

## Reformulating the Two Aspects of Justification

Winner of the Gerritt and Edith Schipper Undergraduate Award  
for Outstanding Undergraduate Paper at the  
58<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Florida Philosophical Association

*Ryan Simonelli, New College of Florida*

In *Evidence and Inquiry*, Susan Haack presents a dual-aspect account of justification in which casual states and relations, as well as logical propositions and relations, play a necessary factor. In this paper, I reformulate how these two aspects fit together to form a comprehensive picture of justification. The reformulation is an account of what could be called *discursive justification*. I am not simply questioning how our beliefs are justified, but I am asking how we, the believers, could actively justify them in discursive practice. In other words, I am concerned with the question of how we could account for the fact that the things we claim to know are, in fact, true. Haack's account is an account of *evidence*, not justification. Though the two notions are very closely related, our approaches are quite different. Nevertheless, I will employ her state/content distinction. Furthermore, I will dedicate a significant portion of this paper to her crossword puzzle metaphor.

### Some New Distinctions

I want to implement the same state/content distinction that Haack employs. Yet, I think that a change in terminology can clear up some confusion. Haack distinguishes the “state and content senses of ‘belief.’” Moreover, she introduces the terms S-belief and C-belief to highlight a distinction between “someone believes something and what they believe.”<sup>1</sup> I think that talking about state and content beliefs as two senses of belief paints a misleading picture. It is more intuitive to speak of state and content *aspects* of belief, rather than speaking of state and content *senses* of belief. We can then say that all beliefs have both an S-aspect and a C-aspect. One aspect of a belief is the mental state that a believer is in, which is causally affected by events in the world and affects behavior. The other aspect is the content, which can be expressed propositionally and to which the belief-state can be said to represent or mark a commitment.

My approach to explaining the reformulated dual-aspect theory is to start from two kinds of *justification* one can offer for a belief: one that latches onto the propositional content of that belief

(the C-aspect), and another that references to the physical state of that belief (the S-aspect). Focusing on content and state *justification*, as opposed to *evidence*, allows me to focus on how our web of beliefs is justified without having to worry about additional evidential issues.

When asked to justify a claim or belief, the standard strategy is to show how that claim could be inferred from a different claim (or set of claims) that does not need to be justified (at least not in that present situation). This is a fairly standard context for justification, such as when scientific or political issues are called into question by another person. The basic structure is that I claim X, someone challenges X, and I go back to P, which is unchallenged at that point, and show how X can be inferred from P. For example, if I am defending a scientific claim, my task is to show how the claim in question can be inferred from experimental evidence or some other scientific claim that both my challenger and I agree upon. If I am successful in defending the inference, then my challenger must either challenge the untested nature of this second claim or rescind her challenge. In this example, what is questioned is the way the C-aspect of the belief stands in relation to the C-aspect of other related beliefs. The justification here is an appeal to the way the content of the belief in question stands in logical relation to other propositions we take to be true. Using the same terminology, we can call this kind of justification C-justification.

Alternately, instead of looking at the relation between the content of different beliefs, we can look at the situation in which a given belief is produced, the environment and the faculties producing it, and claim that the belief is justified if a true belief is likely to come about in such a situation. This sort of justification rests on the fact that we are physical organisms in a physical world and there are causal factors that go into belief-production. A certain state of the world will reliably cause a belief state with true content that goes along with that state. It is still the C-aspect of the belief that is being justified in this instance. Belief-states *themselves* do not get justified because it only makes sense to justify something with propositional form. However, in this sort of justification, the C-aspect of the belief is not connected to related contents, but is connected to its related S-aspect. This S-aspect is, in turn, causally connected to other states in the world. I call a justification of a belief that follows roughly along these lines an S-justification.

Traditionally, internalist theories of justification have dealt primarily with C-justifications. Classical foundationalist theories, traditionally identified with the Cartesian project, have started with belief-contents they took as indubitable and concerned themselves with how the contents of other beliefs could be inferred from those foundations. Coherentist theories have concerned themselves not with a one-way justification of contents, but rather with how a set of belief-contents fit together as a whole. The psychological or physiological S-aspect of the beliefs in question, as well as the causal story of belief-production, have traditionally not played a central role in internalist theories of justification.

