

**Abstract:** *Recent attempts at developing a modest foundationalist account of knowledge have yielded dogmatist epistemology, which argues for prima facie justification for perceptual beliefs. While its modesty maintains the defeasibility of perceptual knowledge, it fails to preserve its factiveness. In order to do so, I suggest a dogmatist-coherent picture of justification for perceptual beliefs, which affords the dogmatist a means of increasing justification, while granting the coherentist grounding in reality. It seems that such a program is the most efficient way to develop modest foundationalism.*

## **Dogmatism and Epistemic Coherence**

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The dogmatist position in epistemology argues for the immediate justification of perceptual claims. James Pryor awards *prima facie* justification to such claims, arguing that *prima facie* justification is defeasible and fallible. The strength of Pryor's dogmatism lies in these modest qualities. But in order for dogmatism to be a useful epistemic theory, it must have the explanatory resources to not only decrease justification (in the face of defeaters) but also to *increase* justification, provide sufficient justification for knowledge. In order to achieve this end, I will argue that a coherent structure of perceptual knowledge is fully compatible with dogmatist theory and that such a conception can preserve the factiveness of perceptual knowledge to a satisfactory extent.

It is first necessary to clarify Pryor's dogmatist view. The Cartesian skeptic's argument in Pryor's view has the following general form: (1) if you are justified in believing that the skeptical hypothesis (H) is false, then your justification is based on things you know by perception, and (2) in order to know anything by perception, you must be antecedently justified in believing that H is false. So, (3) you cannot be justified in believing H is false and therefore (4) you cannot be justified in believing by perception (Pryor 531). Pryor identifies premise (2) as the Skeptical Principle about Justification (hereafter SPJ), which says that you must have *antecedent* justification for believing H is false. The use of the term "antecedent" in the SPJ does not refer to temporal priority. In specifying that the justification be antecedent, Pryor is signaling that justification for the claim "H is false" must not, according to the skeptic, depend on the fact that, or presuppose that, the skeptical hypothesis is false. In that way, according to this notion of

antecedent justification, perceptual experience may not be used to justify knowledge about perception.

Pryor's positive account holds that perceptual beliefs are immediately or *prima facie* justified. His proposal is a form of foundationalism, holding that certain (perceptually basic) beliefs are justified without reliance on other justified beliefs. In particular, Pryor's foundationalism rejects the SPJ principle because he does not think that antecedent justification is necessary to justify belief in perceptual claims (Pryor 356). He acknowledges that without accepting the SPJ principle, he is tied to a modest anti-skeptical project. The *prima facie* justification is therefore relatively weak. Firstly, it is fallible and defeasible; justification may be undermined or defeated by additional evidence. Secondly, *prima facie* justified belief is not necessarily self-evident, self-justifying or autonomous (Pryor 533).

Pryor's intuitive view is particularly appealing for its modesty. While it responds to the intuitive idea that we know things by perception, it restricts our justification for perceptual beliefs to a defeasible level. In dogmatism, the presence of defeaters — observations or evidence contrary to one's *prima-facie* justified observations — can lead to a *decrease* in justification, or in other words, the loss of *prima facie* justification. Pryor makes the defeasibility of *prima facie* justification clear: counterevidence may remove such justification. For instance, if one is driving along a hillside and sees a barn, he is *prima facie* justified in believing that there is a barn on the hillside. However, if the driver sees a sign "You are in Barn-Façade County," he has been presented with a defeater to his *prima facie* justified belief that there is a barn on the hillside. It seems necessary that his justification decrease as a result, possibly entirely removing the *prima facie* justification. It seems that this is a fairly intuitive manner of decreasing justification, and while Pryor does not discuss the appropriateness of defeaters, this topic has been explored by others (Williams 149). Furthermore, given the weak nature of Pryor's *prima facie* justification, it does not seem difficult to conceive of appropriate defeaters in the environment or evidence calling into question one's initial observations. In our barn case, plausible defeaters would include perceptions as explicit as the sign "You are in Barn-Façade County" as well as reasons to believe that one is hallucinating from (for instance) some types of medication.

