Perceptual Justification and the Cartesian Theater

Abstract. According to a traditional Cartesian epistemology of perception, perception does not provide one with direct knowledge of the external world. Instead, when you look out to see a red wall, what you learn first is not a fact about the color of the wall—i.e., that it is red—but instead a fact about your own visual experience—i.e., that the wall looks red to you. If you are to justifiably believe that the wall is red, you must be in a position to justifiably infer this conclusion about the external world from known premises about your own visual experience. Recent anti-Cartesian theorists have pushed back against this traditional model, claiming that the epistemic significance of having a perceptual experience is not exhausted by what can be inferred from the fact that you have the experience. After clarifying an underappreciated commitment of Cartesian accounts and some key motivations for resisting it, I argue that any anti-Cartesian account strong enough to take advantage of these motivations must license a way of updating one’s beliefs in response to anticipated experiences that seems diachronically irrational. To avoid this implausible result, the anti-Cartesian must choose between licensing an implausible kind of epistemic chauvinism, or else claiming that merely reflecting on one’s experiences can defeat the perceptual justification that they otherwise provide. This leaves us with a puzzle: Although there are powerful motivations for rejecting Cartesianism, any view that avails itself of them faces serious problems of its own.

1. Background

According to a traditional Cartesian epistemology of perception, perception does not provide one with direct knowledge of the external world. Instead, when you look out to see a red wall, what you learn first is not a fact about the color of the wall—i.e., that it is red—but instead a fact about your own visual experience—i.e., that the wall looks red to you. If you are to know or to justifiably believe that the wall is red, then you must be in a position to justifiably infer this conclusion about the external world from known premises about your own visual experience.

The Cartesian account is sometimes accused of treating ordinary perception on the model of a “Cartesian theater,” with perceptual experiences playing the role of mere images displayed before an internal spectator. As I will explain, I think there is some truth to the accusation. What is less clear to me is how this seemingly unappealing model of perceptual justification can be avoided. For even though there are powerful motivations for rejecting the Cartesian account, any alternative view strong enough to appeal to these motivations faces serious problems of its own. My aim in what follows is to explain an underappreciated commitment of the Cartesian account, some motivations for resisting the account, and the problem that confronts any view that takes advantage of these motivations.

The underappreciated commitment of the Cartesian account concerns the following question: Why does what you are justified in believing depend on your perceptual experiences, while what I am justified in believing depends on my perceptual experiences? The Cartesian, I will claim, is committed to the following answer: It is because you know
what your own experiences are, but you typically do not know what mine are (and vice versa for me). And this answer commits the Cartesian to claiming that, to whatever extent you do happen to know what my perceptual experiences are, my experiences will justify your beliefs in the same way and to the same degree that your own experiences do. After explaining all of this in Sections 2 and 3 below, I will go on in Section 4 to discuss the problem facing accounts of perceptual justification that follow me in rejecting these Cartesian claims.

But first, I want to consider briefly the more familiar landscape of issues surrounding the Cartesian epistemology of perception. We can start with a closer look at the epistemic situation of one who really is in a Cartesian theater:

\[ \text{(CARTESSIAN THEATER)} \] You find yourself in a windowless room, which is empty aside from a closed-circuit TV. The TV is hooked up to a camera that is located elsewhere, where it faces a wall of an unknown color. When the TV is switched on, it displays an image of a red wall. You have strong reason to believe that the images on the TV are a reliable guide to the color of the wall, and as a matter of fact the images are both accurate and reliably generated.

It should be uncontroversial that you are justified in believing that the wall is red in this example. And in broad outline, it should also uncontroversial why you are justified. Your only access to the color of the wall comes from the images that you see on your TV screen. So you are justified in believing that the wall is red only because you are in a position to justifiably infer that the wall is red from what you know about these images.\(^1\) This of course does not mean that you must consciously go through such an inference. But it plausibly does mean that you must be in a position justifiably to do so. Put another way, your knowledge that there is a red image on the TV screen must give you inferential justification to believe that the wall is red.

Since you must be in a position to justifiably infer the color of the wall from known premises about the images on your TV screen, this lends credibility to some further familiar claims. First, it is plausible that you still would have been justified in believing that the wall is red even if the images on your TV had been inaccurate, and even if the process that generated them had been objectively unreliable. For you would have the same evidence either way. Second, it is plausible that you would not have been justified in believing that the wall is red if you had lacked evidence supporting the reliability of the images on the TV screen. For it is plausible that one cannot justifiably infer from premises about the images to conclusions about the wall unless one has auxiliary evidence supporting that the former is a reliable guide to the latter.

To be sure, both of these further claims are controversial. Some reliabilists about inferential justification, for example, would deny them both. I think we should accept both of these claims, as I have argued elsewhere.\(^2\) But instead of discussing these claims in more detail here, I want to instead examine a prominent way of resisting a traditional Cartesian

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\(^1\) For simplicity, I ignore the view that by looking at the images, one can see the wall itself. See (Briscoe, MS Sec. 5) for critical discussion of a view like this. Those sympathetic to such a view could substitute an example where you receive non-imagistic information about the color of a wall.

\(^2\) See especially (Barnett, 2014) and (Barnett, 2015).
epistemology of perception that is willing to grant these claims about Cartesian theaters, and that instead denies that ordinary perception puts us in a comparable situation.

Consider a corresponding case of ordinary visual perception:

(VISUAL PERCEPTION) You look at a wall, and see that it is red. You have strong reason to believe that your visual experiences are reliable.

Although some radical skeptics might deny that it is possible to have strong reason to believe that one's visual experiences are reliable in the first place, it should be uncontroversial that if the VISUAL PERCEPTION case is so much as possible, then in it you are justified in believing that the wall is red. What is controversial is how to explain why you is justified.

I take the central thrust of the Cartesian explanation to be this. When you look at a red wall, what you learn first is a fact about your own mind; the fact that you are having an experience as of a red wall (henceforth: a reddish experience). This reddish experience itself does not give you justification to believe that the wall is red, anymore than a red image on a TV screen does. Instead, it is your knowledge that you have this experience which puts you in a position to justifiably infer that the wall is red, just as you might justifiably infer this from your knowledge that there is a red image on a TV screen.

If we accept this Cartesian account of why you are justified (and accept the plausible but controversial further claims about Cartesian theaters above), then this will leave us with two familiar corollaries. The first is:

(PERCEPTUAL INTERNALISM) Genuinely perceiving never gives one stronger (or weaker) justification for one's perceptual beliefs than merely seeming to perceive does.

The idea behind PERCEPTUAL INTERNALISM is that someone who is hallucinating, or who otherwise has the same experiences as a genuine perceiver, is as justified in her perceptual beliefs as the genuine perceiver is. This is plausibly a consequence of the Cartesian account because both the perceiver and the hallucinator will be in the position of having to infer conclusions about the external world from the same body of evidence.

The second corollary is:

(PERCEPTUAL INCREDULISM) One is never justified in believing what one perceives unless one has independent evidence that one's perceptual experiences are reliable.

This is plausibly a consequence of the Cartesian account because, as we have just seen, it is natural to think that one would need a corresponding kind of independent evidence in order to justifiably infer that the wall is red from one's knowledge that there is a red image on a TV screen. If the Cartesian is right that ordinary perception requires one to make inferences in a corresponding way from knowledge of one's experiences, then this plausibly will require corresponding independent evidence supporting the reliability of perception. (See Section 3.1 below for more on this controversial matter.)

