
Why Open-Minded People Should Endorse Dogmatism

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Paper: to provide a reason to accept dogmatism by showing how well it addresses four issues concerning non-inferential justification.

(Radical) Dogmatism: Necessarily, if it seems to S that P, then S has prima facie (non-inferential) justification for P. [a.k.a. phenomenal conservatism]

Outline of the Paper

Background Needed to Appreciate Dogmatism's Explanatory Power

Section 1: seemings are distinct from sensations

Three Issues Dogmatism Explains Very Well

Section 2: dogmatism can explain the specked hen problem

Section 3: dogmatism can explain the Reidian intuition that, for some possible cognizer, an olfactory sensation might lead to a justified tactile belief

Section 4: dogmatism can explain our ability to make non-inferentially justified perceptual identifications

Is Dogmatism Absurdly Permissive?

Section 5: dogmatism is not absurdly permissive even though it allows seemings to provide justification even if they are caused in apparently inappropriate ways. This discussion will point out a fourth thing that dogmatism does very well.

Note: it is particularly impressive that dogmatism can explain these four issues because prominent epistemologists have argued that dogmatism *can't* explain the first two.

1. SEEMINGS AND SENSATIONS

What is a seeming that P?

It is neither: a belief that P nor an inclination to believe P

It is: an experience with the propositional content P and a special phenomenal character, which Huemer calls "forcefulness"

My Characterization: A seeming that P "recommends" P as true or "assures" the subject of P's truth

Tollhurst's Helpful Characterization: seemings "have the feel of truth, the feel of a state whose content reveals how things really are"

Examples: Right now it seems to me that there are other people in this room, that $2+2=4$, that I have a slight headache, and that dogmatism is true

What are sensations?

Common (Mistaken) Assumption: sensations are merely a special kind of seeming

My Characterization (which is mainly ostensive): Sensations, like seemings, are experiences, and it is plausible that at least some of them have content. I have a visual sensation when I look at my dog. It is the mental "picture" or visual image of a little white creature wearing a blue halter. I have an auditory sensation when I hear my dog barking. It is the mental "sound" of the bark.

Why think that sensations are distinct from seemings? Because this distinction could help explain certain visual disorders

The Phenomena of Blindsight: Subjects who have a damaged visual cortex often emphatically report that they cannot see anything within a certain region of their visual field. Nonetheless, such subjects often show remarkable sensitivity to such things as motion and the wavelength of light within their reported "blind spot". These subjects are typically surprised to discover their success, thinking that they were making random guesses.

Proposed Explanation: These subjects have seemings without the corresponding visual sensations. The subjects' "blind spots" are regions in their visual fields that lack visual imagery. Nonetheless, the mechanisms that produce seemings function well enough to provide information about the region of the environment that corresponds to the subjects' blindspots. The seemings that provide this information

aren't as strong as they are in a properly functioning subject, which explains why the subjects aren't confident about their guesses.

The Phenomena of Associative Agnosia: When shown a familiar object, such as a ring or a pen, subjects are able to draw the item they see with great success. Although the subjects apparently remember what rings and pens are, they still cannot recognize the objects as rings or pens.

Proposed Explanation: These subjects have the visual imagery without the corresponding seemings.

Subjects can draw the object because their visual imagery is intact. They cannot recognize the objects as rings or pens because they fail to have the seemings which would enable them to do so.

If seemings and sensations aren't identical, how are they related? Seemings typically accompany sensations, but I will assume:

- (i) from the fact that one has a certain sensation, it doesn't follow (in the broadly logical sense) that she has a seeming, much less any seeming in particular, and
- (ii) from the fact that things seem a certain way to the subject, it doesn't follow that she has any sensations, much less any particular sensation.
- (iii) Sensations cannot provide even prima facie justification.

2. THE PROBLEM OF THE SPECKLED HEN

The Problem of the Speckled Hen: Suppose that a normal human has a visual image of a speckled hen. If the hen has only three speckles, it seems that the subject can have a non-inferentially justified (introspective) belief that it has three speckles. On the other hand, if the hen has forty-eight speckles, it seems that the subject can't acquire a non-inferentially justified belief that it has forty-eight speckles. The speckled hen problem is the question of what explains this difference.

Sosa's Resolution: this problem can be resolved only if we accept, not dogmatism, but "some causal or counterfactual connection between the character of the experience and the propositional content of the judgment."

Insight: since there is a sensation with the relevant number of speckles in both the 3-speckle case and the 48-speckle case, a difference in sensations can't explain the difference in justification.

Mistaken Assumption: seemings are merely a special kind of sensation

My Dogmatist Resolution: The difference in justification is explained by a difference in the way things seem.

The 3-speckled image, in normal humans, is accompanied by a seeming that the hen has 3 speckles. Yet, in normal humans, a visual image of a 48-speckled hen is *not* accompanied by a seeming that the hen has exactly 48 speckles.

3. THE REIDIAN INSIGHT

Thomas Reid, Michael Bergmann, and Peter Markie argue that we can explain the Reidian Insight only by accepting the Reidian Explanation.

The Reidian Insight: Whether a sensation can lead to the justification of P varies according to design plan.

The Reidian Explanation: Whether some sensation justifies P varies according to design plan.