The task of interest for Pryor's dogmatism is to show by what means one might *increase*

justification. This move is important if dogmatism is to produce knowledge by bridging the *evidential* gap between perception and knowledge. Firstly, knowledge in epistemology has the essential characteristic of being *factive*; it therefore holds that if an individual knows that  $p$ , then  $p$ . Pryor's *prima facie* justification is modest such that it produces necessary but not sufficient conditions for knowledge. In Pryor's dogmatism, an experience as of  $p$  is always compatible with  $\sim p$ . Without increasing justification in order to reject  $\sim p$ , Pryor's theory would be violating this central principle of knowledge. Secondly, evidence can be used as a means to *decrease* justification, but it is unclear how evidence might be used to *increase* justification. Dogmatism as an epistemic theory implies the rejection of the SPJ for a reason: all lines of deductive inference using evidence will admittedly beg-the-question by relying on the perceptual faculty to support belief in perceptions.

The only obvious means by which Pryor seems to be able to increase justification is in recognizing the absence of defeaters. In the case described, it would simply mean not witnessing the sign that proclaimed "You are in Barn Façade County." It seems that such a standard is not fit for *increasing* justification but rather *maintaining* the level of justification. In other words, the absence of defeaters, or reasons to question our perceptual beliefs, cannot itself increase our justification for the endorsing *prima facie* justified beliefs as knowledge. Furthermore, it seems that one would be arguing that (1) the belief is not justified if there are defeaters, and (2) there are no defeaters, therefore (3) it is a justified belief. Such reasoning would rely on the affirmation of the consequent—resulting in an invalid conclusion.

In order to circumvent this problem, the most likely appeal is to inductive argument. To reason inductively one must rely on some sort of Uniformity Principle that would postulate that nature operates according to laws or regularities that do not suddenly break down (Williams 202). In more specific terms, induction would need to postulate that if all or most of the observed  $p$  has been *prima facie* justified (without defeaters), then all observed  $p$  are more fully justified. Induction here would extend justification on the basis of "compounded *prima facie* justification." If we amend the 'barn' case so that there are no defeaters, the driver would *increase* his justification (beyond *prima facie*) on the grounds that in all (or perhaps most) of the times he has seen a barn on the hillside, he has been *prima facie* justified, so his justification that there is a barn on the hillside this time is more fully justified.

If one uses pure induction to increase justification, all the typical criticisms ensue. In particular and most famously, Hume's criticism of the Uniformity Principle seems applicable; Hume held that inductive arguments proceed on the supposition that the future will conform to the past, which cannot itself be proved without begging-the-question (Hume 35-6). Holding that past *prima facie* justification has any bearing on a current perception is problematic. We might be able to intuitively accept the Uniformity Principle and induction in general, but there is still a problem for pure induction in this case. Inductive reasoning states that the repetition or compounding of one *level* of justification, namely *prima facie* justification, leads to the emergence of another *level* of justification, or greater justification. *Prima facie* justification and greater justification must be related in some way, but it seems that one would need to build on immediate justification to reach greater justification for perceptual belief *p*. While induction attempts to achieve greater justification by noting the frequency of *prima facie* justification, it seems the difference between levels is the *content* or *evidence* that supports each belief as belonging to its specific level. Therefore, it seems more beliefs must be added to alter the content of *prima facie* justified beliefs in order to bridge the evidential gap between immediate justification and greater justification, or knowledge.

Exploring the option of pure inductive reasoning has shown that there must be some means of adding to the content or evidence of the belief in order to increase its level of justification. But dogmatism awards its *prima facie* justification to perceptual beliefs on the basis of intuition about perception. These perceptual beliefs are therefore granted their low level of justification on intrinsic and internal grounds, not evidence or inferential argument. In order to increase levels of justification for these *prima facie* beliefs, it seems necessary that *prima facie* beliefs draw additional content or evidence *from one another*. In this way, the program I am proposing resembles the structure of classical coherentism with important deviations. In this system, each *prima facie* belief belongs to a system of logically related beliefs, each with its own *prima facie* justification. It is by this interrelation that *prima facie* justified beliefs *add* to their content and evidence, and can achieve levels of greater justification for ruling out counterclaims.

