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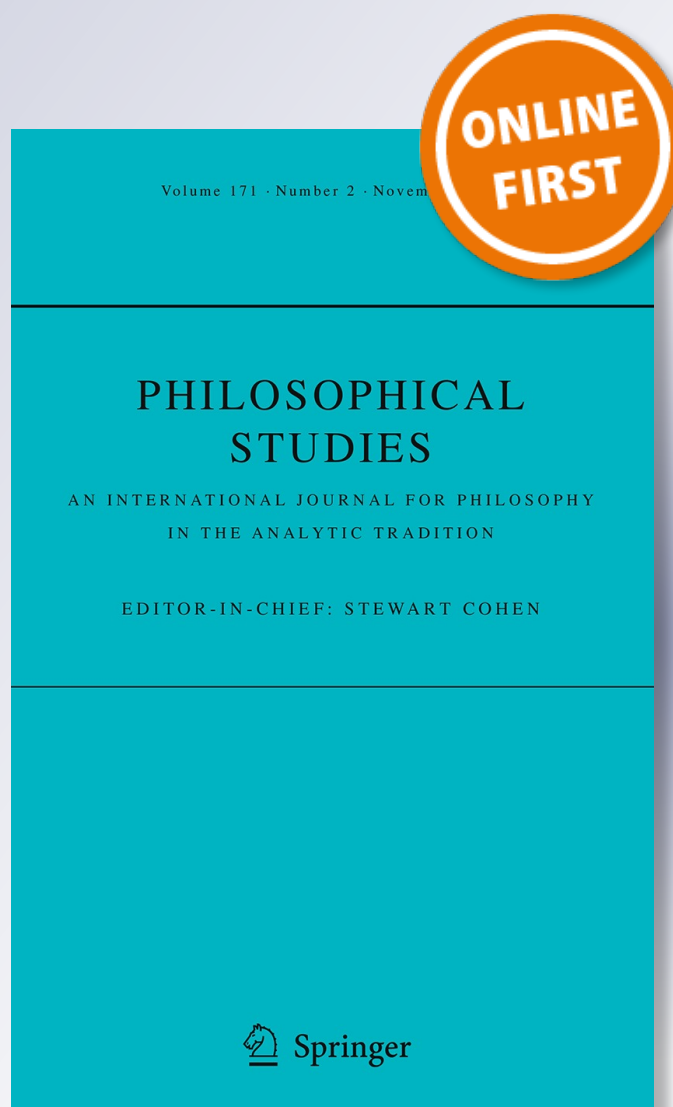
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Epistemic internalism and perceptual content: how a fear of demons leads to an error theory of perception

Robert J. Howell

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Abstract Despite the fact that many of our beliefs are justified by perceptual experience, there is relatively little exploration of the connections between epistemic justification and perceptual content. This is unfortunate since it seems likely that some views of justification will require particular views of content, and the package of the two might be quite a bit less attractive than either view considered alone. I will argue that this is the case for epistemic internalism. In particular, epistemic internalism requires a view of perceptual content that results in an error theory of perception. This, in turn, hobbles the internalist's account of perceptual justification. While there are various stages along the way at which one can resist the argument, each one will involve significant commitments that highlight heretofore unacknowledged connections between justification and content. Even if the internalist is willing to make these moves and resist the argument, the argument reveals a novel way for the epistemic externalist to resist one of internalism's main arguments.

Keywords Epistemology · Internalism · New Evil Demon argument · Phenomenal content · Perception · Reliabilism

My argument will have the following steps that I will defend in turn:

- Step 1: The epistemic internalist's stance on the "New Evil Demon" problem forces him to accept "intrinsic phenomenal content."
- Step 2: Intrinsic phenomenal content entails an error theory of perception.
- Step 3: Epistemic internalism combined with an error theory of perception entails the impossibility of perceptual justification.

R. J. Howell (✉)
Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX, USA
e-mail: rhowell@mail.smu.edu

Clearly, if step three can be established epistemic internalism faces problems before skeptical scenarios are even introduced, making certain internalist responses to skepticism largely beside the point.

For simplicity, I will consider the epistemic internalist—or the Cartesian—to be anyone who is committed to thinking that the New Evil Demon problem generates a refutation of externalism. I will also use Goldman (1979) style reliabilism as the paradigm externalist view, though the New Evil Demon problem faces other externalist views as well.

1 Reliabilism's demons

Since Goldman's (1979) paper, it has become increasingly popular to think that a subject's epistemic justification has a great deal to do with the reliability of his faculties. Reliabilist theories of justification come in different flavors, but most accounts build upon the following basic idea:

Rel: A subject *S*'s belief is justified iff it is the product of a process that produces mostly true beliefs in *S*'s environment.

Reliabilism is attractive for many reasons, among them that what we want out of epistemic justification is truth-connectedness, and reliability gives us that by definition. It also gives us what looks to be a reductive notion of justification, breaking us out of the normative domain of reasons and evidence. Machines and seasons are reliable, and we can give a fairly uncomplicated explanation of the sense in which this is so. If we can analyze epistemic justification along these lines, we will have come a long way towards demystifying the epistemic.