Bergmann's example:

"[T]actile sensations do not seem any more suited than olfactory sensations to being indicators of hardness. Thus, it seems that there could have been cognizers like us in outward appearance who experience, upon grabbing a billiard ball, a sensation that is qualitatively of the same type as one of our actual world sensations of smell. And it seems possible that the natural *unlearned* doxastic response of such a cognizer to that 'olfactory' sensation is the first person belief 'There is a smallish hard round object in my hand'."

Alleged Upshot: the olfactory sensation can justify **P1** (that there is a smallish round object in my hand) for some species, say gumans, but not for others, e.g. humans.

Against the Reidian Explanation: although the Reidian explanation could explain the Reidian insight were it true, we're assuming that sensations can't provide justification for any design plan

My Dogmatist Explanation of the Reidian Insight

Bergmann's example seems powerful because we assume:

- (i) if gumans are designed to accept P1 when they have some olfactory sensation, then, in those circumstances, it will seem to properly functioning gumans that P1; and

- (ii) if humans are not designed to accept P1 when they have some olfactory sensation, then, in those circumstances, it will not seem to properly functioning humans that P1.

Given these assumptions, we can fill out Bergmann's example as follows: Suppose that OS is the olfactory sensation that, for us, is typically accompanied by its seeming that P2 (that there are flowers nearby). We are assuming it is contingent that if one has OS, then OS accompanies a seeming with some particular content (see section 1). It seems, then, that design plans can determine which seemings accompany OS. Humans are designed so that when they experience OS, it seems to them that P1. Yet I am so designed that, when I experience OS, it seems to me that P2. It could be that both design plans are reliable. When humans have OS, it may be that they are always holding something similar to a billiard ball (which would make P1 true), and when I have OS, it might be that there are always flowers nearby (which would make P2 true).

When the example is spelled out in the above way: my dogmatist view gets the right result: it entails that, in the above circumstances, humans have justification for P2 and humans have justification for P1. And my view gets the right result without endorsing the Reidian Explanation, without claiming that justification is relative to design plans.

4. NON-INFERENTIAL PERCEPTUAL IDENTIFICATIONS

Hillbilly vs. Captain Jack Sparrow: Suppose that Hillbilly has heard of dolphins before (and so has the concept *dolphin*), but that he knows next to nothing about them and that he has never seen a dolphin in person or in a picture. It doesn't seem that Hillbilly can tell just by looking that something is a dolphin the first time he sees one. Yet Captain Jack Sparrow is well acquainted with all manner of sea creatures, and he can tell, just by looking, that some creature is a dolphin. Even if Hillbilly and Jack have exactly the same visual image of a dolphin before their minds, only Jack will have non-inferential justification that the creature is a dolphin. What explains this difference?

Dogmatist Explanation: when Jack considers this visual image, it seems to him that the creature is a dolphin, and when Hillbilly considers the image, it does not seem to him that the creature is a dolphin.

Notice: we can make non-inferentially justified perceptual identifications even if we have no idea what features of the objects enable us to make these identifications.

5. Is Dogmatism Too Permissive?

The Basic Objection: Peter Markie and Michael Bergmann argue that seemings can't be sources of non-inferential justification when they are caused inappropriately.

Representative Example: Suppose Expert and Novice are prospecting for gold, and they discover a yellow object, which is in fact a gold nugget. Expert's learned identification skills make it seem that the object is a gold nugget; Novice's wishful thinking makes it seem that way to him.

The Alleged Problem: dogmatism entails that both Expert's and Novice's seemings provide their beliefs with *prima facie* justification, but only Expert's seeming has justificatory power. So dogmatism is false.

My Reply

Non-inferential Knowledge vs. Non-inferential Justification: non-inferential justification is the property a belief has when it is an appropriate response to an experience, whether that experience is caused appropriately or not. Justification is a necessary condition on knowledge, so non-inferential knowledge requires one's belief to be an appropriate response to experience; however, non-inferential knowledge additionally requires that the experience be caused in some appropriate way.

Consider an Analogy: This way of distinguishing between non-inferential justification and knowledge can explain why demon-victims have just as much perceptual justification as we do, even though they fail to have perceptual knowledge.

**Hence my dogmatism can explain a fourth issue concerning non-inferential justification, namely why evil demon victims can have non-inferential justification but not knowledge.

Application to the gold nugget case: Novice's belief is justified because it is an appropriate response to its seeming that the nugget is gold (assuming there are no relevant defeaters), but his belief isn't knowledge because this seeming was caused by wishful thinking.

Are there any relevant differences between the perceptual experiences of demon victims and seemings caused by wishful thinking? Well, Novice is *responsible* for his inappropriately caused seeming and the

demon victim isn't. Perhaps only demon victims have justification because only they aren't responsible for the inappropriately caused seemings.

Responsibility for inappropriately-caused seemings doesn't prevent justification: Suppose Wierdo had always wanted to be a demon-victim, and he paid, even begged a demon to make all his perceptual experiences delusional, such that he would never remember having told the demon to do so. Thus, Wierdo would be responsible for his delusional experiences because of some *past* actions; however, he *now* has reason to believe neither that his experiences are demon-induced, nor that he is responsible for their being demon-induced. In such a case, it still seems that those perceptual experiences would non-inferentially justify Wierdo's perceptual beliefs.

If perceptual experiences can provide non-inferential justification when, unbeknownst to the subject they are demon-caused *and* he is responsible for them being demon-caused, why can't a seeming that P produce non-inferential justification when, unbeknownst to the subject, that seeming was produced by wishful thinking *and* that subject is responsible for that wishful thinking?