lyer lines *look* to be of different length, even though we know perfectly well that they are not. And in waterfall cases, an object *looks* to be moving while at the same time it *looks* not to be moving. How things look is also what we cite when we cite visual experiences as reasons; we say that we believed the tomato was red because it *looked* that way, it *looked red*.

In ordinary speech, ‘looks’ is used in a number of different senses. The use we are interested in here is the sense Jackson calls ‘phenomenal’ (1977, 33): This use of

‘looks’ is tied to terms for sensible properties (examples would be: ‘It looks red’ or ‘The lower line looks longer than the upper line’), but that a material object x looks F to a subject S neither implies that x is F , nor that S believes x to be F .²⁵ Nevertheless, *looking F* is a perfectly respectable property of x ; it is what I would like to call a ‘phenomenal property’.²⁶

In ordinary speech, we use the phenomenal looks-locution both to indicate a propositional attitude, that of experience, *and* to indicate the content of that attitude. If I report my experience by saying ‘The tomato looks red’, this report can be ‘translated’ into more technical philosophical lingo as ‘I am having an experience as of the tomato’s being red’. On an account of experience working with a naive semantics, this is further analyzed as my having an experience with the representational content *the tomato is red*. What I would like to suggest instead is that this experience has the content *the tomato looks red*. Experience, that is, does not ascribe sensible properties to ordinary material objects, but phenomenal ones. It does not have a naive semantics, it has a *phenomenal semantics*. In general, visual experience has contents of the form x looks F . And analogously for the other senses.²⁷

²⁵ This is the use of ‘appear words’ Chisholm calls the ‘noncomparative use’ (1957, ch. 4, esp. 50ff).

²⁶ Phenomenal properties in this sense might for instance be dispositions to cause certain reactions in minded creatures (the dispositional properties Shoemaker calls ‘phenomenal properties’ (1994) or ‘appearance properties’ (2000) would be examples here), or they might be the categorical bases of such dispositions. They might also be properties that consist in an object’s actually causing the reactions in question.

²⁷ In general, we might say, a phenomenal semantics construes experience as having (phenomenal) appears- or seems-contents. I do not think, however, that we should construe all experiences, independently of their sense modality, as having contents of the form x appears F , but rather as having modality-specific contents, contents of the form x looks F , x sounds G , etc. Experience thus carries some

Now, I, for one, cannot find this suggestion violently counterintuitive. Nor do I think it really has much quarrel with transparency. Transparency has it that the only objects and properties we are (directly) aware of in experience are external objects and their properties. On the assumption that what we are thus aware of is what is represented in experience, transparency supports the claim that what is represented in experience is nothing but external objects and their properties. Both a naive and a phenomenal semantics respect this dictum. Consequently, transparency would favor a naive semantics over a phenomenal one only if introspection also told us that the properties represented in experience are sensible properties like redness or squareness, rather than phenomenal ones.

But just how plausible is it to expect introspection to deliver this result? In what way would the phenomenal character of an experience differ if it had the content *x looks red* instead of *x is red*? That differences of this kind are detectable by introspection is questionable already within one and the same ‘semantic framework’,²⁸ but in order to cut any ice against phenomenal semantics, it would have to hold even *across* such frameworks. In order to defend phenomenal semantics, we have to argue that

information about its own sense modality. I think that this is phenomenologically correct; there is a phenomenal difference between an object’s looking square and its feeling square, for instance. On the suggested phenomenal account of the representational content of experience there is, therefore, no problem about common sensibles even if representationalism is true, that is, even if representational content determines phenomenal character. With respect to the problems that are the topic of this paper, however, I don’t think it matters whether the phenomenal semantics works with modality-specific or modality-inspecific contents; both versions of phenomenal semantics deal equally well with these problems.

²⁸ Disjunctivists, for instance, typically think that a veridical experience as of *p* and a corresponding hallucination can be introspectively indistinguishable, but nevertheless do not have the same content.

phenomenal contents have precisely the same phenomenology as naive contents: They are *phenomenally equivalent*. This is very plausible. Take an experience as of something red. Such an experience has a distinctive phenomenal character or quality *Q*. It is intuitively very plausible that an experience with the content *that x is red* has *Q*. But it is equally plausible that an experience with the content *that x looks red* has precisely this phenomenal character. Having *Q* therefore is equally compatible with either content; it does nothing to decide between them.²⁹

In what follows I shall, however, simply grant that adopting a phenomenal semantics for experience remains somewhat counterintuitive. For even if that is so, I claim, once a phenomenal semantics is combined with a doxastic account of experience, the overall advantages and unifying power of the resulting position amply make up for it. This claim will of course have to remain somewhat programmatic in this paper. And so will the suggested semantics itself. I shall not develop it any further here; in this paper, I shall only show how working with phenomenal properties in the semantics of experiences allows the belief theorist to deal with the anti-doxastic arguments. In particular, I shall argue in the remainder of this section that combined with a phenomenal semantics, a doxastic account of experience provides as good an account of the modularity phenomena as a *sui generis* account.