Reliabilism is one of those views that are so simple, so clean and compelling, that one wonders we didn't think of it earlier. There is, I suspect, a pretty clear reason. There is a feeling that in the process of naturalizing the epistemic, the subject's perspective has been lost. The modern epistemic project largely grew out of the tradition of the Cartesian meditations in which each of us is supposed to be lead to doubt all of our beliefs by considering the possibility of an Evil Demon who trips us at every turn. To get out of this doubt, it is not enough that there is, as a matter of fact, no evil demon. Descartes, of course, didn't believe that there was. His difficulty and ours was meant to be that we needed something solid from within our perspective to show that this was so. At least on the face of it, reliabilism doesn't help us with that. To the Cartesian tradition, the strength of reliabilism is also its greatest weakness: it avoids the mess of reasons, seemings and evidence for the clearer notion of reliability, but only the former are available to us from within our own perspective.

It took relatively little time for the Cartesian tradition to express this worry, and it did so by reference to its old adversary. Stewart Cohen articulated what has become known as the New Evil Demon problem for reliabilism in the following:

Imagine that, unbeknownst to us, our cognitive processes (e.g., perception, memory, inference) are not reliable owing to the machinations of the

malevolent demon. It follows on a Reliabilist view that beliefs generated by those processes are *never* justified. (...) Is this a tenable result? I maintain that it is not. (...) [P]art of what the hypothesis entails is that our experience is just as it would be if our cognitive processes were reliable. Thus, on the demon hypothesis, we would have every reason for holding our beliefs that we have in the actual world. (Cohen 1984, p. 281)

One way to put the point is that whether or not a subject is justified in holding a belief should depend on how things appear to him, and reliabilism ignores that crucial element of justification. Focusing on perceptual beliefs the problem can be put into an argument as follows:

- P1: Reliabilism would hold that if I were in a demon world, my perceptual beliefs would be unjustified even if in this world my perceptual beliefs are justified.
 P2: All of my experiences are the same whether I am in an evil demon world or not.
 P3: If all of my experiences are the same in two situations, my perceptual justification should be the same in the two situations.

Conclusion: Reliabilism is false.

Of course the reliabilist can remain unimpressed by this argument. P3 looks like it simply begs the question against him. Justification goes with reliability, not with appearances. But the reflective reliabilist should probably not remain untroubled. One can hear the Cartesian insist over post-conference beers:

Are you telling me that if someone is sitting here, with things seeming to her just like they seem to you as you hold that cold glass of beer in your hand, that she should believe something other than that there is a cold glass of beer in her hand? She is your total phenomenal duplicate! Can you really maintain that if she's unlucky enough to be deceived by an evil demon that she is just as justified in believing she has a chainsaw in her hand as she is in believing she holds a beer? Surely not. Surely we think her insane if she believes anything but that there is a beer in her hand. And if that is what she should believe, and if believing in any other way makes her a lunatic, then surely her belief is justified.¹

The reliabilist can still resist, but unless he is simply changing the subject, certain intuitions are against him.

2 How things seem

The New Evil Demon argument (NED) is typically stated in terms of experiences, but the real issue is that according to the internalist things will *seem* the same to the demon worlder as they will to the unproblematic perceiver. The internalist will be

¹ I owe this way of putting things to Jeremy Fantl.

unimpressed with arguments that try to gain ground by quibbling about the individuation conditions for experiences. Perhaps there are good reasons to think experiences are in part individuated by the things that actually cause them. So what, the internalist will ask. As long as those experiences seem the same to the two subjects, their justification cannot differ. For perspicuity, therefore, we can consider the argument couched in terms of how things seem.

- P1: Reliabilism would hold that if I were in a demon world, my perceptual beliefs would be unjustified even if in this world my perceptual beliefs are justified.
 P2: Things would seem the same to me whether I was in an evil demon world or not.
 P3: If everything seems the same to me in two situations, my perceptual justification should be the same in the two situations.

Conclusion: Reliabilism is false.

Though this argument seems straightforward, there is a subtle ambiguity in what it means for things to seem the same to a subject. There is how the *experience* seems to the subject—the *what it's like* of the experience—and there is how *the world* seems to be to the subject in virtue of her having that experience. When one places one's hand over a hot burner, one has an experience that is subjectively different than the one has when one places one's hand in front of an air conditioner. What it's like is different in the two cases. Call this feeling the *phenomenal character* of the experience. The same experiences also have a world-presenting aspect, however. Not only does it feel a certain way to have a heat sensation, but also that sensation represents the world as being a certain way, and the perceptual experience can be correct or incorrect in its representation. Call this feature of experiences, the *representational content* of experiences. When we say that two experiences seem the same, we could be meaning (among other things) either that they have the same phenomenal character or that they have the same representational content.²

This ambiguity in “seems the same” provides a way for the externalist to resist the argument. The externalist can claim that the New Evil Demon argument commits the fallacy of equivocation. The second premise of the argument, which claims that things seem the same to the demon worlder and her counterpart, is most plausibly interpreted as being about phenomenal character. The demon is replicating how things stand subjectively for the subjects. My demon twin enjoys the same phenomenology as I do. But the third premise, which connects seemings to perceptual justification, is best interpreted as being about *perceptual content*. Perceptual justification is connected to how the things perceived are represented as being, not how things are subjectively for the subject. Perceptual justification is, after all, about how things are in the external world. Why would a belief about the external world be made appropriate or inappropriate simply by the occurrence of a psychological state with a certain subjective feeling? The phenomenal character of the experience might well be relevant to the justification of introspective beliefs

² My terminology borrows from, but is not the same as, that of Siewert (1998), Chalmers (2006), Thompson (2009) and Shoemaker (2001).

about the experience itself, but it seems odd to think that it would be relevant to justification of beliefs about the world. Therefore, argues the externalist, the New Evil Demon argument is fallacious because it equivocates of “seems the same.”