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3 A disjunctivist can read my talk of having a reddish experience as shorthand for a disjunction, such that an agent has a reddish experience if she either sees a red wall or (merely) seems to see a red wall.
Recent anti-Cartesian theorists, however, have pushed back against this traditional account. These anti-Cartesians do not merely make the psychological claim that we do not go around introspecting our experiences and drawing inferences from the introspected premises. Instead, they think that the epistemology of perception is anti-Cartesian in an even deeper sense. In their view, your knowledge of your own experiences is not what justifies perceptual beliefs. Instead, certain kinds of perceptual states do some positive epistemic work of their own, and contribute to your perceptual justification in a way that is not exhausted by whatever inferences you can draw from your knowledge of those experiences.

Very often, these opponents of Cartesianism also seek to reject one or both of Cartesianism’s familiar corollaries. Take, for example, dogmatists and phenomenal conservatives. These anti-Cartesians are motivated in part by a desire to reject PERCEPTUAL INCREDULISM, which they see as leading to an untenable skepticism about perception. Roughly speaking, their idea is that because one’s perceptual experiences themselves can provide a distinctive form of immediate justification not acknowledged by the Cartesian model, they can give you stronger justification for your perceptual beliefs than what the Cartesian model predicts. We will consider how this might anti-Cartesians an anti-skeptical advantage over Cartesianism in Section 3.1 below.

Other anti-Cartesians, such as epistemological disjunctivists, go even further in their rejection of the traditional Cartesian account, and deny that the perceptual states most directly involved in perceptual justification are experiences. They claim instead that the relevant perceptual states are factive states like seeing. Because these factive states are absent in cases of hallucination, these anti-Cartesians reject not only PERCEPTUAL INCREDULISM but PERCEPTUAL INTERNALISM as well.

Although externalist versions of anti-Cartesianism like disjunctivism are important, our discussion will focus more directly on internalist versions. This is because the contrast with Cartesianism that will be of greatest concern to us arises even without rejecting the Cartesian view that the perceptual states most directly involved in perceptual justification are (non-factive) experiences. Even so, much of what I will say should extend to externalist anti-Cartesian views as well. And I will highlight a few places where the differences between internalist and externalist forms of anti-Cartesianism are important.

It is important that even though both of these familiar forms of anti-Cartesianism reject PERCEPTUAL INCREDULISM, that is not something that I build into the view. Instead, anti-Cartesianism as I define it is a view about the explanation of perceptual justification. It says that perceptual states themselves can justify beliefs, and that their involvement in the justification of one’s beliefs need not always consist in their serving as evidence from which...
the beliefs are inferred. As we go on, I will have more to say about the additional commitments I think the anti-Cartesian ought to take on, including PERCEPTUAL INCREDULISM. But for now, I define anti-Cartesianism in a minimal way, so that I must work to explain why it should take the more specific form I favor.

2. Anti-Cartesianism and Perceptual Partiality

It is time to consider an important point of contrast between Cartesianism and anti-Cartesianism, which in my view has been underappreciated. The contrast concerns how each view explains the distinctive epistemic significance of one’s own experiences. Both views can accept the datum that the justification of one’s beliefs depends more directly on one’s own experiences than it does on another person’s. But they explain this datum in different ways. The Cartesian’s explanation, I will claim, commits the Cartesian to a principle that I will call PERCEPTUAL IMPARTIALITY. And as I go on to explain in Section 3.1, the Cartesian’s commitment to the more familiar PERCEPTUAL INCREDULISM is best seen as a byproduct of her prior commitment to PERCEPTUAL IMPARTIALITY.

We can start by again comparing a pair of examples, one involving a Cartesian theater, and the other involving ordinary perception. Here is the first:

(TWO SPECTATORS) You are in a windowless room, which is empty aside from a closed-circuit TV. The TV is hooked up to a camera that is located elsewhere, where it faces a wall of an unknown color. Another camera also faces the same wall. This camera is connected to a different closed-circuit TV, which sits in a different windowless room, which is occupied by a different person, who we will call ‘Other’. Your evidence concerning the reliability of your own and Other’s TVs are on a par, in the sense that for any evidence you have concerning your own, you have corresponding evidence concerning Other’s. At the moment, both TVs are turned off. But pretty soon, exactly one of the TVs will be turned on. You know all of this.

Let’s consider some claims about this example that should be uncontroversial. The first is that there is an asymmetry between the epistemic significance for you of images on your TV screen and of images on Other’s. In particular, if your TV screen is the one that is turned on, and if it displays an image of a red wall, then this can result in your having some justification to believe that the wall is red. How much justification it gives you will depend on your background evidence concerning factors like the reliability of the images on your TV. But regardless of how these details of the example are filled in, the important point is that the images on your TV screen have the potential to affect your justification to believe that the wall is red. If instead Other’s TV is turned on, and Other’s TV displays an image of a red wall, then this will not result in your having any reason to believe that the wall is red. In short, the images on your TV screen can affect your justification for believing the wall is red in a way that the images on Other’s TV do not. And this is true even though your evidence concerning the reliability of Other’s TV is on a par with your evidence concerning your own. A second uncontroversial claim concerns the explanation of this asymmetry. The explanation is simply that you are in a position to know what images are displayed on

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6 Of course, this does not mean denying that experiences never serve as evidence. When looking at an eye chart, for example, your knowledge that you have an experience as of a blurry image might give you inferential justification to believe that you need glasses. What the anti-Cartesian denies is that this is how things work in ordinary cases of perceptual knowledge.
your TV screen—you can see them!—but you are in no position to know what is displayed on Other's TV screen. Because you could know what you images are on your TV, you could be in a position to infer conclusions about the color of the wall from them. But you are in no position to infer conclusions from the images on Other's TV, for the simple reason that you would not know what they are. Thus the asymmetry in the epistemic significance of the images is explained by an asymmetry in access; the images on your TV screen affect what you are justified in believing simply because you are in a position to know what they are.

This explanation has some important consequences for a situation in which you are able to learn about the images on Other's TV screen in some way other than by seeing—for example, where Other is able to tell you what he sees on his TV screen. The consequence is that if this other way of knowing about Other's images confers knowledge with the same degree of epistemic security that one gets by seeing, then it would give you just as much justification to believe that the wall is red as you get from seeing the same images on your own TV screen. And moreover, even if your alternative way of accessing Other's TV screen confers less secure knowledge than seeing does, it will give you less justification to believe the wall is red only to the extent that your knowledge of the images on his TV screen is less secure.7

These consequences follow because by stipulation you have no evidence supporting the reliability of your TV over Other's. If you nevertheless received stronger justification from seeing your own TV's images, this would mean that you could be justified in placing greater confidence in them than in Other's (e.g., by believing what you see on your TV while holding back from believing what you know is displayed on Other's).8 But that would amount to a kind of irrational chauvinism. For you would be counting the images on your TV as stronger evidence of the truth, simply because that TV is yours.