On the other hand, S-justifications, which tie the truth of a belief with causal factors regarding its production and the environment where it is produced, are primarily what externalist theories of knowledge have latched onto. The most widely acknowledged of these externalist theories is Alvin Goldman's reliabilism. Yet, Alvin Plantinga's proper-function account of warrant is another good example. In what follows, I will use Plantinga's account as my model of S-justification. The general principle behind Plantinga's account can be put as follows: If you are designed such that in situation S you produce true belief P, then if you are in situation S and produce true belief P, and you are properly operating (if you are not broken in some relevant way), then you know P.<sup>2</sup> To play the role of S-justification, my view employs a naturalized version of Plantinga's account where "designed" can mean "designed by evolution," or, more centrally for the present view, *designed by a specific community through conditioning a language-learning to verbally respond in specific ways.*

Although an externalist element will be an important aspect of my account, my overall commitment is internalist in nature. In my account, a factor functions in justification if and only if the justifier is aware of it. Because my project attempts to show how we could discursively justify our own beliefs, this awareness is necessary. I am not trying to answer the question "what are the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge in general?" Although one could have knowledge even when she is not in a position to attest to having such knowledge herself, as externalist theories claim, I will not discuss such issues here. My account of justification, because it includes S-justification as a central aspect, will incorporate paradigmatically externalist factors, such as causal relations outside of a belief. In addition, I will tentatively adopt an account formulated as an externalist one (Plantinga's proper-functionalism). Yet, insofar as I incorporate it as an aspect of justification, the only externalism I employ here is an *internalized externalism.*

### **Indispensability and Interconnectedness of S-Justification and C-Justification**

I claim that S-justifications and C-justifications provide a satisfactory account of empirical justification only when they are taken together. First, why is S-justification indispensable? Could we not justify all of our beliefs on logical grounds, as opposed to appealing to the causal factors involved in the production of our beliefs? I think the answer is in the negative. I argue that a causal component is a necessary addition to the logical component of justification.

We are physical animals living in a physical world. We form beliefs in response to the physical events in the world that leave an imprint on our sense organs. Without explicit identification of the connection between our beliefs and the world, our epistemological picture would have no contact with the world. In other words, the events in the world affect us. Most relevant for my purposes, events in the world affect the state of our sensory systems. We have

evolved and been trained to form certain beliefs when certain events or objects, detectable by our sense organs, are present in the world. Our belief states – the S-aspect of our beliefs – are connected to the world. It is the S-aspect of belief alone that makes that connects agent and world. The causal S-justification that latches onto the physical state of the belief is what ultimately ties it to events in the world. It is this causal connection that a belief with the content “X” has with X. Such a connection ensures that the arising of a belief with content “X” is a good indicator that X occurred. Without this causal link, no epistemological picture can be complete. It would be a picture with floating beliefs that are unconnected to the world or the things our beliefs are about.<sup>3</sup>

If our S-justified beliefs can C-justify other beliefs, then our theoretical commitments are tied to the world. This is the first direction of justification, in which we move from state-justified beliefs to content-justifications. In the next section, I will explain, with reference to Quine, how this connection works. But, why do we need C-justifications in the first place? An S-justification is strong only if it is designed to produce the belief “P” in situation S, and “P” is true. We are conditioned to respond to stimuli by producing beliefs. Yet, this conditioning happens in accordance with what a linguistic community takes to be the right set of beliefs. Furthermore, there should be mechanisms to show that these beliefs are good ones. We cannot simply show that these are in fact the right beliefs by using more S-justifications; this requires an inferential C-justification.

The second direction, where the move is made from C-justified beliefs to new S-justifications, provides the way in which our knowledge grows and is revised. Our web of beliefs, tied together with broadly logical relations, form the backdrop of knowledge through which we can be conditioned (through ordinary language learning in the standard case or through special training in a scientific community) to reliably and noninferentially form new beliefs. New S-justified noninferential beliefs arise out of what were once inferential and contested C-justifications. In this way, our knowledge can grow. We also can *revise* our previously S-justified noninferential beliefs by subjecting them to C-justification. The rest of this paper will provide a sketch of this process.

### **The First Direction: State-Justified Beliefs to Content-Justifications**

How are our beliefs connected to the world? To answer this question we need a way to connect the propositional content of an observation or belief (the inferential force of an observation or belief) and the empirical state of that observation or belief (the causally affected aspect of an observation or belief). I will start with Quine’s later epistemological work and show how, in conjunction with a component of causal S-justification, S-justified beliefs, connected with the world, can inferentially C-justify theoretical beliefs and, in this way, connect theory to the world.