This is a nifty move for the reliabilist, but the internalist will have a ready response. There is an obvious connection, the internalist should say, between how experiences are subjectively and how those experiences present things. That is, even if there is a distinction to be made between phenomenal character and perceptual content, there is a type of content that experiences have in virtue of having the phenomenal characters they have. This is *phenomenal content*. It is true that when I see green grass that I am having a certain subjective experience—perhaps phenomenal greenness. But in virtue of that experience the grass seems to be a certain way: green. If I had a brownish experience the grass would appear to be brown. Differences in phenomenal character lead to differences in what is represented in experience. The world seems to be a certain way for a subject at least partly because of the phenomenal states the subject is in.³ These reflections should feel comfortable to the Cartesian and if I am right they must accept them; to answer the externalist's equivocation response the internalist must hold that there is phenomenal content.

But it is not enough for the internalist to insist upon the existence of phenomenal content. For one can recognize the existence of phenomenal content without agreeing that the connection between character and content is as tight as the internalist requires. A very plausible view, with notable adherents in the philosophy of mind literature, is that an experience does have content in virtue of its phenomenal character, but the connection between the two aspects of the experience is contingent.⁴ The fact that a certain state feels a certain way for a subject does not by itself necessitate that the subject is representing anything, but given certain connections between states of that type and the world, a subject represents something in virtue of having that state. On this view, phenomenal characters are like the words in a written language. A particular word, such as “dog” represents something, but not simply because of the shape of the letters or characters that make up “dog.” “Dog” represents dog because of contingent features of “dog” type markings—in this case, contingent linguistic conventions. Similarly, subjective experiences of red represent properties in the world in virtue of contingent, probably causal, connections between those experiences and the represented properties.

The internalist needs to endorse a stronger version of phenomenal content than this. He must insist on the existence of *intrinsic phenomenal content* which is content that supervenes upon, or is necessitated by, the phenomenal character of the experience. Otherwise, two experiences can be the same phenomenally while differing in how they make the world seem to the subject. If that were possible the externalist can insist, once again, that things seem the same to me and the demon worlder in one sense but not the other. In other words, on the weaker view of

³ The arguments in the previous paragraph owe a good deal to Siewert (1998).

⁴ See for example Block (2003).

phenomenal content, the evil demon argument would still equivocate between these two senses in the move from premise two to three.

Recognizing intrinsic phenomenal content is required for the internalist, but it should seem quite natural. For the epistemic internalist there is a very close tie between how things phenomenologically seem and that which is epistemically relevant. Phenomenal character accounts for how things seem and representational content is what is epistemically relevant. (It is only experiences presenting things to be a certain way that makes them apt to justify beliefs about how things are). If there is no intrinsic phenomenal content, how things seem phenomenologically to the subject can remain the same while what matters epistemically to the justification of the subject's beliefs—representational content—can vary. This seems precisely the sort of thing an internalist, who insists on justification supervening on factors accessible to the subject, should eschew. Whatever contingent connections hold between a phenomenal state and the world are behind the scenes, as far as the subject is concerned. The presentational aspect of the phenomenal is, however, available to the subject. Since the Cartesian wants to avoid making the epistemic determinants unavailable to the subject, he should embrace intrinsic phenomenal content.

If this is correct we have reached Step One of the overall argument. This establishes that there is at least one significant connection between one's stance on epistemic justification and one's view of phenomenal content. But so far there is nothing, perhaps, that should be of deep concern to the epistemic internalist. It is, after all, very intuitive that there is intrinsic phenomenal content. The way phenomenal states seem to the subject is not incidental to the way they represent the world as being. The fact that I use the letters "r-e-d" to represent the color of fire engines does not contribute anything to the way I represent fire engines as being. I could represent the same thing just as easily using "r-o-t." Phenomenal states play a larger role in our access to the world. Intrinsic phenomenal content thus has some phenomenological plausibility at the very least.

There will already be those, however, who think the internalist is in trouble. Just as the externalist would like to find naturalistic accounts of reasons and justification, many of us are eager to find a naturalistic account of representation and intentionality. Tying the intentional so close to the phenomenal threatens to block that reduction in two ways. First, if there is intrinsic phenomenal content, then anything that threatens the reduction of phenomenal character would threaten the reduction of phenomenal representation. Second, even granting the possibility of a naturalistic account of the phenomenal, there is the question as to why there would be a necessary connection between two features of experience that are apparently quite different. What makes it the case that something with a particular intrinsic phenomenal quality, presumably in the heads of the subjects who enjoy it, depicts something out there in the world? By ruling out covariations or nomological connections between the state and the property, a plausible avenue of explanation that seems sufficient for other types of intentionality, is blocked.

These are not, however, the worries I mean to push against the epistemic internalist. The worries I mean to push are themselves epistemic and they have to do with the possible candidates for the intrinsic phenomenal content of experiences.