It is plausible that everyone should accept these claims about Cartesian theaters. But turn now to the second example involving ordinary perception, over which Cartesian and anti-Cartesian views conflict:

(TWO PERCEIVERS) You and Other are facing a wall of an unknown color. Your evidence concerning the reliability of your own and Other's visual faculties are on a par, in the sense that for any evidence you have concerning your own, you have corresponding evidence concerning Other's. You are both wearing blindfolds, but pretty soon, exactly one of you will have his or her blindfold removed. You know all of this.

It should be uncontroversial that if you go on to have your blindfold removed, and if you have a reddish experience, then this can give you some reason to believe that the wall is red. Whether it gives you sufficient reason to justify belief that the wall is red will depend on your background evidence about factors like the reliability of your vision. But the important point for now is simply that your experiences can have a positive epistemic impact on your justification to believe that the wall is red. If instead it is Other's blindfold that is removed, and if Other is the one who has the reddish experience, then this will not give you any reason to believe that the wall is red. And this remains true even though your evidence concerning Other's visual reliability is entirely on a par with evidence about your own. Thus

7 For more on what this amounts to, see Section 4.1 below.
8 For an explanation of why, see the discussion of JUSTIFICATION GIVES CONFIDENCE in Section 4 below.
it should be uncontroversial that your own experience can asymmetrically affect what you are justified in believing in this way. What Cartesians and anti-Cartesians disagree about is the explanation of this asymmetry.

The Cartesian about perception must explain this asymmetry in the same way that we explain the corresponding asymmetry in TWO SPEC TATORS. That is, the Cartesian must say that your perceptual experiences asymmetrically affect your justification simply because you have a special kind of access to facts about your experiences. In TWO SPEC TATORS, you know about the images on your TV screen because you can see them, while in TWO PERCEIVERS, you know about your own experiences not by seeing but instead in a special introspective way. But despite this difference, the Cartesian thinks that these cases have in common that the asymmetry in epistemic significance is explained by an asymmetry in access. This is because the Cartesian thinks that the contribution made to one’s perceptual justification by perceptual experience is exhausted by one’s knowledge of those experiences.

Notice some apparent consequences of the Cartesian explanation. Since the Cartesian explains the epistemic asymmetry by an asymmetry in access, the Cartesian is committed to granting that if you somehow could have equally secure access to what Other’s visual experiences are, this would give you the same degree of justification to believe that the wall is red as you get from your own experiences. And even if it is not possible for you to have equally secure access to Other’s experiences as you have to your own, it remains true that you get less justification from knowledge of Other’s experiences only to the extent that your access to those experiences is less secure.

These consequences follow from the Cartesian explanation because by stipulation you have no evidence supporting the reliability of your experiences over Other’s. For this reason, it would seem irrationally chauvinistic to count your own experiences as stronger evidence of the truth, by placing greater confidence in any conclusions you might infer from what you know about them. The Cartesian thus must accept these consequences, on pain of licensing irrational chauvinism as justified.

In Section 1 above, we noted two familiar corollaries of Cartesianism, PERCEPTUAL INCREDULISM and PERCEPTUAL INCREDULISM. We are now ready to introduce a less familiar, though in my view no less important, third corollary:

(PERCEPTUAL IMPARTIALITY) Having a perceptual experience can never give you substantially stronger justification for a perceptual belief than you would get from mere knowledge that another person has had such an experience.

Note that PERCEPTUAL IMPARTIALITY says that you cannot receive substantially stronger justification from your own experiences than you would get from knowledge of another person’s. For a Cartesian can plausibly claim that your own experiences give you slightly stronger justification, for the simple reason that that you plausibly never can be quite as certain of another person’s experiences as you are of your own. What the Cartesian seems unable to accept is that even to the extent that you can know another person’s experiences, this knowledge still does not confer the same degree of justification as you get from your own experiences. For again, it would seem irrationally chauvinistic to count one’s own experiences as stronger evidence of the truth than another person’s experiences, unless you

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9 But see Section 4.2 below, including footnote 22, for one way the Cartesian might try to deflect this charge of chauvinism.
have some evidence suggesting that your experiences really do amount to more reliable evidence.

Turn now to the anti-Cartesian, who claims that your merely having a reddish experience can give you justification to believe that the wall is red, in a way that is not fully accounted for by your knowledge of those experiences. Now the anti-Cartesian does not deny that you do have a special way of knowing your own experiences. It is obvious that you do! What the anti-Cartesian denies is that this asymmetry in knowledge fully explains why your own experiences have an epistemic significance for you that Other’s do not have. Nor does the anti-Cartesian need to deny that your knowledge of your own reddish experience can give you even more justification to believe that the wall is red, in addition to what you get just by having the experience—although some anti-Cartesians might wish to deny this. What the anti-Cartesian says is simply that having a reddish experience gives you some justification all on its own.

The Cartesian and anti-Cartesian thus disagree in the first instance about why your perceptual beliefs are justified, in cases where they are justified. But in disagreeing with the Cartesian’s account of why perceptual beliefs are justified, the anti-Cartesian opens the door for sometimes disagreeing with the Cartesian about whether your perceptual beliefs are justified in particular cases. In particular, it allows the anti-Cartesian to hold that there are cases where having a reddish experience can give you substantially stronger justification for a perceptual belief than you would get from merely knowing that Other has had such an experience. In other words, it allows the anti-Cartesian to deny PERCEPTUAL IMPARTIALITY, and accept:

\[
\text{(PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY) Having a perceptual experience can sometimes give you substantially stronger justification for a perceptual belief than you would get from mere knowledge that another person has had such an experience.}
\]

We have already seen that the Cartesian must deny a thesis like this, on pain of licensing an irrational form of chauvinism as justified. But perhaps it might seem that any view accepting PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY, including an anti-Cartesian one, must be guilty of the same kind of chauvinism. If I believe what I seem to see, but am less willing to believe what I know that you seem to see, aren’t I in an important sense counting my own experience as stronger evidence than yours? I think this is not so obvious.

Consider first what an externalist anti-Cartesian might say to deflect the charge of chauvinism. She might say that what you are justified in believing depends on the available evidence, which includes all of the facts that you know. When you know that some other person has a reddish experience, then the fact that he has this experience is included in your available evidence. And perhaps when you yourself see a red wall, you might also know that you have a reddish experience, and hence have this fact included in your available evidence. It indeed would be irrationally chauvinistic to count this bit of the available evidence as stronger evidence of the truth than the fact that another person has a similar experience. But that kind of chauvinism need not be involved in believing what you see. For when you see that the wall is red, the fact that the wall is red also is included in your available evidence. And there is nothing chauvinistic about taking this fact to better support that the wall is red than any facts about an agent’s experiences do.

I think the internalist anti-Cartesian has a similar way of deflecting the charge of chauvinism. For she might say that what you are justified in believing depends upon the
apparent evidence, which includes not only the facts that you know, but also the other things that appear to be facts from your point of view. When you know that another person seems to see a red wall, this fact about his experience is included in your apparent evidence. But when you yourself seem to see a red wall, your apparent evidence includes the apparent fact that the wall is red. Again, there is nothing chauvinistic about counting this apparent fact as stronger evidence that the wall is red than apparent facts that merely concern a given person's experiences.10

Of course, it might still be worried that these sorts of moves do not really avoid commitment to an implausible chauvinism, at least for reflective perceivers like us. For we are in a position to reflect on our own experiences, and recognize that they are as capable of error as anyone else's. And even if we do not infer conclusions about the world from premises about those experiences, as the Cartesian alleges, there presumably is some further sense in which we only hold the perceptual beliefs we do as a result of our experiences. Since we are in a position to appreciate all of this on reflection, the worry goes, we are still guilty of irrational chauvinism if we nevertheless place more confident in our ordinary perceptual beliefs than we would in the conclusions we might infer from another person's experiences.