²⁹ Note, that the phenomenal semanticist remains free to endorse (weak) ‘representationalism’, i.e. the claim that phenomenal character supervenes on, or is determined by, the representational content of experience. Note, too, that *within* a given semantic framework it might also hold that phenomenal character determines representational content.

3.2 The Return of the Belief Theory

The modularity phenomena arise in situations where naive contents would result in absurd beliefs, if experiences were beliefs. Faced with these phenomena, the sui generis theorist recommends to construe experiences as a kind of state that is distinct from belief precisely in being tolerant of naive contents in these situations. In short, the sui generis theorist responds to the modularity phenomena by fiddling with the kind of state experience is. Looking at the situation in the abstract, it should not be very surprising that there is another, complementary move available here that consists in fiddling with the contents of experience instead. Adopting a phenomenal semantics for experience is precisely such a move.

Let's quickly go through the relevant cases to see how adopting such a semantics deals with the modularity phenomena. First, known illusion: Peter, our known illusion subject, knows that the lines of the Müller-Lyer diagram he is looking at are of the same length, but they nevertheless look to be of different length to him. On a phenomenal semantics, this amounts to an experience with the content that the lines look to be of different length, and a background belief that they are of the same length. There is no contradiction between the contents of the two states (cf. Hamlyn, 1994, 253), and, thus, no pressure towards the conclusion that the experience is not a belief. Next, falsely believed illusion: John falsely believes that the lighting is non-standard. He refrains from forming the basic perceptual belief that the necktie he is looking at is green, but the necktie nevertheless looks green to him. On a phenomenal semantics, this amounts to his having an experience with the content that the necktie looks green, but not having having the belief that it is green. No support for the conclusion that the experience is not a belief is to be had from this. Last, but not least, the waterfall: Tim, our waterfall subject, has a visual experience as of an object x 's both moving and not moving at the

same time. On a phenomenal semantics this can be construed as having an experience with a content of the form *x looks F and x looks not-F*. The phenomenal content is not contradictory, and there is thus no pressure towards the conclusion that a ‘waterfall experience’ is not a belief.³⁰

In sum, adopting a phenomenal semantics for experiences removes the pressure that the modularity phenomena, on the assumption of a naive semantics, exert towards the conclusion that experience is not a kind of belief. If a doxastic account of experience is combined with a phenomenal semantics, it has no difficulties accommodating experience’s independence from background belief. Not only is there no contradiction between both believing that the Müller-Lyer lines look to be of different length and believing that they, in fact, are of the same length; on the assumption that experience is a kind of belief, having both of these beliefs nicely captures what intuitively is going on in a case of known illusion. A belief about how things look is precisely what is independent of background belief to the effect that things in fact are different from what they look to be in the situation in question. On a phenomenal belief theory, the so-called ‘belief independence’ of experience, or more precisely, the modularity phenomena underlying this claim, can thus be very nicely and elegantly captured as experience’s independence from background belief. As far as the modularity phenomena are concerned, adopting a phenomenal semantics puts the belief theory back into business.

³⁰ What would be contradictory, of course, is a content of the form *x looks F and x does not look F*. But the phenomenal semanticist clearly does not have to construe a ‘waterfall experience’ as having a such a content. Moreover, doing so would not capture the phenomenology of waterfall illusions at all; the waterfall object looks to be moving and it looks to be not moving. In general, not looking *F* is not a phenomenal property, while looking *not-F* can be (where *F* is a suitable sensible property).

Now, of course the sui generis theorist could adopt a phenomenal semantics, too.³¹ As far as options in logical space are concerned, the kind question might well be orthogonal to the content question. But it is far from clear what *motivation* the sui generis theorist could have for adopting a phenomenal semantics. As far as such a motivation is supposed to come from the modularity phenomena, it is certainly not required to perform both of the defusing moves that are available in reaction to it. Rather, their motivating power would seem to be exhausted by making one or the other. Thus, adopting a sui generis account in combination with a naive semantics, or a doxastic account in combination with a phenomenal semantics seem to be equally effective, and in a certain sense complementary, responses to the phenomena in these cases. As far as the modularity phenomena are concerned, phenomenal semantics therefore first and foremost is an option interesting to the belief theorist.

As a response to the modularity phenomena, adopting a phenomenal semantics brings doxastic accounts of experience back into business. Is this all it does? In a certain sense, it is. The modularity phenomena do not establish one or the other of the competing accounts as the *true or correct* one. Thus, there is a stand-off between the two accounts.³² I think, however, that considering a phenomenal semantics for experience with respect to the modularity phenomena nevertheless does something towards undermining, or pre-empting, the *motivations* we could have for adopting a sui generis account. Crucially, to have motivation for a sui generis account of the kind suggested, we need to hold that there is no state of another kind that could play a particular functional role. But sui generity with respect to experience becomes plausible

³¹ This was stressed to me by Tim Crane.