There are several key features to this coherent system that will make the nature of my claim clearer. In this system, each *prima facie* justified belief retains its own level of justification. Unlike classical coherentism, this dogmatist-coherent system derives its

justification from the justification of the constituent beliefs. It ought to be the ultimate goal of each justified belief  $p$  that it be able to reject its counterclaim  $\sim p$ , but this goal was not attainable under the simple dogmatist system. In this dogmatist-coherent system, the perceptual belief is still immediately justified as Pryor described, but its ability to reject its counterclaim is founded on its presence in a coherent system of *prima facie* justified perceptual beliefs.

The use of an analogy would be helpful in understanding the dogmatist-coherent system. In this analogy, each *prima facie* belief is a small nation with an army whose size represents the level of justification the belief has. Several nations with the same size of armies are joined in a confederation, or a coherent system. Each nation retains autonomy with respect to the use of its army, but has alliances (relations) with each other nation. And the confederation has little or no power without the agreement (or coherence) of the constituent nations. So, when nation XYZ is threatened by non-ally nation  $\sim XYZ$ , whose army is exactly the same size of nation XYZ, neither country can prevail. And while they co-exist, they are hostile toward one another. In order for nation XYZ to prevail over nation  $\sim XYZ$ , nation XYZ enlists the help of its allied partners in the confederation, whose collective army is far greater in size than any single nation. Because of its membership in the confederation and the confederation's agreement, nation XYZ is granted the power to destroy nation  $\sim XYZ$ .

There are points about the nature of the system that still need clarification. First, a trouble with the pure induction that was previously discussed was its assumption that compounding *prima facie* justification can lead to greater justification. It still remains true that several instances of the same *prima facie* justification do not produce greater levels of justification, but such justified beliefs, when placed in a system of relation to one another, *can* produce an increased level of justification for each belief. The coherent system is comprised of *prima facie* justified beliefs, but it avoids the problem that pure induction had because the dogmatist-coherent system groups *different* beliefs in relation. Pure induction did not produce any difference in content and evidence, but building a coherent system adds to the content of each belief by tying it to its proximal beliefs.

Second, it is important to consider the size of the coherent system; as many epistemologists point out, holism may present problems for coherence theory (Williams 118-9). But the dogmatist-coherent system is local in that it is responsive to a contextual setting. It may

be the case that *prima facie* justified perceptual belief  $p$  may have logical relations with similarly justified beliefs perceived *at the same time* as  $p$ . The dogmatist-coherent system is localized to the set of perceptual beliefs at time  $t$  in this case. It seems that if we accept something like the Uniformity Principle, previously justified beliefs might be added into the dogmatist-coherent system. But this contested principle is not necessary; the dogmatist-coherent system may very well just consist of *prima facie* justified beliefs concurrently perceived at time  $t$ . Therefore, the justification of each *prima facie* belief perceived at time  $t$  is increased in virtue of each concurrently perceived and justified belief's membership in a coherent system.

A third point that needs clarification is exactly why the dogmatist-coherent system can be said to rule out counterclaims, or in the analogy discussed, the reason nation XYZ can destroy  $\sim XYZ$ . In dogmatism, an experience as of  $p$  is fully compatible with  $\sim p$  as a result of the weak *prima facie* justification. I claim that the dogmatist-coherent can effectively reject  $\sim p$  in order to maintain the factiveness of knowledge. The task is to define exactly what in this system is able to reject  $\sim p$ . The dogmatist-coherent system is able to reject  $\sim p$  because belief  $p$  is granted greater justification in virtue of being present in a coherent system. The logical relationships between *prima facie* beliefs effectively rule out the possibility of counterclaim existing in the system insofar as it is coherent. But, it seems that  $\sim p$  (and the counterclaims of  $p$ 's proximal beliefs) might themselves form a coherent system. This is a common objection to coherence systems in general; they may have no real tie to reality. But the dogmatist-coherent picture can answer that objection quite easily. The counterclaims may form a coherent picture but will not be *prima facie* justified. So even if these beliefs fulfill the coherence condition, they failed to meet the dogmatist's condition.