3 The instability of epistemic internalism and phenomenal externalism

If I am right, the epistemic internalist is committed to intrinsic phenomenal content. I will maintain that this is likely to lead the internalist into some uncomfortable corners. But lest we move too fast, it should be noted that there are two different camps that acknowledge this sort of content. I have been speaking as if phenomenal character is determined “in the head,” so to speak, but there are many philosophers who deny this and still believe in intrinsic phenomenal content. Externalists about phenomenal character maintain that the very “what it’s like-ness” of experiential states is determined by features in the history or environment of the individual, not by intrinsic features of the subject’s brain at a time.⁵ Since most of what follows will assume that the epistemic internalist is not a phenomenal externalist, largely because phenomenal externalists seem in large part to be epistemic externalists also, it is worth pausing to ask whether the combination of epistemic internalism and phenomenal externalism is viable. In particular, is phenomenal externalism open to the epistemic internalist who is motivated by the New Evil Demon problem?

At first glance, the two appear to be naturally exclusive of one another. If the epistemic internalist is one who believes that epistemic justification supervenes on facts internal to the subject’s head, and the phenomenal externalist believes that phenomenal character does not supervene on the internal, then if phenomenal character can effect whether or not one is justified the epistemic internalist cannot be a phenomenal externalist. It is very doubtful that the internalist would want to say that how things seem phenomenally to a subject is irrelevant to the subject’s epistemic justification. In addition to being counterintuitive, that would be in tension with the New Evil Demon argument. Therefore, the epistemic internalist should not be a phenomenal externalist.

This argument is a bit quick, however. In particular, it might be a mistake to define epistemic internalism in terms of supervenience on the intrinsic features of the subject’s mind. Epistemic internalism, after all, seems to be more about the subject’s having epistemic access to the factors that justify his belief. It is this view, not the metaphysical supervenience claim, that drives the internalist’s commitment to the New Evil Demon argument as well as much of his distaste for externalism. If this is the case, then as long as the subject has access to the phenomenal character of his perceptions—something no phenomenal externalist would want to deny—the fact that this character is determined by features external to his skull is irrelevant. At least on the face of it, then, the two views are compatible.

Though this compatibilist argument has some plausibility, the epistemic internalist, at least the one who wants to make the New Evil Demon argument, ought to be reticent to take this path. Consider the second premise of that argument: “things would seem the same to me whether I was in an evil demon world or not.” Can a phenomenal externalist make this claim? It depends, I think, on two things: on what sort of external relation determines phenomenal character and on the nature of the demon world. It does seem that for at least some demon worlds, and some

⁵ See, for example, Dretske (1995), Tye (1995), Byrne (2001) and Hill (2009).

accounts of the external relation premise two would not hold. If phenomenal content is determined by the property that reliably causes the occurrence of the internal representational state, then a world where one isn't justified (because one's perceptual mechanisms were unreliable) could not be phenomenally indistinguishable from a world where one was justified.⁶ In this case, premise 2 wouldn't hold. So this variety of phenomenal externalist cannot make the NED.

For other externalist accounts of phenomenal character, however, there can be demon worlds where premise two holds. Suppose, for example, phenomenal character is determined by the properties in the subject's environment that the subject's perceptual apparatus was evolved to detect, and the demon just generates extended, perhaps life-long, hallucinations in the subject.⁷ In that case, things would seem the same to a subject in the demon world and a subject who isn't, and the subject will be reliable in one world and not in the other. This phenomenal externalist can thus make the NED.

Of course the fact that it is consistent for a phenomenal externalist to make some version of the NED doesn't show that an epistemic internalism and phenomenal externalism are a stable blend of positions. The possibilities countenanced by evil demon arguments might seem to speak against phenomenal externalism. Consider the version of phenomenal externalism according to which phenomenal character is determined by evolutionary history. It seems conceivable that I have a "swampman" phenomenal duplicate that didn't evolve—that just appeared because an evil demon decided it would.⁸ If this is in fact possible, the evolutionary brand of phenomenal externalism is false. This isn't exactly the New Evil Demon argument, but it is in the neighborhood.⁹ To endorse the NED but reject this argument would require denying in one case that conceivability implies possibility while maintaining it does in the NED. There would need to be a principled reason to deny a similar move to the epistemic externalist who denied that the NED world was possible.

There does seem to be a difference, though, in the phenomenal externalist who denies the possibility of swampman worlds and the epistemic externalist who denies the possibility of NED worlds. The phenomenal externalist's denial isn't merely motivated by an attempt to save his theory—it is motivated by the commitments of the theory itself. It doesn't seem that reliabilism, on the other hand, entails anything at all about the possibility of NED worlds. The phenomenal externalist can therefore say, with reason, that any such move by the epistemic externalist is ad hoc in a way the denial of swampman worlds is not. The combination of epistemic internalism and some versions of phenomenal externalism seems consistent and worth

⁶ For such a view see Tye (1995).

⁷ For such a view, see Dretske (1995).

⁸ For the swampman example, see Davidson (1987). The swampman is a being who is a molecule for molecule duplicate of a normal creature but who didn't evolve.

⁹ So are the inversion scenarios discussed in the next section. The phenomenal externalist will likewise have to deny inversion-like possibilities.

exploring. It isn't a path that has tempted many, though, so I will set it aside for the time being.¹⁰

4 Inversion and error

We've discovered that NED involves commitment to intrinsic phenomenal content, but the investigation isn't over. For the question still arises about what the contents of perceptual states are and how they are determined. Unfortunately, intuitive reflections which should be amenable to the Cartesian introduce some problems for intrinsic phenomenal content. Let's focus, for example, on visual experience. The problem here comes from the possibility of spectral inversion.¹¹ It seems possible, for example, that due to internal differences—in the eyes or brain, perhaps—when Jack sees a red apple, he has the sort of sensation that Jill has when she sees a green apple, and when Jill sees a red apple she has the sort of sensation that Jack has when he sees a green apple. Jack and Jill are red/green inverters. Despite the fact that things are quite different for Jack and Jill they will by and large be behaviorally indistinguishable. They will both call tomatoes “red” and grass “green.” The inversion only makes a difference to the subjects from the inside. Are Jack and Jill's perceptions veridical? There are three possibilities: either they both perceive color correctly, or only one of them does, or neither of them does.