³² Here, too, I am indebted to Tim Crane.

only once functional role is characterized at the level of content – and on the assumption that content is naive. Once phenomenal contents are so much as considered, it becomes so much more difficult to have a non-question begging motivation for sui generis: To have such a motivation, we would have to describe the relevant functional role independently of the assumption of naive content. As long as we are concerned with the modularity phenomena, these phenomena are precisely what characterize experience's functional role in a semantics-independent way. But if that is all that can non-question beggingly be used to characterize experience's functional role, then both naive sui generis accounts and phenomenal doxastic accounts assign *the very same functional role* to experience. It is thus *not* the case that no state of another kind could play the particular role in question. Our motivation for adopting a sui generis account would therefore seem to be seriously compromised.

Nevertheless, described on the level of content, the two accounts do induce different functional roles for experience. The modularity phenomena just by themselves therefore do not rule out a sui generis account of experience. Since both a phenomenal doxastic and a naive sui generis account do equally well with respect to these phenomena, it is a stand-off at this point. This changes, I think, once we consider another important desideratum on a satisfactory account of experience: That of accommodating experience's reason-providing role. Here, I think a phenomenal belief account has a clear advantage over any sui generis account. I shall consider this in the next, and final, section.

4. Experience and Reasons

4.1 Folk-psychology and its Reasons

No-one, I take it, would deny the fundamental importance of perception to epistemology. Perceptual experience plays a basic role in the justification of empirical belief. Moreover, justificatory relations between experience and empirical belief are of equally fundamental importance to the theory of content. Its justificatory relations to experience arguably are among those relations that determine the very content of empirical belief.

What is relevant here is only one particular aspect of the justificatory role of experience for empirical belief, however.³³ This is the aspect captured by the folk-psychological (and folk-epistemological) notion of *reasons*. Intuitively, this notion of a reason is not restricted to theoretical reasoning; subjects can have reasons both for their beliefs and their actions (or intentions). For simplicity's sake, I shall focus on reasons for belief in what follows. What we are interested in, then, are notions like those of *having a reason for belief* or *providing (a subject with) a reason for belief*.

The notion of having a reason applies to subjects. It raises general questions as to what kind of things reasons are, and what having them consists in, questions we don't

³³ Epistemologists offer us very different ways of thinking about justificatory relations. There are externalist and internalist conceptions, and, these days, many people cook up more or less happy mixtures of these. As far as this conflict concerns the final analysis of justification, or epistemic warrant, this is a conflict we can stay out of. Whether or not epistemic warrant can, for instance, ultimately be analyzed in terms of reliability does not matter to the following line of argument. This line of argument is thus not hostage to the final outcome of any fundamental dispute in epistemology. Nor do we, by focusing on reasons-relations, in any way have to reject externalist notions of warrant that are explicitly introduced as alternatives to internalist notions of justification, and argued to obtain under specific circumstances (such as, for instance, Burge's notion of 'perceptual entitlement' (2003)).

have to take a stand on here. What we are concerned with is a particular case of having reasons for belief: the case in which there is a proposition p that is the reason for believing a proposition q , and the subject has this reason in the sense of having a propositional attitude (of a certain kind) towards p . I shall apply the expression ‘provides (a subject with) a reason (for believing q)’ to the propositional attitude in question, and reserve the term ‘reason’ for the propositional content of that attitude.³⁴ Below, we shall hear more about both the kind of attitude capable of providing reasons for belief, and the kind of relation between p and q required for such reason providing. Intuitively, these are such that having a reason for a belief makes it in a certain sense *rational* for the subject to have this belief.

The claim I shall base my line of argument on is this: It is an essential part of our ordinary, everyday conception of experience that experience provides reasons for empirical belief. Those of us capable of reflecting on and reporting our own reasons do, on occasion, cite our experiences as reasons. This is a very simple, everyday business, as McDowell nicely brings out:

[S]uppose one asks an ordinary subject why she holds some observational belief, say that an object within her field of view is square. An unsurprising reply might be ‘Because it looks that way’ (1994, 165).

Thus, I take it to be a desideratum on any satisfactory account of experience that it accommodates their role as reason-providers in our folk-psychological practices of explaining and justifying beliefs. We routinely cite experiences as reasons for what we believe: I can, for instance, explain to you why I thought a certain tomato was ripe by telling you that it looked red. This, we typically do when a belief has turned out

³⁴ For this very practical terminology I am indebted to Marie Lundstedt.

to be false. But I can also use experience to argue for what I think is true. I can point to the tomato and say: ‘It looks red. It’s ripe.’ Similarly, we use experiences to explain the beliefs of others. This is both part of folk-psychology and of what we might call ‘folk-epistemology’, our everyday practice of empirical justification.