A fourth point: the nature of coherence in this theory is such that membership in the system confers greater justification, but I do not believe justification can be achieved simply by coherence. Consider the case in which a *prima facie* belief does not cohere with the other concurrently justified beliefs an individual holds. In this case, and cases similar to it, I believe that *prima facie* justification has epistemic priority over coherence. This is because coherence itself does not say anything about reality and therefore, while a coherence system helps increase justification, it cannot do anything to *establish* justification. At the very most, the incoherence of *prima facie* justified beliefs ought to signal that the individual should be aware of potential

defeaters but in no way implies that there necessarily are defeaters. The coherence system in my conception derives its justification from the *prima facie* justification of each belief and confers greater justification on basis of several justified beliefs and logical relationships.

Throughout this discussion, I have addressed the differences between dogmatist-coherentism and classical coherentism implicitly. It seems helpful to summarize the ways in which the former differs from its classical basis. Unlike classical coherentism, (1) dogmatist-coherentism derives its justification from the constituent *prima facie* justified beliefs. Conversely, in classical coherentism, the system grants the constituent beliefs their justification. In a related way (2) dogmatist-coherentism does not place epistemic priority on coherence with the system; rather, a belief's individual justification must first establish justification. This is a protection to keep dogmatist-coherentism grounded in reality. Furthermore, when a belief is presented as incoherent, classical coherentism may dictate that the belief be rejected, but since beliefs in dogmatist-coherentism have their own justification, the system is more likely to be amended to account for new *prima facie* justified beliefs. According to some accounts of coherentism, the system of coherence is entirely holistic in that all beliefs must fit into a single coherent world-view (Williams 128). Dogmatist-coherentism is not radical in such a way; (3) it is open to localization such that only concurrently justified beliefs might be relevant to the system.

An important question that may arise in any coherence theory and must be clarified in dogmatist-coherentism is essentially how *prima facie* justified perceptual beliefs may stand in relation to one another. The way the dogmatist-coherent system will look depends on cognitive psychology's answer to how any particular person understands *prima facie* justification. Therefore, if one is justified in seeing a barn, the coherent system will look one way, but if one is instead justified in seeing a construction of wood with a roof and walls and so on, the coherent system will look another way (Pryor 569). But, the general principle is that elements of the perceptual beliefs will be related. It is not the case that there are always causal or explanatory relations between elements of *prima facie* justification. For instance, the shape of the shadow of the barn cast on the hillside is directly caused by the structure of the barn, and these two beliefs may causally relate to one another. But simply looking for causal relations will not develop a coherent system of perceptual beliefs; not all things in our perceptual world are related in such a

way. Therefore the notion of relations must be expanded to develop associations between greater numbers of perceptual beliefs. Some coherence relations are so-called positive constraints that include explanation, similarity, and association (Thagard and Verbeurgt 1-24). It is true that all these constraints do not produce the same level of connection between beliefs. However, they seem to be sufficient to gain entry into the coherent system and provide some means by which a *prima facie* justified belief might increase its justification.

When one considers what the dogmatist-coherent system will be, it seems clear that it will be responsive to perception. In one way, the design of the system will depend on the person and how he or she cognitively accepts *prima facie* justification. Those aged or specially trained might “see” things differently than a young inexperienced child might. Secondly, it has been shown that greater justification for claims of knowledge depends on the belief’s coherence with proximal beliefs. It goes without saying that this means there must be proximal perceptual beliefs in order for a *prima facie* belief to gain greater justification. Such proximal beliefs might be as simple as beliefs about the body and body parts in some cases. In other cases, proximal perceptual beliefs will be about other objects and surroundings.

Dogmatism provides an account of how perceptual beliefs might be justified immediately or *prima facie*. This account is compelling because it is essentially modest, but its modesty also leaves the theory lacking in its ability to account for the factiveness of knowledge. It is therefore necessary that a new program, namely dogmatist-coherence, replace pure dogmatism. Dogmatism gains a theory of increased justification while coherence theory gains grounding in reality. Such a combination of the dogmatist condition and coherence condition provides a means of explaining how a modest anti-skeptical program ought to proceed.

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