It is difficult to claim that one of them perceives veridically while the other does not. It is, perhaps, tempting to say that whichever one represents things in the way that normal perceivers do perceives correctly. This, of course, raises the question of what makes one set of perceivers normal. There are, of course, various possible answers—that the majority of perceivers constitutes the norm; that normal perceivers are those that perceive in accordance with evolutionary design, etc. But these suggestions just push the question back a bit—one can just as easily imagine that there is no majority among perceivers: half the population could be Jackish and half could be Jillish. And given that they behave similarly, and both get along perfectly well in their environment, it seems doubtful that there is a survival benefit that would accrue to a Jackish perceiver over a Jillish perceiver or vice versa. So, the question remains, which perceives correctly?¹²

¹⁰ Would this combination block my overall argument? Only to the extent that the phenomenal externalist will be able to handle intuitions about the possibility of spectrum inversion, etc. My suspicion, though, is that someone committed to rejecting the possibility of swamp-worlds won't have too much problem rejecting the possibility of spectrum inversion.

¹¹ The material in this section draws heavily from Howell (2013).

¹² One possible view would hold that there is a primitive connection between the phenomenology of the experiential state and some color property in the world—either one that is natural, or some primitive “edenic” color. Jack would be right if he had that connection and Jill would be right if she did. While possible, such a view owes us an account of that connection and the corresponding property. Without that, it seems an uncomfortable place in logical space. Horgan et al. (2004) hold something similar to this view, but it succumbs to the error theory when it comes to secondary qualities. It plausibly stands more of a chance when it comes to qualities like shape, but to make that case they would need to answer the arguments below, drawn from Thompson (2010).

There is no principled basis for deciding that one of the inverts is correct and the other is not.¹³ So, either they are both correct, or neither is. There is an intuitive argument for denying that they both perceive correctly. Either they are both representing the same property, or they aren't. The idea that they are both representing the same property is in tension with the very intuition behind intrinsic phenomenal content. It was intuitive to say that there was intrinsic phenomenal content precisely because veridicality conditions stem from the way the world phenomenally appears to the subject, and the world phenomenally appears differently to Jack and to Jill. So it seems they must be representing different properties. But if they are both perceiving correctly, and assuming it is colors they are representing, when they are looking at the very same spot on a tomato there must be two different colors in one place at the same time. This seems counter-intuitive enough, but one can't keep the number of colors in one place down to a mere two. It seems, in fact, that there will wind up being a color for each type of imaginable perceiver. We can imagine, in addition to Jack and Jill, Jim who sees things as Jack does but a shade or two darker, and Jane, who perceives things as Jill does, but a shade or two lighter, etc. On the face of it, this seems to be multiplying colors beyond necessity. The "inversion argument" thus proceeds:

1. There is no principled reason for saying that Jack's perception is veridical while Jane's isn't, or vice versa.
2. They cannot both be veridical, since objects cannot have two fully determinate colors in the same place.

Therefore, neither Jack nor Jill's perception is veridical.

The result of this argument, of course, is that none of our perceptions of color is veridical, since there is no difference in principle between us and Jack and/or Jill.

If this argument is right, we have established Step Two of the overall argument: Because epistemic internalism is committed to intrinsic phenomenal content, it is committed to an error theory of perception.

There are several ways to resist the move to this step, but they involve substantial commitments that might themselves involve difficulties. One response is that this argument presupposes a naive concept of colors, according to which they are intrinsic properties of objects. But if colors are dispositions to produce certain phenomenal appearances in perceivers objects can have two fully determinate colors in a single place. Thus, P2 of the inversion argument is false.

While this move is tempting, it conflicts with some of the intuitions behind phenomenal content.¹⁴ The point can be made by pairing the possibility of spectral inversion with Ned Block's Inverted Earth.¹⁵ There could be a world where the grass reflects light in the same way red apples do on earth, while blood and stop-lights reflect light the way that grass does on earth. It also seems possible that JackT

¹³ Though Tye (2000, 2002) argues otherwise.

¹⁴ See Chalmers (2006, p. 56). This and the following argument derive from Chalmers (2006) and I make this particular use of his argument in Howell (2013).

¹⁵ Block (1990) and Chalmers (2006).

and Jill are inverters, and that Jill lives on earth and JackT lives on inverted earth. In this case when JackT looks at blood and Jill looks at blood, they will see the blood in the same way—that is, it will seem the same to them. Blood looks to JackT on inverted earth, just like blood looks to Jill on regular earth.

Given the commitment to intrinsic phenomenal content, JackT and Jill represent things to be the same. This Twin-Argument is thus:

- 1*. JackT and Jill either both perceive veridically or neither does.
- 2*. The color of blood on Inverted Earth seems the same to JackT as the color of blood on Earth seems to Jill.
- 3*. By hypothesis, the color of blood on Inverted Earth is not the same as the color of blood on Earth.

Therefore, neither JackT nor Jill perceive veridically.