I have a great deal of sympathy for this worry. Indeed, in Section 4 I will press a problem for anti-Cartesianism that I see as closely related to it. All I claim here is that it is not just obvious that an anti-Cartesian that accepts PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY must license the kind of flagrant chauvinism that a Cartesian view would need to. Perhaps in the end the anti-Cartesian who accepts PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY is committed to licensing irrational chauvinism. But it takes work to show it.

3. Motivations for Anti-Cartesianism

We have just seen that the Cartesian cannot plausibly accept PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY, but that it might be open to the anti-Cartesian to do so. In Section 4 below, I will press a problem for anti-Cartesianism that stems from PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY. But before doing so, I need to say more to strengthen the association between anti-Cartesianism and PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY. For even though PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY seems open to the anti-Cartesian, this does not mean that the anti-Cartesian must accept PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY. For one thing, anti-Cartesianism as I have defined it is compatible with the unusual view that having perceptual experiences always gives you weaker justification than you would get from merely knowing about another person's perceptual experiences. More importantly, it might be possible for an anti-Cartesian to hold that while having a perceptual experience gives you a different kind of justification than you would get from merely knowing about another person's experiences, you always get the same overall strength of justification from both sources.

To strengthen the connection between anti-Cartesianism and PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY, it will help to consider two core motivations for rejecting Cartesianism. My aim is to show that these motivations, if they succeed at all, will succeed in motivating a form of anti-Cartesianism that accepts PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY. The upshot is that any anti-Cartesian who appeals to these motivations for her view must accept PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY along with it.

10 For related thoughts on the epistemology of intuitions, see (Wedgwood 2007, Chs. 10 and 11).
3.1 First Motivation: Anti-Skeptical Advantages

Recall PERCEPTUAL INCREDULISM, the claim that one cannot be justified in believing what one perceives without independent evidence that one's perceptual experiences are reliable. One familiar motivation for anti-Cartesianism holds that the Cartesian is committed to PERCEPTUAL INCREDULISM, and that this in turn leads to skepticism. For this reason, the motivation goes, anti-Cartesianism enjoys an anti-skeptical advantage over Cartesianism. Here I want to briefly survey why it is natural to think that anti-Cartesianism enjoys this advantage. In doing so, my purpose is not to develop a novel motivation for anti-Cartesianism, or to settle whether it ultimately succeeds. Instead, I aim merely to highlight that this familiar motivation for anti-Cartesianism, if it succeeds at all, succeeds at motivating a form of anti-Cartesian that embraces PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY.

First consider why it is difficult to avoid perceptual skepticism without rejecting PERCEPTUAL INCREDULISM. If one's ordinary perceptual beliefs are to be justified, then under PERCEPTUAL INCREDULISM one must have independent evidence supporting that one's perceptual experiences are reliable. The relevant notion of 'independence' here can be slippery. But the idea is that one's evidence supporting the reliability of perception cannot itself derive from perception, on pain of vicious circularity.\(^\text{11}\) This raises a problem, because it is hard to see how we might have perception-independent evidence concerning the deeply continent matter of whether our perceptual experiences are reliable. And for this reason, it is natural to think that our ordinary perceptual beliefs can be justified only if PERCEPTUAL INCREDULISM is false.

This sketch of why PERCEPTUAL INCREDULISM might lead to skepticism is open to question. But it at least has strong prima facie plausibility. The anti-skeptical motivation for anti-Cartesianism assumes that it is correct, and goes on to allege that the Cartesian is committed to PERCEPTUAL INCREDULISM.

To see why the Cartesian is arguably committed to PERCEPTUAL INCREDULISM, consider again a simple case in which you find yourself in a Cartesian theater, observing a red image on your TV screen. As we noted in Section 1 above, it is very appealing to accept the following thesis about such a case:

\[(TV \text{ IMAGE INCREDULISM}) \text{ One cannot be justified in inferring conclusions about the world from premises about TV images unless one has independent evidence that the TV images are reliable.}\]

The problem for Cartesians is that they treat ordinary perception on the model of a Cartesian theater. So if they accept the appealing thesis of TV IMAGE INCREDULISM, they have trouble rejecting PERCEPTUAL INCREDULISM. For if inferring from premises about TV images to conclusions about the external world requires independent evidence that the TV images are reliable, then plausibly the same should go for corresponding inferences from premises about one's perceptual experiences.\(^\text{12}\) Otherwise, one could count one's experiences as stronger evidence than a TV's images, even when one lacks evidence.

\(^{11}\) See, e.g., (Barnett, 2014) for further discussion.

\(^{12}\) But see Foley (2001 and 2005), who seems to deny a corresponding view concerning beliefs rather than experiences.
supporting that the experiences are more reliable than the images. And this seems to amount to an irrational kind of chauvinism.

The Cartesian might resist this apparent commitment to PERCEPTUAL INCREDOUSM by denying TV IMAGE INCREDOUSM. For example, a reliabilist might say that one can be justified in inferring from premises about the TV images to conclusions about the world so long as the images are objectively reliable, and so long as one has no defeaters. A reliabilist view like this could still qualify as ‘Cartesian’ in my sense, and yet face no obvious skeptical problems. Traditional Cartesians, however, reject reliabilism and other views that might deny TV IMAGE INCREDOUSM, as I argue elsewhere we all should.13 The anti-skeptical advantage claimed by anti-Cartesians is an advantage over these traditional Cartesians.

The only other way to resist PERCEPTUAL INCREDOUSM is by distinguishing in some way between ordinary perception and a Cartesian theater, in order to accept incredulism about the latter but not the former. And this is where the Cartesian faces problems that the anti-Cartesian does not. For the Cartesian account holds that perception puts one in the position of having to infer conclusions about the world from known premises about one’s experiences, just as in a Cartesian theater one might infer conclusions about the world from known premises about the images on a TV. If that is accepted, then it is hard to see how further differences between the cases could be of assistance. We already have seen that the Cartesian has a difficult time accepting PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY without licensing obvious chauvinism. And this means that if she rejects PERCEPTUAL INCREDOUSM, then she is committed to rejecting a corresponding claim concerning a case where one must infer conclusions about the world from premises about another person’s experiences. That is, she is committed to rejecting:

\[(\text{OTHER PEOPLE’S EXPERIENCES INCREDOUSM}) \text{ One cannot be justified in inferring conclusions about the world from premises about another person’s experiences unless one has independent evidence that those experiences are reliable.}\]

The Cartesian would thus need to reject OTHER PEOPLE’S EXPERIENCES INCREDOUSM while accepting TV IMAGE INCREDOUSM. But this would seem to simply commit her to a different kind of objectionable chauvinism. For if one has no evidence suggesting that an agent’s experiences are more reliable than a TV’s images, it would seem illegitimately chauvinistic to nevertheless count the experiences as stronger evidence than the images.