The main assumption of what I shall call ‘the argument from reason’ can, thus, be put like this:

(R) Experiences provide subjects with reasons for first order empirical belief.³⁵

The argument itself is very simple. It starts with (R) and contains only one more premise:

(B) The only propositional attitude that provides reasons for first order belief is that of belief.³⁶

³⁵ Cf. Brewer, 1999, 18 for a very similar principle. In (1999) Brewer, however, gives a McDowell-style ‘transcendental’ argument according to which something like (R) is a condition on having beliefs with empirical content. What I am claiming is comparatively pedestrian; I am claiming that (R) is an essential part of our pre-theoretic notion of experience, of folk-psychology and folk-epistemology and should, therefore, be accommodated by any satisfactory account of experience. In (1999) and (2005) Brewer also claims that only states with conceptual contents can provide reasons, and that subjects can have reasons only if they can think of their reasons *as reasons*. I don’t see why any particular kind of content would be required for a state to provide reasons (Byrne 2005 provides some instructive discussion of this), and I do not think that reflection, or having the epistemic concepts of reason, justification etc. are required for having reasons.

³⁶ If you are reminded here of the (in)famous Davidsonian slogan: ‘Nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief’ (1983, 310), that is fully intended. The claim I am making is, however, not only formulated more carefully but also weaker. I am not making a claim about reasons in

The question, of course, is why we should subscribe to (B). To see this, we first need to hear more about reasons. I shall therefore elaborate a bit on the notion of reasons on which I think (B) holds. Because of its essential connections with folk-psychology, I shall call this conception ‘the intuitive notion’; as we shall see, this notion is inferential in nature.

Note, however, that I am not claiming that this is the only plausible or useful notion of reason that there is. Rather, what I am claiming is this: The intuitive notion of reasons is precisely that, a notion that is very intuitive. It is very intuitive because it spells out what is basic to folk-psychology’s reasons-explanations or -justifications. And folk-psychology routinely applies this notion to experiences. This does not exclude the possibility that there are other useful notions of reason that also apply to experiences.³⁷ The claim is, however, that it is an essential part of our pretheoretic notion of experience that it provides reasons in the sense spelled out here. Consequently, the relevant desideratum cannot be satisfied by means of any other notion of reason.

That said, here we go: What we are interested in are reasons for first order (empirical) beliefs. Reasons explanations explain such beliefs by *rationalizing* them. The rationality they provide is *subjective* in the sense of providing an explanation from the subject’s own point of view, but the standards of rationality employed, though rather

general, but only about propositional attitudes providing subjects with reasons for first order beliefs. Moreover, Davidson concludes that experiences (or at least sensations) are not reasons (cf. *ibid.*).

³⁷ What I primarily have in mind here are (externalist, non-inferential) notions of entitlement. Both Burge (2003) and McDowell (2004) argue that experience provides (externalist) entitlement to belief, though of very different forms.

minimal in character, nevertheless are intersubjective, or *objective*, standards.³⁸ Such reasons-relations are *content-sensitive*: In order for one propositional attitude to provide its subject with a reason for a (first order) belief, their contents need to be related in a certain way. More precisely, where a propositional attitude towards p provides its subject with a reason for believing that q , there is a relation of *evidential or inferential support* between p and q . P is a reason for believing q , that is, only if p can be used as a premise in a valid inference (logical or material) from p to q . Thus, the intuitive notion of reason for (first order) belief is an inferential one. A propositional attitude towards p provides its subject with a reason for believing q only if p evidentially supports q .³⁹

Evidential support comes in degrees, and a subject S can have more than one reason for believing q . Moreover, S can have both reasons for and *against* believing q . Having a reason p for believing q does not imply that S actually believes that q . S might simply never form the belief, or S 's reason for believing q might be *overridden* by reasons she has against believing q . And even if S believes q , she might believe it for reasons other

³⁸ These standards guarantee that the subject's point of view brought out by such a rationalization is one that others can recognize as a point of view, and that the rationalization provided has explanatory power: It shows to others that, given the subject's overall cognitive state, there was something that 'spoke for' believing a certain proposition, something that would have 'spoken for' that belief for anyone being in that overall cognitive state.

³⁹ As I have characterized it, the intuitive conception of reasons is neutral on the question whether reasons have to be *true*, or even *known* propositions, as required by Williamson (2000). Note that Williamson nevertheless holds that perceptual illusions provide evidence, and that this is achieved by a move similar to the one suggested here: 'If perceptual evidence in the case of illusions consists of true propositions, what are they? The obvious answer is: the proposition that things appear to be that way' (2000, 198). Williamson does not explicitly construe this proposition as the content of the illusory experience, however.

than p . The notion of reason we are concerned with here thus is the notion of a *prima facie* reason.