Once again, we wind up with an error theory.

Adopting dispositionalism about colors doesn't help with this case since on that view JackT and Jill would be seeing different properties. This would preserve veridicality, but only at the cost of intrinsic phenomenal content—it would no longer be the case that there is a content that supervened upon phenomenal character. Despite the fact that the colors seem the same phenomenally to the two of them, Jill is not really representing green things in the way that JackT is representing red things. Jill is representing blood as ⟨that which causes RED in Jill⟩ and JackT is representing twin-blood as ⟨that which causes RED in JackT⟩. Similarly, on the dispositionalist view it turns out that the original Jack and Jill are not really color inverters (and in fact it is impossible that there be color inverters). Jill is representing a Jill indexed property (red-for-Jill) and Jack is representing a Jack indexed property (red-for-Jack).¹⁶ Thus, this proposal denies existence of intrinsic phenomenal content as well as the possibility of shared perceptual content and true inversion and should be rejected.¹⁷

Another way out for the internalist is to reject the assumption that the phenomenal character of an experience determines, without aid of context, the property that is represented by the experience. A view of content that makes that assumption can be called *Russellian*.¹⁸ On a Russellian theory of phenomenal content, JackT and Jill must be representing blood as being the same color because their experience has the same phenomenal character, and in general any two experiences with the same phenomenal character necessarily represent the same property. *Fregean* views of phenomenal content, such as the views proposed by Brad Thompson and David Chalmers, deny this assumption. According to Thompson,

A content is Fregean if it consists of modes of presentation of objects and properties rather than the objects and properties themselves. According to

¹⁶ It's worth noting that one way out of the Jack/Jill example, indexing the colors to perceiver types instead of individual perceivers, fails in the case of JackT and JillT since they are different perceiver types.

¹⁷ These arguments owe deeply to Chalmers (2006), and Thompson (2007), and Egan (2006).

¹⁸ Chalmers (2006), Thompson (2009).

Fregean theories of phenomenal content, the phenomenal content that is shared by any two phenomenally identical experiences is a matter of *how* the world is represented, and need not involve sameness in *what* is represented. ... For the Fregean, sameness of phenomenal character need only entail sameness in the mode of presentation. This is compatible with the idea that perceptual experiences do represent particular properties, and that they even have Russellian contents. But this property-involving content will not be, on the Fregean view, *phenomenal* content, since it will be a kind of content that need not be shared by phenomenal duplicates. (Thompson 2009, pp. 100–101)¹⁹

So, for example, a Fregean view could maintain that associated with a particular phenomenal character *g*, there is for every subject the following mode of presentation: the property that typically causes *g* in me. The result is that Jack and Jill do have a content in common: the content ⟨Blood is the color property that typically causes **RED** in me⟩ where **RED** is the phenomenal experience they both get when looking at things that are red on earth and green on Twin Earth. They will also have a difference in content, however—the (non-dispositional) property they ascribe to blood will be different, since different properties in the world cause **RED** in each of them. The content they have in common is the phenomenal content. Jack and Jill, however, will have different phenomenal contents, since they have different phenomenal characters, but both are representing veridically: Jack is representing *r*, the color which typically causes **GREEN** in him, and Jill is representing *r*, the color which typically causes **RED** in her.

The epistemic internalist can try to dodge commitment to an error theory by adopting a Fregean view of phenomenal content. The Fregean view might not be such a comfortable haven for the internalist, however. For one thing, the Fregean view of content and the dispositionalist account of colors are extremely similar, so much so that the argument against the dispositionalist is arguably also an argument against the Fregean.²⁰ There are also some independently odd implications of the Fregean view. Let's take the Fregean view according to which the Fregean perceptual content of the sort of experience I have when seeing red apples is ⟨The property that typically causes **RED** in me.⟩²¹ What if there is no such property, perhaps because a demon keeps switching the causes of my experiences? In such a case the Fregean must say that the world doesn't really seem to be any particular way to me at all. It's not just that my perception isn't accurate, it's that there is no way the world could be to make it accurate.²² It seems very peculiar to say that,

¹⁹ Thompson (2009).

²⁰ For an argument to this effect see Howell (2013).

²¹ There are other possible Fregean views, but this is the sort of view suggested by Thompson and Chalmers.

²² One can imagine the Fregean responding that there is a way the world could be to make the content accurate. It would be for this phenomenal character to be reliably caused by the property that caused it. This is truly an empty content, though, since it is compatible the experience representing any possible property. Such a content would thus say next to nothing about the world—this would, I take it, be as bad a result for the internalist as the error theory.

especially since my phenomenal twin's perceptions (in a non-switchy world) are accurate!²³

This same problem is apt to generate tension between epistemic internalism and Fregeanism about phenomenal content. The NED depends on the claim that two subjects who are phenomenally indistinguishable will have the same justification for their beliefs. But compare me to my twin in the switchy demon world where his experiences have no typical cause. Things appear phenomenally the same to us, but how can we be equally justified in our beliefs about the external world when my perceptions represent it as being a particular way and his perceptions do not? Assuming we are really internal twins, we would both have the same perceptual beliefs, but it looks like mine can be justified (at least to some extent) by the content of my perceptual experiences but his cannot, since his perceptual experiences don't present the world to be any particular way at all. This contradicts the crucial premise of NED and thus isn't an option for the internalist.²⁴

If I am right, and Fregeanism about phenomenal content and dispositionalism about color don't help the epistemic internalist with the inversion arguments, then we have arrived at step two. The argument has focused on visual perception of color, but it need not be so limited. At the very least the same arguments can apply to olfactory perception, sounds, tastes and feels. As long as we can conceive of inversion-like scenarios, the arguments will apply.