The Cartesian thus faces a prima facie skeptical problem. It is plausible that we must reject PERCEPTUAL INCREDOUSM if we are to avoid skepticism. But the Cartesian has difficulty doing so. For it is plausible that a spectator in a Cartesian theater cannot justifiably infer conclusions about the world unless he has independent evidence that the images on his TV are reliable. And since the Cartesian treats ordinary perception on the model of a Cartesian theater, she has difficulty accepting this incredulist claim about Cartesian theaters without also accepting a corresponding incredulism about perception.

This is where the anti-Cartesian can plausibly claim an anti-skeptical advantage over the Cartesian. For the anti-Cartesian more plausibly can distinguish between ordinary perception and a Cartesian theater, accepting an incredulist view about the latter but not the former. This is because the anti-Cartesian denies that ordinary perception requires us to

13 See especially (Barnett, 2014).
make inferences from premises about our own perceptual experiences. For this reason, the anti-Cartesian plausibly can avoid commitment to PERCEPTUAL INCREDULISM, even while granting that independent evidence for the reliability of the TV images would be required by a spectator in a Cartesian theater. Indeed, the anti-Cartesian can grant that we would need independent evidence for the reliability of perception if we were in the position of having to infer our ordinary perceptual beliefs from premises about them. For again, the anti-Cartesian denies that ordinary perception puts us in the position of having to make such inferences.

This anti-skeptical motivation for anti-Cartesianism is by no means beyond question. Perhaps the Cartesian could find a way to avoid PERCEPTUAL INCREDULISM after all, or else of accepting it without falling into skepticism. Alternatively, perhaps it could be claimed that the anti-Cartesian cannot ultimately succeed in resisting skepticism, either. I do not hope to settle these matters here. Instead, I want to emphasize only that if the anti-Cartesian does enjoy this anti-skeptical advantage over the Cartesian, this is only because the anti-Cartesian is better positioned to accept PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY. For the anti-Cartesian is in no better position than the Cartesian to distinguish between inferences from premises about TV images and inferences from premises about an agent's experiences. And so the anti-Cartesian is in no better position to accept TV IMAGE INCREDULISM and reject OTHER PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES INCREDULISM. Rather, the anti-Cartesian's advantage comes in distinguishing ordinary perception from a case where one infers conclusions about the world from premises about an agent's experiences. This arguably could enable the anti-Cartesian, unlike the Cartesian, to accept OTHER PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES INCREDULISM while rejecting PERCEPTUAL INCREDULISM. In doing so, the anti-Cartesian must hold that one sometimes can be justified in one's perceptual beliefs even though one would not be justified in inferring conclusions about the world from premises about another agent's experiences. And this means accepting PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY.

3.2 Second Motivation: We Can't be Cartesians “All the Way Down”.

Although the preceding anti-skeptical motivation for anti-Cartesianism speaks in an especially direct way to PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY, it might be worried that what it gives us is at best a reason to want PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY to be true, so that it can be used to combat skepticism. Indeed, it does seem that this motivation does little to help us rebut the charge that PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY must license a kind of arbitrary chauvinism. What I want to consider now is a less direct motivation for anti-Cartesianism, but one which I think helps to emphasize how the anti-Cartesian can plausibly accept PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY without obvious chauvinism.

This second motivation for anti-Cartesianism appeals to the observation that we cannot be Cartesians “all the way down.” By this, I mean that we cannot hold that the epistemic significance of all of one's own mental states is exhausted by the inferential justification provided by one's knowledge of them. Although Cartesianism about perceptual experience has at least some prima facie appeal, I think corresponding views about belief and knowledge
are far less appealing. After saying why, I will explain how the motivations for accepting anti-Cartesianism about belief furthermore support a principle very similar to PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY. The upshot will be that the anti-Cartesian about perceptual experience can point to anti-Cartesianism about belief as corroborating her own view only if she is willing to accept PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY.

Let’s first get clear on what it would mean to accept “Cartesianism” about some type of mental state M. The Cartesian about perceptual experiences denies that perceptual experiences themselves are what give one justification for perceptual beliefs. Like the images displayed on a TV screen, the Cartesian says, experiences do not directly affect what one is justified in believing. Instead, it is one’s knowledge of that experiences that (inferentially) justifies perceptual beliefs if anything does. More generally, a Cartesian about M says that states of type M do not themselves directly affect what one is justified in believing, and that if states of type M are ever involved in the justification of a belief, it is only indirectly, in virtue of one’s knowledge of them, giving one inferential justification for the belief.

Given this general characterization of Cartesianism, it would seem that Cartesianism about knowledge itself is not a coherent position. For consider a case where knowledge is involved in the justification of one’s belief, such as when one has background knowledge that a picnic will be cancelled if it rains, and one gains new knowledge that it will rain. What would a Cartesian about knowledge say about how this new knowledge is involved in one’s gaining justification to believe that the picnic will be cancelled? She would say that one’s knowledge that it will rain is not itself what gives one justification to believe that the picnic will be cancelled. Instead, what gives one justification to believe this must instead be one’s knowledge that one knows that it will rain. But at the same time, the Cartesian about knowledge would also deny that one’s knowledge that one knows it will rain can give one justification for this belief, for the same reason. Cartesianism about knowledge thus leads to a contradiction.

What this shows is that we cannot be Cartesians “all the way down”. For some mental states, just being in those states affects what one is justified in believing, such that the epistemic significance of those states is not always exhausted by the inferential justification provided by knowledge that one is in them. At least some states of knowledge must be states of this kind. But there may be other such states as well.

I think it is very plausible that belief also is such a state. Consider an example:

(TWO BELIEVERS) You and Other both know that the picnic will be cancelled if it rains. Right now, you are both agnostic about whether it will rain. But pretty soon, one of you will come to hold a belief about whether it will rain. Your evidence concerning the reliability of your own and Other’s beliefs are on a par, in the sense that for any evidence you have concerning

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14 See (Wedgwood, 2007, Chs. 10 and 11) for arguments in favor of anti-Cartesianism about intuitions, particularly moral intuitions. See also (Bealor, 2000), (Brown, 2013), and (Chudnoff, 2011) for views about the epistemology of intuition that are arguably committed to anti-Cartesianism. Pollock and Cruz (1999) defend a kind of anti-Cartesianism about memory experiences, although see (Barnett, 2015) for criticism of their overall view.

15 The view is so called with apologies to Descartes, who I interpret as an anti-Cartesian about the clear and distinct perceptions that he took to be the source of all knowledge. See (Barnett, MS) for discussion.
the your own, you have equivalent evidence concerning Other's. As a matter of fact, the person who forms a belief about whether it will rain will believe that it will rain, and this belief will be based on strong meteorological evidence.

As with TWO SPECTATORS and TWO PERCEIVERS before it, TWO BELIEVERS is schematic in that it leaves unspecified crucial details regarding your evidence about your own and Other's reliability. But it still should be uncontroversial that there is an asymmetry in the epistemic effects of at least one's own justified beliefs, as opposed to those of another person. For suppose that you go on to hold a justified belief that it will rain. If so, then this will result in your having justification to believe that the picnic will be cancelled. In contrast, if instead Other comes to hold a justified belief that it will rain, this will not necessarily result in your having justification to believe that the picnic will be cancelled.