For subjects to have such reasons, however, they do not need to be reflective reasoners.⁴⁰ In the basic, folk-psychological sense employed here, there are reasons as soon as there are correct reasons explanations. Consequently, the reasons relations we are interested in are relations between first order states. Such relations do *not* require that their subjects draw any *conscious inferences*. Nor do they require that their subjects need to be able to formulate their reasons, or think of them *as* reasons. Reflective believers will normally be able to do so, but a subject does not need to be a reflective believer to have reasons. Quite the contrary; having reasons (for first order beliefs) does *not* require second order belief.

Let me summarize what I have said about the intuitive notion of reasons: This notion concerns reasons for first order belief as provided by first order propositional attitudes. Such reasons are *prima facie*, subjective reasons potentially rationalizing the relevant beliefs (according to objective, if minimal, standards of rationality). A propositional attitude towards p provides such reason for believing that q only if p evidentially or

⁴⁰ Here, I agree with Burge who claims that requiring ‘reflection or understanding’ for having reasons is ‘hyper-intellectualizing’ our cognitive lives (2003, 503ff, esp. fn 1), and that higher non-linguistic animals do have reasons for some of their beliefs. Similarly, Dretske argues that certain non-linguistic animals have reasons for their actions (cf. Dretske 2006). Burge and Dretske disagree on whether experiences are among these reasons; Dretske holds that they are, while Burge denies this. According to Burge, experiences *only* provide a different kind of warrant that he calls ‘entitlement’ (2003, 528). McDowell (2004; 2008) also holds that experience does not provide reasons in the inferential sense, but *only* what he calls ‘entitlement’ (which is rather different from Burgean entitlement). I am not concerned here to dispute that experience provides entitlement in any of these senses; what I take exception to is simply the counterintuitive contention that that is *only* kind of warrant they provide.

inferentially supports q . This is the notion of reason that folk-psychology routinely applies not only to beliefs, but to experiences as well. When it comes to reasons for first order empirical belief, folk-psychology is as happy with experiences as it is with beliefs: it happily puts them into the same kind of ‘slot’ in theoretical reasoning. Thus, both play exactly the same folk-psychological, reason-providing role.⁴¹

Now, given this notion of reason, we can next tackle the question: Why should we subscribe to (B) above?

4.2 Reasons and Belief

Why does a propositional attitude have to be a belief in order to be a reason for belief in the intuitive sense? It should be clear that an attitude providing reasons for belief cannot be a conative attitude; desires, for instance, might provide practical reasons for actions or intentions, but they do not provide reasons for belief. Next, none of what we might call the ‘non-committal cognitive’ attitudes will do either. To see that, let’s assume that q logically follows from p . And let’s start by considering mere tokenings of some representation of p . No such ‘bare content’ could provide its subject with a reason to believe anything. Of course, it is possible to merely entertain a proposition. But clearly, such episodes do *not* figure *as reasons* in our psychology. That is the very point of entertaining something – you just think it without actually drawing any consequences from it. You might entertain the consequences, too, that is, you might entertain a proposition p in order to see what the consequences would be *were* you to adopt it as

⁴¹ But is not belief also characterized by always also standing in need of reasons? This is a highly controversial philosophical claim argued for by certain epistemologists of the coherentist stripe (most influentially, the earlier BonJour (see, for instance, BonJour 1985, 78)), not part of the folk-psychology, or even -epistemology, of belief.

one of your reasons. But merely entertaining p will not do the trick. And the same holds for any other ‘non-committal’ attitude. Thus, you might imagine that p , or assume that p (for instance, to prove that q follows from it), and none of these provide you with reasons for actually endorsing q .

But what, then, makes an attitude into a reason-providing attitude? The answer, I think, becomes clear if we consider what it is about these ‘non-committal’ attitudes that disqualifies them: It is precisely that they *do not commit to p* . Assuming is particularly instructive here: If you assume p in order to prove that q follows from p , what you assume is *the truth of p* . But you just assume it, without actually committing to it. *That* is precisely what prevents a mere assuming of p from providing you with a reason for believing q – even if q logically follows from p , and even if you believe that it does. But then, we can turn things around: In order to have such a reason, you precisely need to *commit to the truth of p* – in other words: you need to *hold p true*.⁴² If you prefer to think in terms of degrees of holding true, that is, of course, fine. But as far as I can see, nothing else would do. There simply is no other kind of attitude that provides a subject with reasons.⁴³ On the assumption that any holding true is a belief, that gives us (B).

⁴² Of course, coming to believe that q follows from p might provide you with a reason for not believing p , or even for believing *not- p* (for instance, if q is patently absurd). But our question was what attitude towards p would make p into one of your reasons for further belief, not what you would have reason to believe if you believed that q followed from p . So, if you believe that q follows from p , you only have a reason for believing q if you (nevertheless continue to) hold p true.