A “bridge” is not a particularly apt metaphor for my Quinian picture, specifically because it is a metaphor Quine aims to move away from.<sup>4</sup> Rather than a bridge, what we need is a *fulcrum* – a point in which an epistemologist can identify the transition from causal to inferential factors. Quine illustrates how such a state/content fulcrum can work in his discussion of observation sentences, occasion sentences which all members of a linguistic community agree with when witnessing an occasion. If we think of observation sentences in terms of holophrastic noise, as opposed to thinking of them in terms of the meaning, we can see them as sentences we are conditioned to assent outright when certain sensory stimulation is present. Thus, observation sentences are casually and reliably connected to physical events in the world. However, if we think of observation sentences term by term, they connect logically to theories. For this reason, Quine calls observation sentences “Janus-faced.”<sup>5</sup>

It may seem the Quinian strategy of focusing on linguistic items and their connection to purely physiological states precludes any serious discussion of a role for experience or perception to play in justification. If that is the case, then Quine’s method is far removed from Haack’s. However, I do not think it need be. Placing observation sentences in the role of the state/content fulcrum, as opposed to playing the role of a noninferential experiential/perceptual state or belief, is not epistemologically essential. What is essential is not that one can make explicit inferences to the fulcrum (and can be causally connected directly to the world), but that it is something *from which* one can make an explicit inference. This is why I have described it as a fulcrum; it is a point that marks the transfer from causal to logical factors.

Quine explicitly avoids a serious discussion of conscious experience or experiential beliefs because he is concerned that this sort of “experience” is in some sense non-naturalistic. His insistence on describing “experiences” physiologically, he tells us, “was of a piece with [his] naturalism, [his] rejection of a first philosophy underlying science.”<sup>6</sup> But, it seems to be unrepresentative of psychology to think that perceptual experience is not an aspect of scientific theory. Tests conducted in cognitive psychology provide legitimate scientific insight into the way we experience the world, the heuristics that factor into our everyday experience, and how we can manipulate experience. Considering how experience is treated in psychology, it is not clear that there is no place for experience in the sciences. It may be the case that it can be included in a naturalistic metaphysics.<sup>7</sup> I think that conscious experience is too central to the way we think about how our beliefs are justified to leave out of an epistemological account. Our explicitly conscious experiential states seem to be the paradigm case of non-inferential knowledge.<sup>8</sup> I think this kind of experience, as opposed to an observation sentence, can serve as a commonsensical epistemological fulcrum.

Keeping Quine's position in mind, I want to be very careful about what I mean by “experience.” I do not mean something similar to an array of uninterpreted “qualia” present to our

consciousness. In the sense I am using it, the contents of experience are fully theory-laden. Our experience consists of all the objects and events we see in the world. We experience things such as tables and chairs and, if we have enough training, even things like viruses and electrons. In parallel to Haack, I maintain that perception is “of things and events around one, not of sense-data, color patches, or whatever. But at the same time it allows for the pervasive interpenetration of background beliefs into our beliefs about what we see, hear, etc.”<sup>9</sup> When Quine states, “[o]ur typical sentences are about bodies and substances, assumed or known in varying degrees, out in the world. Typically they are not about sense data or experiences,”<sup>10</sup> he is certainly not thinking of the sort of experience that Haack and I endorse. If the content of our experience *includes* the “bodies and substances, assumed or known in varying degrees” and correspond with observation sentences, it seems that experience could play a central role in a Quinian account.

A certain experiential state is both a physical and psychological state that can be causally connected directly to sensory or neural stimulation and to objects in the world. An experiential state also has content that can be articulated in terms of a set of observation sentences – drawing my account even closer to Quine’s. Because of these two aspects, experience is just as “Janus-faced” as Quine’s observation sentences. If we think of the content of experience as connected to *psychological states*, we can look at the causal relations between experiential states and the objects in the world, and causally S-justify their truthfulness. If we think of how the content of an experiential state is expressed propositionally, we can treat it as a set of propositions (a set of observation sentences) that can factor into logical C-justifications.<sup>11</sup>

A causal S-justification roots experiential content causally to the world. The causal path we recognize in our justifications as connecting the propositional content *X* with the event *Y*, moves from *X*, the event happening, through the stimulation of the sensory receptors (as Quine rightly notes), to the experiential state *X*. Without an S-justification of the truthfulness of the content of an experiential state, we have no reason to rely on experience to justify our inferences. Inferential justification has to stop somewhere. Moreover, it must make a connection to the world where it stops. If we stop at experience (which seems like a good place to stop as the paradigm case of non-inferential knowledge), we need to put the content of experience in truthful connection with the world *via* S-justification. Since externalist justifications have addressed the issue of S-justification in detail, we can adopt an already formulated externalist account to play the role of S-justification. Quine does not do this, but, since sophisticated externalist accounts are already formulated, employing one would be a good addition to the present view. An in-depth attempt to incorporate a detailed account of S-justification into the picture I am sketching is beyond the scope of this paper, but if my strategy were to be pursued further, it would be necessary to incorporate such an account.