It's tempting to claim that while these arguments succeed when it comes to secondary qualities like color and smell, they do not succeed with paradigmatically primary qualities like size and shape. If this is the case the internalist can embrace a limited error theory, but one that doesn't infect all perceptual knowledge.²⁵ I question whether the damage can be contained in this way. Although it is more difficult to imagine "inversion" scenarios for shape, size and other primary qualities, we don't really need them. All we need are scenarios where there is the appropriate sort of perceptual variation. Berkeley made such arguments, but in recent years they have been well defended by Brad Thompson. One of Thompson's examples is that of Doubled Earth.

²³ Objection: It doesn't seem so absurd that the Fregean view sometimes has the result that there are sometimes no extensionally specifiable accuracy conditions. The Fregean view is indexical, and don't such problems plague any indexical view of thought or linguistic content? The answer is that this depends on how the indexicals achieve reference in these other cases. Similar objections have been raised to various views of indexical content (see Austin 1990, for example). In any case, we must decide whether perceptual content is in fact indexical, and the argument here is that it is particularly hard to see how a constant perceptual experience could fail to make it seem to the subject that a particular property is being instantiated. Thanks to a referee of this journal for this objection.

²⁴ A referee for this journal suggests that pairing a two-dimensional view of belief [of the sort adopted by Chalmers (1996)] with a Fregean picture of perception might offer the internalist a stable position. Pursuing this idea is a worthy enterprise, but I am skeptical. Presumably the indexical Fregean content would compose part of the primary intension which is the belief content that would concern the epistemic internalist. But if the arguments here are right, that content doesn't give the internalist the sort of accuracy conditions she wants. In other words, two dimensionalism will help only if the internalist can already solve her problem with Fregean content.

²⁵ This was Terry Horgan's response to an earlier version of this paper in his comments at the 2012 Pacific Division APA meeting.

Consider two individuals, Oscar and Big Oscar. Oscar is a normal perceiver residing on Earth. Big Oscar lives on Doubled Earth, a distant planet in the same universe as Earth. Doubled Earth is just like Earth, except everything on Doubled Earth is stretched out to be twice as big as its counterpart on Earth. The “meterstick” on Doubled Earth is two meters long. A cube of volume v on Earth is of volume $8v$ on Doubled Earth. Oscar is six feet tall; Big Oscar is 12 feet tall. Big Oscar is Oscar's *phenomenal twin*. Big Oscar's conscious life is precisely the same as Oscar's. When Oscar looks at a sunset on Earth and has a visual experience with a certain phenomenal character, Big Oscar is also looking at a sunset, but on Doubled Earth, and his visual experience is phenomenally just like Oscar's. When Oscar looks at the Eiffel Tower, he has an experience of a certain shape, color, and size. When Big Oscar looks at Big Eiffel Tower (the Eiffel Tower's counterpart on Doubled Earth), Big Oscar has an experience that is phenomenally just like Oscar's. Big Oscar's experience, however, is caused by something twice as tall as Oscar's. (Thompson 2010, p. 156)

Who is representing size correctly? The pattern of argument should be familiar. Either they both are, one is and the other isn't, or neither is. It is difficult to say that one is and the other isn't, for there doesn't seem to be a good way to privilege one's perceptions over the other. Saying they both are accurate isn't an option since that would involve a divorce between phenomenal character (which are the same in both cases) and phenomenal content (which must be different if they are both accurately representing size and the sizes are different). And since it is phenomenal content that is relevant to the justification of beliefs this opens up the possibility that two subjects with the same phenomenological seemings could have differently justified beliefs, contrary to P2 in the NED.

To take a more intuitive case, consider solidity. My various senses—both together and separate—lead me to think that the table before me is solid. Of course we find that as a matter of fact the table has more space in it than it has matter. This surprises most people, and leads some to claim that the table isn't really solid. The natural move, though, is just to reinterpret what we meant by solidity, by reference to the structure and properties of paradigmatically solid things. This is nice, because it makes it true to say “The table is solid” even if it is mostly empty space. The problem is that it seems there are various ways the world could be that are consistent with the phenomenal characters we get in perceiving solidity. There is the way they are, but it is possible that solid things be as we first thought them, really solid. It is possible that in fact they be the result of a consistent hallucination by an evil demon. Phenomenal twins across these worlds cannot have the same contents and both be perceiving veridically (since the way one perception would represent things would be incompatible with the way the other represented things.) But again, there is no way to privilege one over the other. The result: none of us are perceiving correctly when we perceive things to be solid.

A full defense of the arguments showing that intrinsic phenomenal content implies an error theory would require more work. We would need to consider the plausibility of the same sorts of moves we considered in the case of colors

(Fregeanism about content, dispositionalism about primary qualities) and more. But I hope to have said enough to show the reader how these arguments will be likely to go. Again, the Cartesian might be able to resist the slide to a complete error theory, but only with commitments that are rarely made explicit.²⁶

5 The cost to epistemic internalism

I have argued that the New Evil Demon argument highlights a connection between internalist approaches to epistemic justification and a particular view of phenomenal content. Ultimately, the repercussion of this commitment is that the internalist is committed to an error theory of perceptual appearances. Whether or not this is devastating, it is surprising. In fact, though, I think it significantly undermines the appeal of NED. For it entails that with respect to visual appearances, with respect to how things seem, I am epistemically no better off in this world than in the demon world. For all epistemic purposes, this world *is* the demon world—as is every world where individuals have perceptual experiences like mine.