How would a Cartesian epistemology of belief explain this asymmetry? It would say that if you come to hold a belief that it will rain, this results in your having justification to believe that the picnic will be cancelled only indirectly, in virtue of your knowledge that you hold this belief giving you inferential justification to believe that the picnic will be cancelled. Your own belief would have this effect, even while Other's would not, only because you are in a position to know about your own beliefs, but are not in a position to know about Other's.

This sort of Cartesian epistemology of belief arguably avoids falling into outright contradiction as Cartesianism about knowledge did, since it explains the epistemic significance of belief in terms of a distinct state of knowledge, about which it can be anti-Cartesian. But it arguably faces a related problem. The Cartesian about belief claims that knowing of one's own belief that it will rain gives one inferential justification for believing that the picnic will be cancelled. But why would the fact that an agent believes that it will rain inferentially support that a picnic will be cancelled? The obvious answer is that it does so only by supporting that it will rain, which in turn supports that the picnic will be cancelled. It thus seems that knowledge of your own belief will give you inferential justification to believe that the picnic will be cancelled only by giving you justification to believe that it will rain. But by stipulation, you already believe that it will rain based on strong evidence—and the Cartesian claimed that this did not give you justification to believe that the picnic will be cancelled! The Cartesian about belief thus has no plausible way of explaining how knowledge of your belief could give you inferential justification to believe that the picnic will be cancelled.

But regardless of whether Cartesianism about belief can avoid this problem, I want to press a different worry that more closely parallels some of the issues surrounding a Cartesian epistemology of perception. The problem is that if this Cartesian account of TWO BELIEVERS were true, then we should expect knowing that Other holds the belief that it will rain to have the same effect on your justification concerning the picnic that you would get from holding this belief yourself. And this is highly implausible.

I think that the implausibility of this claim is clearest when we consider a version of the case where your evidence concerning your own and Other's reliability is largely unfavorable. For suppose that in such a case, Other comes to believe that it will rain, and you know that he believes this. Even if in fact Other has strong reasons for this belief, you would not be justified in believing that it will rain based on what you know—since, again, your evidence concerning Other's reliability is largely unfavorable. Now suppose instead that in such a case you come to believe that it will rain yourself. If so, then by stipulation you believe that it will
rain based on strong meteorological evidence, despite your unfavorable higher-order evidence about your reliability. In such a situation, will your belief that it will rain be justified? This is a controversial matter. But note that if we do say that your belief that it will rain is justified, then we must reject Cartesianism, for surely in that case you furthermore could be justified in believing that the picnic will be cancelled. Indeed, to hang on to a Cartesianism about belief, we must say that your justification for believing that it will rain is entirely a function of your higher-order evidence about your own reliability, and is in no way enhanced by your strong first-order evidence that it will rain. For otherwise your strong first-order evidence that it will rain will result in your having stronger justification to believe that it will rain than you would have in the case where you merely know that Other holds this belief. And presumably this stronger justification to believe that it will rain will also mean stronger justification to believe that the picnic will be cancelled, contrary to what Cartesianism predicts.

Now these implications on their own might not be enough to condemn a Cartesian epistemology of belief. For it could simply be claimed that even when you have strong first-order evidence that it will rain, you are as unjustified in believing that it will rain as you would be in the case where you merely know that Other believes that it will rain. But even so, a thoroughgoing Cartesian epistemology of belief has a further consequences that few will want to accept. To see why, let us grant for the sake of argument that you are wholly unjustified in believing that it will rain. But let us suppose that despite this, you believe that it will rain anyway. If so, what does this mean for your justification for believing that the picnic will be cancelled?

Cases like this raise many difficulties. On the one hand, it seems that unjustifiably believing that it will rain would not put you in a position to justifiably believe that the picnic will be cancelled. But on the other hand, it does not seem plausible to say that your holding this unjustified belief has no effect at all on what you can justifiably believe about the picnic. For it seems that even an unjustified belief that it will rain puts a kind of rational pressure on you to believe that the picnic will be cancelled. Since you know that the picnic will be cancelled if it rains, it seems that if you believe that it will rain, then you cannot, on pain of irrationality, withhold belief that the picnic will be cancelled. As we might say, believing that it will rain will rationally require you to believe that the picnic will be cancelled.

Now a justified belief can rationally require the beliefs that it justifies in this sense. (Indeed, those who accept the Uniqueness thesis should say that that whatever justifies a belief also rationally requires it.) The difference in this case is that any doxastic attitude you adopt concerning the picnic will be rationally defective in some way, so long as you continue to hold the belief that it will rain. In contrast to these epistemic effects of your believing that it will rain yourself, so long as your evidence suggests that Other’s beliefs are unreliable,

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16 Conciliationism about peer disagreement is often thought to entail a view like this about higher-order evidence. See, e.g., (Enoch, 2010), (Kelly, 2010), (Weatherson, Ms.), and (White, 2009) for critical discussion.

17 See, e.g., (Broome, 1999) and (Kolodny, 2005). I hope to remain neutral on the main points at issue in this familiar debate.

18 Those who accept Uniqueness say that there is a unique justified doxastic attitude to take in any epistemic situation, which would mean that if belief is justified then withholding belief is not. Epistemic permissivists deny this. For general discussion of Uniqueness and permissivism, see, e.g., (Schoenfield, 2014) and (White, 2005).
knowing that he believes that it will rain does not require you to believe that the picnic will be cancelled, or put any other kind of pressure on you to believe this.

The upshot is that even when your higher-order evidence concerning yourself and Other is on a par, your beliefs can rationally require you to hold other beliefs even where knowledge of Other's beliefs would not. This observation alone is sufficient to rebut a thoroughgoing Cartesian epistemology of belief, because it suggests that having an unjustified belief can affect one's epistemic situation in a way that is not due simply to the effects of one's knowledge that one holds the belief.

It is time now to see how this leads us to a principle concerning belief that closely parallels the PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY principle about experience. I think we have seen reason to accept at a minimum the following claim:

(DOXAStic PARTIALITY) Holding a belief can sometimes impose rational requirements on you that would not be imposed by mere knowledge that another person holds the belief.

This principle differs from the one about experience in that it speaks to the rational requirements imposed by one's own beliefs rather than the justification they confer. The distinction is important in the case of belief, because as we have just seen, the unjustified belief that it will rain can rationally require you to believe that the picnic will be cancelled even though it does not justify you in doing so. But I think that it is unlikely that the distinction between justifying and rationally requiring a belief will be of similar importance when it comes to experience. Since experiences cannot be unjustified in the first place, it is not clear that an experience could rationally require a perceptual belief without thereby justifying it. And so an anti-Cartesianism about experience, if modeled on anti-Cartesianism about belief, should accept PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY.

To be sure, the fact that we should be anti-Cartesians about belief does not straightaway show that we should be anti-Cartesians about perception. For it could be that the epistemic role of perceptual experience is simply different from that of belief. Coherentists have often stressed what they see as fundamental differences between belief and experience in supporting their claim that the only thing that could justify a belief is another belief. But recent anti-Cartesians reply by stressing what they see as important similarities. Like belief, these anti-Cartesians claim, perceptual experiences have representational content. And also like belief, but unlike other states with representational content like desires and perhaps mere mental imagery, perceptual experiences in some sense present their representational content as being true. For this reason, it is plausible that perceptual experiences, like beliefs, partially determine what one's apparent evidence is. I take this to strengthen attempts to deflect the charge of chauvinism that we considered at the end of Section 2 above.