### The Second Direction: Content-Justified Beliefs to State-Justification

In Plantinga's account of proper function, an essential element is that the design of a given function is a *good one*. That is, the cognitive faculties have to have been designed, and designed well, to produce *true* beliefs. On a naturalized account, this is a large issue that must be dealt with. An S-justification can only do justifying work if the justifier knows that the causal relations involved lead to *truth*. Yet, if experience provides the basis for our inferences, *how can we have the knowledge necessary to S-justify them?* It seems like we have stepped right back into the epistemic regress problem that Plantinga's account strives to avoid. However, we have not, because of the second direction of justification.

Even though our S-justified noninferential beliefs ground us to the world, this does not mean they cannot be tested against our logical web of beliefs. Instead, if we do this, we need a different foothold. An observational belief can be called into question on logical grounds, requiring a C-justification rather than its usual S-justification, if different beliefs in the web call for it to be challenged. Consider a Kuhnian revolution in which basic observational beliefs must change when a set of background beliefs change. This encourages Kuhn to claim that the basic experience of scientists changes with paradigm shifts.<sup>12</sup> Even if we take experience as the grounding aspect of our epistemology, this is not necessarily problematic; it merely means that scientists cannot use *that* observational belief as a grounding foothold at that time. This is exactly the point Wilfrid Sellars makes when he states, “[f]or empirical knowledge, like its sophisticated extension, science, is rational, not because it has a *foundation*, but because it is a self-correcting enterprise which can put *any* claim in jeopardy, though not *all* at once.”<sup>13</sup> The ground of justification is not a “foundation” that gives us firm ground for our inferences; it only provides the best conjunction of security and informativity with respect to our belief-structure.

Our experience is conditioned to fit with the best set of beliefs we have at the moment—the set of beliefs which we think are most likely to be true. If we have reason to change our beliefs, we can learn to see the world differently and, though at first correct observation may require some thought and inference, eventually our immediate experience is filtered through the correct set of beliefs. Imagine a child who learns the word “fish” and recognizes any swimming animal with flippers as a fish. She then sees a whale and calls it “fish” and, though this recognition may have corresponded to some set of beliefs at some point in history (perhaps before sufficiently developed biology), the best set of beliefs, the one most internally and externally consistent, classifies this animal as a whale. Though it may take some extra thought at first, eventually the agent's experience becomes conditioned (with the help of her parents) to this set of beliefs. Our experience gets no more basic than this sort of experience, which includes things like “fish,” and there is no

epistemological foundation more theory-neutral than our everyday basic experience. This is unproblematic insofar as we note that experience is not independent of our understanding of the world. The way we experience the world constantly reflects a more comprehensive and empirically adequate set of beliefs.

As a consequence of using C-justification to revise which beliefs are to be S-justified, C-justifications expand the scope of our S-justified noninferential beliefs. The complexity of our experience increases as we acquire a new theoretical understanding of the world. What we once inferred from experience, formed by a less theoretical worldview, now provides the new bundle of background beliefs which organize our experience of the world. The sort of theoretical commitments that were once at the forefront of research now form the filter through which one experiences the world and forms new theoretical commitments.

#### **Appendix: An Addition to a Metaphor**

Haack's key metaphor in articulating her foundherentist position is a crossword puzzle. The entries depend on clues (experiential evidence), how well they fit together with other entries (background beliefs), and how secure those entries are.<sup>14</sup> As useful as this metaphor is, it only illuminates the justification of our beliefs which latch onto their C-aspect. Haack would probably agree that the crossword analogy is just an analogy. It serves to point us in the right direction, but does not give us a complete picture of knowledge. Yet, I think the analogy can be extended to yield very important results if we think more closely about what is meant by "clues." I argue that clues are not the numbered ink markings on the page themselves, but the *meanings* of those markings. We can only know the clues if we know how to read the marks on the page.

In a modified version of the metaphor, the ink markings that compose the clues on the page are analogous to certain physical events in the world that bears causal relations to a given experience. The meanings of the clues, what the subject understands when she knows the language in which the crossword puzzle is written, is analogous to the experience she has when such physical events occur (such as undergoing a certain sensory stimulation). If the clues of the crossword puzzle are written in Russian (assuming a non-Russian speaker), then the clues will be of little help. In one sense, it may seem that the speaker has the same clues as a native Russian speaker (in that she observes the same ink markings). There is another sense in which she does not really *get* the clues, because she cannot grasp their meaning. Similarly, if I receive the sensory stimulation of an electron interference pattern through spectroscopy image, I will have the same sensory stimulation as a scientist trained to look at such images. Yet, since I do not have the training required to understand those images, I will not have the same experience. A scientist's experiential belief, such as "the electrons are doing such and



such,” will be relevant to making a theoretical conclusion. In contrast, my experiential belief, which will be limited to saying something like “there are blue splotches,” will not be theoretically relevant.