⁴³ This point is made specifically against McDowell in Stroud (2002, 89), XXX, and Ginsborg (2006). Most recently, McDowell seems to have conceded the point: ‘If experiences have propositional content, it is hard to deny that experiencing is taking things to be so, rather than what I want: a different kind of thing that entitles us to take things to be so’ (2008, 15). McDowell now concludes that experiences do not have propositional – but what he calls ‘intuitional’ – contents (I should note, however, that it is not

And the assumption that any holding true is a belief is extremely plausible; some might say it is (almost) analytic.⁴⁴ The notion of a propositional attitude in general, and that of belief in particular, is a partly technical one essentially informed by our folk-psychological and folk-epistemological practices of ascribing, justifying, and predicting both our own mental states and actions, and those of others. Because of this, the notion of a propositional attitude is very austere: Propositional attitudes type psychological states according to exactly two characteristics – attitude and content.⁴⁵ Without austere notions like these, notions subsuming a wide variety of otherwise quite different states, a unifying model of folk-psychological reasoning would simply be impossible. The notion of belief in particular is, in part, ‘designed’ to capture precisely the reason-providing role of the relevant states. But then, to the extent that the notion of belief

completely clear to me whether McDowell’s intuitional contents do, or do not, fall under the wide notion of a propositional content I have used in this paper).

⁴⁴ Consequently, there is a tendency to think that it is not very informative to characterize belief in terms of holding true; further analysis is needed to really understand the notion of belief. There is currently no consensus on any suggested further analysis, however (for relevant discussion see, for instance, Shah and Velleman 2005, Owens 2003, Wedgwood 2002, Zimmerman 2008). This is certainly not the place to settle that issue; I hope the notion of holding true is intuitively clear enough for the purposes of this paper. I take it that holding true does *not* include the attitude involved in imagining or assuming. Actually holding a proposition *p* true among other things entails that a rational subject is disposed to employ *p* as an asserted (as opposed to merely assumed) premise in both practical and theoretical reasoning.

⁴⁵ This does of course *not* mean that we cannot, for instance, type beliefs into all sorts of *other* sub-kinds. Assume that experiences are beliefs, for instance. And assume that we can distinguish them from other beliefs by their distinctive phenomenal character: There is something it is like to have an experience that experiences do not share with any other beliefs. That makes experience into a particular species of belief, but not into a different propositional attitude.

answers to the systematic needs of the theory of folk-psychology, a state essentially playing the belief-role simply is a belief. And being a holding true is precisely what is necessary and sufficient for being such a state. Therefore, (B) holds. The argument from reasons concludes that experience is a kind of belief.

However, even if we agree that reason providing in the intuitive, inferential sense requires holding true, we might at this point wonder whether the issue has not become rather terminological.⁴⁶ It might seem as if all participants to this debate easily could agree that *if* we employ the austere, folk-psychological notion of belief their reason-providing role makes experiences into a kind of belief. But this notion of belief might not seem mandatory. Most importantly, the *sui generis* theorist does not seem to work with this notion of belief; her notion of belief seems more narrow since it characterizes belief by means of a functional role described at a level of more detail. Thus, our disagreement with the *sui generis* theorist might seem to reduce to a mostly terminological quarrel about what should properly be called a belief.

As I see it, this would be mistaken. What is at issue is, after all, folk-psychology, and with it our everyday practices of ascribing, justifying, and predicting both our own mental states and actions, and those of others. Capturing the concepts employed in these practices more or less well can hardly be a merely terminological issue. But I shall not press the issue any further in this way; rather, I shall try to bring out its substantial nature by again comparing the doxastic account of experience I suggest with its main competitor, the *sui generis* theory. For now, we are prepared to see how these accounts do when it comes to accounting for the reason-providing role of experience.

⁴⁶ This worry was brought home to me by an anonymous referee.

4.3 Stuttering Revisited

Prima facie, the argument from reasons provides strong support for a doxastic account of experience. If experiences are beliefs, then we can account for their reason-providing role on the model of beliefs providing reasons for other (first order) beliefs. So far, however, we have ignored the last of the anti-doxastic arguments we looked at above: the stuttering inference argument. This was precisely an argument to the conclusion that *any* account according to which experience provides inferential reasons for empirical belief results in stuttering inferences of the form $p, \textit{therefore } p$. Which is absurd as a model of the rational role of experience for empirical belief; experience clearly provides strong, but defeasible inferential reasons, if any.

If the stuttering inference argument would actually establish this conclusion with the intended generality, it would simply cancel whatever support for doxastic accounts is provided by the argument from reasons. However, as we saw above, the stuttering inference argument is premised on a naive semantics for experience. Stuttering is avoided as soon as we work with an alternative semantics. The question then is whether the alternative semantics in question induces a plausible picture of observational reasoning. I shall argue now that in combination with a doxastic account a phenomenal semantics does precisely that: On a phenomenal semantics, experience can be a kind of belief and thus provide its subject with *defeasible* inferential reasons for further beliefs. On the account suggested, experiences are beliefs about the way things look, sound, feel or smell. Such beliefs provide precisely the right kind of support for basic perceptual beliefs: That x looks red is a strong, but defeasible reason for believing that x is red. It is a reason in precisely the same sense in which that there is smoke is a reason for believing that there is fire. The relevant inference is material, not logical. This, it seems to me, is precisely as it should be when it comes to experience providing defeasible

reasons for empirical belief.⁴⁷ A phenomenal doxastic account of experience thus allows us to account for the reason-providing role of experience by applying the intuitive, inferential model of reasons for first order belief to experiences.