19 Those with worries about the cognitive penetrability of perception—e.g., (Siegel 2012 and 2013)—might think it is possible for perceptual experiences to be epistemically defective in some broader way that makes them unsuitable to justify a perceptual belief even when they require it. But even if this is granted, I think it will not substantially affect the main thread of our discussion. The problem for anti-Cartesianism that I present in Section 4 could arguably be recast in terms of requirements rather than justifications, or even simply be restricted to cases in which it is stipulated that the perceptual states in question are not epistemically defective.

20 For helpful review and discussion of these issues, see (Pryor, 2005).
These are difficult matters, and I will not try to adjudicate them here. Instead, my aim is simply to note that to the extent that we are attracted to anti-Cartesianism about experience because of these apparent similarities between perceptual experiences and beliefs, we will have reason to accept PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY.

4. A Problem for Anti-Cartesianism

Let's take stock. According to the traditional Cartesian epistemology of perception, one's perceptual beliefs are justified if at all by inferences from known premises about one's perceptual experiences. But anti-Cartesians say that perceptual states themselves can provide one with perceptual justification to a degree that cannot be accounted for in this way. This allows anti-Cartesians to accept PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY without obvious chauvinism, unlike Cartesians. And indeed, the core motivations for anti-Cartesianism also support PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY, meaning that the anti-Cartesian cannot avail herself of these motivations without also accepting PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY.

What remains to be seen is whether there is some subtler way in which accepting PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY ultimately commits the anti-Cartesian to licensing objectionable chauvinism or some other sort of irrationality. And it is here that I think the anti-Cartesian faces a problem. So although in my view the motivations for rejecting Cartesianism are powerful, there also is a powerful objection to any form of anti-Cartesianism that can avail itself of these motivations by accepting PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY. The Cartesian analogy between ordinary perception and a Cartesian theater, despite its many difficulties, is not easily dispensed with.

The problem for anti-Cartesianism arises from the fact that just as you can know about another person's experiences, you also can know about the experiences that you had in the past, or that lie in store for you in the future. Consider an example:

(Anticipated Experience) Shortly before noon, you are wearing a blindfold and facing a wall. You know that at noon, the blindfold will be removed, and that when it is, you will have an experience as of a red wall.

What should the anti-Cartesian say about the epistemic significance of knowing that you will have a reddish experience at noon? Is it epistemically akin to knowing that another person has a reddish experience? Or is it more like actually having the experience now? For a more precise formulation of this question, let's call the justification that the anti-Cartesian says that you get from actually having an experience your proprietary justification. (That is, the proprietary justification is whatever you get in excess of what you would get from knowing that another person had such an experience.) The question at hand is whether knowing about your own future experiences gives you proprietary justification now for perceptual beliefs.

There are strong prima facie motivations for thinking that the anti-Cartesian cannot allow knowledge of one's future experiences to give one proprietary justification now. For it would seem that the only way this knowledge could justify you in believing that the wall is red is by allowing you to justifiably infer that the wall is red from the premise that you will have a reddish experience at noon. And it would be illegitimately chauvinistic to infer that the wall is red from this premise unless you also would be willing to infer the same conclusion from the premise that Other will have a reddish experience at noon. Thus the anti-Cartesian cannot say that knowledge of one's own future experience gives one
proprietary justification for believing that the wall is red any more than the Cartesian was able to say this for knowledge of one's own present experiences.

Now I am not entirely sure that this *prima facie* motivation should be accepted, as I will explain in Section 4.2 below. But let us for now suppose that it is, and see the problem that it raises for the anti-Cartesian. The anti-Cartesian accepts PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY, and thus says that having a reddish experience now can give you proprietary justification for believing that the wall is red—justification that can be stronger than what you would get from merely knowing that another person has or will have a reddish experience. But merely knowing that you will have a reddish experience yourself in a few minutes does not give you that kind of proprietary justification right now. The anti-Cartesian must therefore claim that even when you know in advance that you will have a reddish experience at noon, when noon arrives and you actually have that reddish experience, this will give you stronger justification than you had to begin with.

The problem for the anti-Cartesian is that this final claim licenses a way of updating one's beliefs and credences that seems to manifest diachronic irrationality. For suppose that before noon you withhold belief that the wall is red, even though you know that at noon the wall will look red to you. It would seem flagrantly irrational for you suddenly to be convinced that the wall is red once your blindfold is removed and you seem to see a red wall. You knew that this is exactly what would happen! More generally, it would seem irrational for you to increase your confidence that the wall is red to any substantial degree at noon, merely because you at that time are having the very experience that you knew in advance you would have. But if the anti-Cartesian were right that your degree of justification for believing the wall is red increases substantially at noon, then it would be rational for you to substantially increase your confidence that the wall is red. Since it isn't, the anti-Cartesian must be wrong.

Now in saddling the anti-Cartesian with this sort of diachronic irrationality, I am assuming a bridge principle between degrees of justification and degrees of confidence along the following lines:

\[(\text{JUSTIFICATION GIVES CONFIDENCE}) \text{ The stronger your justification to believe that } p, \text{ the more confident you rationally can be that } p.\]

If JUSTIFICATION GIVES CONFIDENCE is true, then when your degree of justification for believing a proposition increases, the degree of confidence that you rationally can invest in the proposition increases. If so, then it ought to be rational for you to increase your confidence when your degree of justification increases. This is why an anti-Cartesian who accepts PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY must license as rational one's becoming more confident that the wall is red at noon, even though one knew in advance that one would have a reddish experience.

To my ears, JUSTIFICATION GIVE CONFIDENCE has the ring of a truism. But in any case, I think the anti-Cartesian must accept it, on pain of losing her anti-skeptical advantage over the Cartesian. For suppose that our perceptual experiences gave us a kind of proprietary justification that affects the strength of our justification for perceptual beliefs without also permitting us to place more confidence in them. This kind of proprietary justification would do nothing to help us respond to the skeptical challenge that we are irrational for being as confident as we are that we have hands. If we were worried that our perceptual beliefs, despite being rational and true, were merely defective in some further way, then
perhaps PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY could still be of assistance. But it is hard to see what that further worry would be, and it does not seem to be the core skeptical challenge that anti-Cartesians have traditionally taken their view to help us overcome.

So instead of rejecting JUSTIFICATION GIVE CONFIDENCE, I think the anti-Cartesian must choose between avoiding commitment to the claim that one’s degree of justification increases at noon, or else biting the bullet and accepting that it is rational to increase one’s degree of confidence at noon. In Section 4.1, I will consider the prospects for biting the bullet. In Sections 4.2 and 4.3, I will consider two ways that the anti-Cartesian might try to avoid the commitment that one’s degree of justification does increase at noon.

But before considering these options, I want to say briefly why I think the problem for anti-Cartesianism that I am raising here is more general and less avoidable than two more familiar objections to particular versions of anti-Cartesianism.