Notice that this is different than the familiar claim that internalist views of justification are doomed because they succumb to Cartesian skepticism. That would be because we cannot rule out that we are being deceived by an evil demon. This problem doesn't stem from that. It is rather that even in the best case scenario, even if we could somehow by ontological proof find that there was no demon, or even if the dogmatists are right that we needn't rule out demon possibilities, we would be systematically wrong about the world. This is quite a bad consequence for the defender of NED.

This is apt to be particularly troubling to those internalists who believe there is a way to defeat skepticism about the external world because of some *prima facie* credence that should be given to appearances. Take as an example Dogmatism as developed by Jim Pryor.²⁷ According to Dogmatism, one receives *prima facie* justification in believing *p* if it perceptually appears to one that *p*. This helps defeat the skeptic because this evidence is in place even if one has not already ruled out skeptical scenarios. If one needs to rule out skeptical scenarios, then, one now has a way to do so in the typical Moorean manner: one's justification that one has a hand before one transfers across known implication to show that one is not a brain in a vat.²⁸ Thus, not only do one's senses provide (internalist) perceptual justification, they also provide the basis for an argument against the skeptic.

If internalists are ultimately committed to error theories of perception, however, the dogmatist strategy faces difficulties. For one thing, dogmatism would obviously fail as an account of perceptual knowledge. For even if it is still the case that an

²⁶ See Thompson (2009) and Chalmers (2012) for the defense of the view about primary qualities. They are inclined to take a Fregean way out. To me this seems even less plausible than in the case of colors, since it would make the perceptions of people in the evil demon world veridical. But my Modus Tollens is Chalmers' Modus Ponens as we see in Chalmers (2005).

²⁷ See Pryor (2000).

²⁸ See Moore (1939).

appearance that p provides prima facie justification for the belief that p , it cannot provide knowledge that p because the appearance is ultimately deceiving. This in turn takes away the dogmatist's response to the skeptic. The justified but false belief in p cannot be plugged into the Moorean argument against the skeptic since the belief is false and one cannot come to know the anti-skeptical conclusion based on a false premise.²⁹

Dogmatism is not the only view that will be troubled by the embrace of an error theory of perception. So will any view that believes there is some prima facie entitlement³⁰ or rationality³¹ to accepting perceptual beliefs on face value. Even if they are right about their fundamental claim, that one has some epistemic right to the deliverances of perception, at best this will yield false justified beliefs. It will thus be of no help in showing how we might have knowledge of the external world.

6 Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to explore some logical connections between views of epistemic justification and views of phenomenal content. I have suggested that there is at least one important connection: the internalist—at least one who advocated NED—should embrace intrinsic phenomenal content. I have argued that this leads the internalist to an error theory of perception, which in turn problematizes the internalist's view of perceptual justification. The somewhat surprising flip side of this argument would be that if one is committed to intrinsic phenomenal content, one should probably be an externalist about justification. The externalist could plausibly defend the justification of perceptual beliefs, for example, even if the perceptual content is always erroneous.³² There are, of course, various stages along the way that the committed internalist can resist, but considering these arguments will at least reveal significant commitments that have not heretofore been obvious, and it might land the internalist in new difficulties.

There is another way to view the paper's arguments, however, which frankly requires that fewer of them succeed. The recognition that there is an equivocation on "how things seem to the subject" opens a possible response to the New Evil Demon argument for the externalist. To make the argument stick, the internalist has to argue that the equivocation is in some sense not real and it is difficult to see how this might be done without arguing for a particular view of phenomenal content.³³ The

²⁹ Warfield (2005), Fitelson (2010) and others have offered counterexamples to the assumption that one cannot get knowledge by inferring from a falsehood. Their arguments are somewhat convincing, but their cases seem relevantly unlike the case at hand that we can perhaps safely set them aside.

³⁰ Wright (2004).

³¹ Cohen (1999).

³² See, for example, Howell (2013) for an approach like this.

³³ I don't think the internalist can avoid the whole issue of phenomenal content by simply insisting that justification supervenes on phenomenal character. This would be unmotivated. Why would justification supervene on a subject's phenomenal character instead of his hair color? Because phenomenal character and not hair color has to do with the way the world appears to the subject. That is, it is only so far as

externalist should feel free to push back on such views; in fact, accepting views that reject intrinsic phenomenal content might seem to be more in the spirit of the externalist's naturalistic project. The reliabilist should argue that the lesson we should take from the New Evil Demon argument is not that reliabilism about justification is wrong, but that we cannot stably be reliabilists while retaining an overly first-personal picture of perceptual representation. If one consistently pursues the naturalistic project, embracing reduction with respect to both epistemic justification and perceptual content, the intuitions behind the New Evil Demon argument will dissolve.

Whether or not this externalist spin on the New Evil Demon argument will ultimately succeed is at this point unclear. But in light of the connections between perceptual content and epistemic justification, the idea should be pursued.

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Footnote 33 continued

phenomenal character is connected with phenomenal content that the former is relevant to justification. If that's the case, ways in which the two come apart have to be considered. Thanks to Eli Chudnoff for forcing me to respond to this possibility.

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