To repeat, the ink markings that compose the clues are analogous to the sensory stimulation that arises under certain physical conditions or any other physical state to which we causally tie our experience to the world. The clues one can get if she knows how to read the ink markings are analogous to experiential states that are triggered by certain sensory stimulation, the content of which can serve as a basis for making theoretical inferences. The reading of a certain clue is S-justified by language learning, and the belief that a certain entry is correct is C-justified, both by inference from the clue and coherence with other entries. Suppose the crossword we are solving is a straightforward one where the clues are not tricks of some sort. The implicit assumption that the solver has faculties that allow her to reliably draw the clue from the marking on the page underlies this sort of puzzle solving. To the question, “How do you know those marks mean what you think they do?” the answer would be “because I know English.”

In Haack’s original formulation, she states, “the clues don’t depend on the entries.”<sup>15</sup> However, in my reformulation of the metaphor, where the clues are the *meanings* gleaned from reading the ink markings on the page, this is a serious possibility; it is a possibility which provides an analogue to the sort of top-down experiential change over time characteristic of our experience. Consider the following example:

ACROSS

2 A bass is mightier than this.

4 A small dog's bark

DOWN

1 A quarterback's signal

3 A jewel

5 A mathematician's pastry

Suppose that one is trying to answer three down. After repeated failures to find an entry that fits the clue, the spaces, and the “T” at the beginning and “Y” at the end, the puzzle-solver must

reconsider her intersecting beliefs. She considers words that do not fit the relevant constraints, and our puzzle-solver is so convinced that the answer to three down is RUBY, she writes RUBY lightly in pencil, erasing the entry TROUT (though she had been pretty certain of it, given that it fit with HUT and seemed to fit with the clue quite well). She still holds that RUBY could be wrong, and TROUT could be right, but decides to try this strategy for the time being.

She tries to think of other types of common small fish that end in “R” but has no success. After a while of frustrated thinking, she realizes that “bass” is not only a type of fish, but, pronounced differently, it is also a classification for voice. She realizes she had gleaned the wrong meaning from the clue and, now thinking of it with this meaning in mind, she quickly fills in TENOR for two across, which has the merits of fitting with all of the clues. In this example, the markings on the page do not change, but the reading of them does. It is the reading of the markings, not the markings themselves, which play a factor in evaluating the entries.

### Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> Susan Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1993) 118.

<sup>2</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> At least for beliefs about contingent matters. I withhold judgment about what we could say in regards to a priori knowledge.

<sup>4</sup> W. V. Quine, “In Praise of Observations Sentences,” *The Journal of Philosophy* (1993): 110.

<sup>5</sup> Quine, “In Praise of Observation Sentences,” 109.

<sup>6</sup> W.V. Quine, *Theories and Things* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1981) 40.

<sup>7</sup> This is a rather hefty point and making a convincing case for it requires more space than presently available.

<sup>8</sup> For my present purposes, I do not intend to make a strong distinction between “experiential state” and “experiential belief.” The reason for this is that I do not think it is a particularly easy distinction to make; both “experiential belief” and “experiential state” can serve the same function in my account.

<sup>9</sup> Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry*, 158.

<sup>10</sup> Quine, *Theories and Things*, 40.

<sup>11</sup> If one is skeptical that the content of experience can be expressed propositionally, it must be noted that if we are saying that experience is something which one can use as the basis of inference, there must be some way in which we can say this about its content. Since it seems like we infer

---

from our experience all the time, it seems that there must be some way in which we can express its content propositionally.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1962).

<sup>13</sup> Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (Harvard UP, 1997) 78.

<sup>14</sup> Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry*, 126.

<sup>15</sup> Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry*, 126.

### **Bibliography**

Haack, Susan. *Evidence and Inquiry*. New York: Prometheus Books, 1993.

Kuhn, Thomas. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1962.

Plantinga, Alvin. *Warrant and Proper Function*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993.

Quine, W.V.O. "In Praise of Observation Sentences." *The Journal of Philosophy* 60.3 (1993): 107-116.

Quine, W.V.O. *Theories and Things*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1981.

Sellars, Wilfrid. *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997.