The next question is how the *sui generis* theory does with respect to reason-providing: Can any such theory account for the reason-providing role of experience? Before we get into that I would like to consider an objection that at least some *sui generis* theorists might want to make here. The *sui generis* theorist might want to protest that I have rigged the game against her from the start by selling the inferential element as part and parcel of the intuitive, folk-psychological notion of a reason. After all, she might say, there are other folk-psychologically respectable reasons relations which are not inferential. Why should not the reasons relation between experience and empirical belief be non-inferential, too?⁴⁸

As I said above, I take it to be uncontroversial that first-order inter-doxastic reasons relations are inferential. The dialectical upshot of the *sui generis* theorist's protest would therefore be the following: While it is indeed mandatory for the belief theorist to use the inferential model of reasons, this might not be so for the *sui generis* theorist. As long as she can provide us with a model on which experiences provide reasons in an intuitive, but *non*-inferential sense there is no reason to think her account inferior. I think this is

⁴⁷ Thanks to an anonymous referee for prompting clarification here.

⁴⁸ Pryor, for instance, inveighs against what he calls the 'Premise Principle', insisting, among other things, that it is not the case that all reasons are propositions (cf. Pryor 2005, 189ff). However, none of Pryor's arguments concern the case we are solely concerned with here: The case where a propositional attitude provides its subject with reasons for first-order belief. In this case, it seems to me, it is very hard indeed to understand how an attitude with content *p* could provide a reason for believing *q* where *p* does *not* inferentially support *q*.

wrong; there is reason to think that any account that cannot apply the inferential model of reasons to experience is inferior to one that can. For even if there were relevant non-inferential reasons-relations, folk-psychology certainly does not mark any such difference between experience and belief. Intuitively, experience and beliefs provide reasons in the very same sense.

Moreover, there *is* no model around we could plausibly use here, nothing, at least, that would come even close to being as well-worked out and well-understood as the inferential model. And the question is whether there even *could be* any model on which experiences provide reasons in an intuitive, but *non-inferential* sense. What are the candidates for folk-psychological, but non-inferential reasons relations? There are the practical reasons desires or other pro-attitudes provide for actions or intentions. Whether these relations are inferential or not is a matter of debate, but it should be immediately clear that the (epistemic) reasons experiences provide for beliefs cannot instructively be modeled on the motivations desires provide for actions. Next, one might think that first order beliefs (and other mental states) provide reasons for certain second order beliefs their subject might form about them. Whether these really are reasons is a matter of debate, but if they are, the relation is clearly non-inferential. Again, however, it should be immediately clear that the reasons experience provides for first-order belief cannot be modeled on those first order states provide for second order belief; there is *no* sense in which first order empirical beliefs are about our experiences. As far as I can see, that exhausts the possibilities. There is thus no reason to think that experience's reason-

providing role can be modelled on any other non-inferential folk-psychological reasons relation.⁴⁹

What is left for the *sui generis* theorist is to simply declare, as a matter of dogmatism, that experience *does* provide (non-inferential) reasons for empirical first order belief.⁵⁰ The *sui generis* theorist thus seems to be driven to the claim that experiences not only are *sui generis* states, but also provide *sui generis reasons*. But why should we believe that? In the absence of any other kind of reasons relation to use as a model, some substantial further explanations are required before we can so much as assume that anything recognizable as a *reasons* relation has been identified.⁵¹ As long as these are not forthcoming, the inferential model arguably remains the only, and

⁴⁹ An idea here might be to go outside folk-psychology; experience's reason-providing role could for instance be modelled on *testimony* (Evans (1982, 123) hints at this, and Burge's (2003, 452) contention that experiences *are* commitments, but *not* of the 'whole animal' could be construed along this lines, too). Since we are concerned with personal level propositional attitudes, attitudes of the experiencing subject herself, some rather implausible level of compartmentalization would seem to arise in known illusion cases, but the idea might still seem worthwhile to explore. Be that as it may, the most that can be drawn from this at the moment is an open cheque on the future.

⁵⁰ Cf. Pryor 2000. Pryor writes: 'My view is that whenever you have an experience as of *p*, you thereby have immediate *prima facie* justification for believing *p*' (536), and he explicitly characterizes this view of perceptual justification as 'dogmatism' (532).

⁵¹ Pryor only hints at such an explanation in a footnote. After dismissing, rightly to my mind, possible explanations in terms of irresistibility and conceptual truth, he suggests that is is 'the peculiar "phenomenal force" or way our experiences have of presenting propositions to us' (547, fn. 37) that explains why experiences provide justification. If this is a reference to the so-called 'transparency' of experience, as Pace surmises, or to those aspects of 'perceptual immediacy' that have to do with vividness etc., it remains unclear what epistemic significance such phenomenal features of experience could have (cf. Pace 2008, 21 ff).

certainly the best understood and most well-established conception of reasons for first order empirical belief available. Even for those not convinced that folk-psychology's egalitarian treatment of experience and belief forces this model on experiences anyway, this should be a very good reason for favoring accounts of experience able to use the inferential model.⁵²

The next question, however, is whether it is an advantage that cannot equally be claimed by the *sui generis* theorist. After all, the *sui generis* theorist agrees with us that experiences are strongly representational states, i.e. that they represent the world as being such that their contents *are true*. Thus, it might seem as if the *sui generis* theorist could, so to speak, buy the first half of the argument from reason: He could accept that all strongly representational states involve the attitude of holding true, but, it might seem, he could also insist that that is not enough for making a strongly representational state into a belief (in his more narrow sense). Consequently, the inferential model of reasons would seem to be as available to the *sui generis* theorist as to the belief theorist. And thus, we would have reached a theoretical stand-off again.

This time, however, the impression of stand-off is mistaken. The stuttering inference argument applies as soon as we conceive of experiences as providing inferential

⁵² Someone who clearly appreciates this advantage is Heck, who writes:

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

reasons. Whether the reason providing attitude is one of belief or sui generis does not matter here. As long as the sui generis theorist works with a naive semantics, he is stuck with stuttering, and thus with a very implausible picture of observational reasoning. A phenomenal belief theory thus clearly has a decisive advantage over a naive sui generis account.

This is not the end of the matter, however. As we saw above, there is no reason in principle why the sui generis theorist could not adopt a phenomenal semantics, too. As long as we were concerned with accounting for the modularity phenomena only, there was no real motivation for such a move. But now, stuttering seems to provide such a motivation. And then, the question would be whether a phenomenal doxastic account has any advantage over a *phenomenal* sui generis theory. The answer to this question is that once both work with a phenomenal semantics, the doxastic account has *every* advantage over the sui generis account: There is no level of description left at which the functional role assigned to experiences by these two accounts is different.

At the end of section 3, we compared naive sui generis accounts with phenomenal doxastic accounts and concluded that the *motivation* for the former was weakened because there was *no non-question begging* level of description left at which functional roles differed. At the level of content, the functional roles assigned to experiences by the competing accounts nevertheless remained different.

The situation is different now: Once we construe experiences as states with phenomenal contents, the peculiarity of functional role induced by naive contents simply vanishes. Whether experiences with phenomenal contents are construed as beliefs or as sui generis attitudes ceases to make any functional difference whatsoever. Thus, it is not only the case that we do not have much reason to think that experiences

are *sui generis*, they simply cannot be: We have lost the difference that was to make the distinction.

The conclusion of these considerations therefore must be that even though a naive *sui generis* account and a phenomenal doxastic account of experience do equally well when it comes to accounting for the modularity phenomena, the doxastic account has the advantage when it comes to another desideratum: In contrast to any *sui generis* account, the phenomenal doxastic account neatly accommodates the reason providing role of experience. As far as the desiderata here considered are concerned, the belief theory thus is not only back as a viable contender to an account of experience, it also has a decisive advantage over its strongest competitor.⁵³

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⁵³ Obviously, the considerations presented amount to no more than a partial defense of a phenomenal belief-theory of experience. Issues that need to be addressed elsewhere include animals and small children, and hallucinations. Two brief remarks: Concerning *animals and small children*, I think that as long as we do not require them to *possess* the relevant concepts (in any sense in which that would be impossible for them), there is no obstacle to ascribing phenomenal contents to their experiences. Rather, this would seem to be required, and justified, by precisely the thought that their experiences have the same contents, and are (at least capable of) playing the same folk-psychological role as ours do. Regarding *hallucinations*, on pain of a known hallucination argument, a belief theory has to construe the content of hallucinations as free from existential commitment, be it incurred by singular or existentially quantified general contents. Otherwise the knowing hallucinator holds contradictory beliefs. My preferred solution, *pace* disjunctivism, aims at avoiding such contradiction while holding on to the idea that veridical experiences and the corresponding hallucinations have the same content. The basic idea is to construe ‘looks’ primarily as a sentential operator L_1 ($L_1(p)$; ‘It looks as if p ’), and to define a predicate modifier L_2 ($L_2(F)(x)$; ‘ x looks F ’) in terms of it: $\exists x ((L_2(F)(x)) \equiv_{\text{df}} \exists x L_1(Fx))$.

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