First consider familiar Bayesian objections to dogmatism. These objections are less general than the one I raise here, because they apply only to views that license a Moorean response to skepticism, which for all I have said might be separable from anti-Cartesianism. These objections further appeal to a number of potentially controversial Bayesian assumptions, such as that evidence cannot increase one’s justification for believing a proposition if the proposition’s negation entails that evidence. In contrast, the problem I raise does not require any substantive Bayesian commitments like these. It requires only that justification can come in degrees, and that an increase in one’s degree of justification for believing a proposition licenses an increase in one’s confidence in it. Finally, as Luca Moretti (2015) has emphasized, the Bayesian objection smuggles in the Cartesian assumption that having a perceptual experience gives one the same degree of justification as does knowing that one has the experience—which is surely not something an anti-Cartesian should be willing to take for granted! I thus think that the problem for anti-Cartesianism presented here is more general in scope and less controversial in its commitments than these familiar Bayesian objections to dogmatism are.

Although the focus of our discussion has been internalist versions of anti-Cartesianism like dogmatism, I also think that the problem that I raise for these views is more pressing than a familiar kind of objection to externalist versions of anti-Cartesianism like disjunctivism. Externalist views like this claim that the factive state of seeing can give one perceptual knowledge even when merely seeming to see the same thing would fail to so much as give one justification for a perceptual belief. The prima facie problem for these views is that they lead to the counterintuitive result that one who unwittingly hallucinates a red wall is unjustified in believing that the wall before her is red. But externalists have tried to explain away the intuition that such an agent is justified by distinguishing between justification and blamelessness. Sure enough, they say, such an agent might be blameless in believing that the wall is red, but this kind of blamelessness is not sufficient for justification. The problem

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21 See (White, 2006) for a canonical presentation of Bayesian objections to Pryor’s (2000) dogmatism, and see (Cohen, 2010), (Jehle and Weatherson, 2012), (Kung, 2010), (Moretti, 2015), (Pryor, 2013), and (Weatherson, 2007) for replies.

22 Jim Pryor has impressed upon me the contentiousness of this prima facie innocuous assumption. See (Pryor, MS) for related discussion.

that I raise for anti-Cartesianism, however, instead only requires blamelessness to be necessary for justification. This is because it charges anti-Cartesianism with licensing as justified a way of updating one’s beliefs that strikes us as positively blameworthy. So long as blamelessness is necessary for justification, this updating procedure could not yield justified belief, as the anti-Cartesian is apparently committed to claiming.

It is time now to consider an anti-Cartesian’s options for responding to the problem I have just raised. After considering these options in turn, I will explain in Section 4.4 why I think the anti-Cartesian who wishes to hang on to PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY has no further options remaining.

4.1 First Option: Biting the Bullet

Is it plausible that at noon you could rationally become more confident that the wall is red?

Perhaps even a Cartesian could allow that one can become *slightly* more confident at noon that the wall is red. For it might be that one can never know about one’s future experiences with quite the degree of certainty that one can know of one’s present experiences. It is at least plausible that even when one knows some evidence e that inferentially supports p, this is compatible with one having some room for doubt about e and thus about p as well. And so it is plausible that increasing one’s degree of certainty in e beyond a minimum threshold required for knowledge might increase one’s degree of confidence in p at least slightly. Even so, I think it is not plausible that one’s degree of confidence for p could rationally increase more than slightly. If one knows that e, then one has at most a little room for doubt about e. So there will be little room for one’s degree of certainty in e to increase, and thus little room for one’s confidence in p to increase as a result of an increase in certainty of e.

It is important that the degree to which one plausibly can increase one’s confidence at noon is small. This is because the anti-Cartesian proponent of PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY needs to say that one’s confidence that the wall is red can increase *substantially* at noon. For it is the claim that having an experience gives one substantial proprietary justification that gives PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY its anti-skeptical punch. If having an experience offered only a slight increase in the strength of one’s justification relative to what one would get from knowing about another person’s experience, then the anti-Cartesian would have very limited anti-skeptical advantages over Cartesianism. For whatever the strength of our justification for perceptual beliefs might be under Cartesianism, the anti-Cartesian would be able to offer us only slightly more. That would be reassuring only if the skeptical worry was merely that we fall *just slightly* short of being justified in our perceptual beliefs! To have real anti-skeptical punch, therefore, it is necessary for the anti-Cartesian to claim that the proprietary justification conferred by one’s experiences is substantial in degree. For this reason, I do not think that biting the bullet is made any more palatable by the slight increase in certainty about one’s experience that might come when it actually happens, as Earl Conee has suggested to me.

Nor do I think biting the bullet can be made more palatable by the suggestion from Harold Hodes that at noon one learns a new tensed proposition to the effect that one is having a reddish experience *now*. For this and other suggestions along similar lines merely offer additional *theoretical rationales* for the claim that one might rationally increase one’s confidence at noon that the wall is red. But I take it that the problem for anti-Cartesianism is not the absence of a theoretical rationale for this claim. It is instead simply its striking counterintuitiveness. Before noon, you already know that you will have a reddish experience
when your blindfold is removed. Intuitively, it would be irrational for you become substantially more confident at noon, when you have precisely the perceptual experiences that you knew in advance you would have. It is simply hard to accept that any theory that says otherwise could be getting the facts on the ground right, whatever its theoretical virtues.

4.2 Second Option: Licensing Chauvinism

A second option for the anti-Cartesian is to claim that when you know of your own future experience, that gives you stronger justification than you would get from knowing of another person’s experience. If this is granted, then in ANTICIPATED EXPERIENCE you might already enjoy this stronger justification before noon, and consequently receive no additional reason to believe that the wall is red at noon. The apparent problem with this claim is that it seems to license an irrational form of chauvinism. For it seems to license one in counting one’s own future experiences as stronger evidence than another person’s, even in the absence of evidence that one’s experiences are objectively more reliable.

It might be claimed that there is a way to avoid this kind of flagrant chauvinism. One strategy might be to claim that it can be rational to count one’s own experiences as stronger evidence of the truth, even in the absence of evidence that one’s experiences are objectively more reliable. For example, perhaps one could argue in the style of Wright (2004) that we have non-evidential reasons for believing that our own experiences are a reliable guide to the truth—e.g., that the pursuit of our intellectual projects requires us to accept that our own experiences are reliable, but not that other people’s experiences are. Another strategy might be to claim that even if it would be irrational to count one’s own future experiences as stronger evidence than another person’s, this is not the only way that knowledge of one’s future experiences to give one proprietary justification for perceptual beliefs. Perhaps if I know that I will have a reddish experience in just a moment, I don’t need to infer that the wall is red from this evidence. Maybe it could somehow just make my future proprietary justification available to me now, as if I were already having the experience.

But again, even if these or other responses give us plausible theoretical rationales for why knowledge of one’s own future experiences can give one proprietary justification right now, they too face the problem of licensing an updating procedure that seems hard to accept as rational. Consider:

(VISUAL PERCEPTION SEQUEL) All is as before in the VISUAL PERCEPTION case. Then, before any blindfolds are removed, you learn some additional information. Without being told whether you or Other will be the agent whose blindfold is removed, you are informed that whoever has their blindfold removed will have an experience as of a red wall. A few minutes pass, and you are given the further information that you will be the one whose blindfold is removed.

When you learn that the agent whose blindfold is removed will have a reddish experience, this might give you some justification to believe that the wall is red. How much justification it gives you can vary, depending on how we fill in further details of the case. For although we have said that your evidence concerning the reliability of your own experiences is on a par with your evidence concerning Other’s, we have left it open precisely what this evidence

Note, however, that the Cartesian might avail himself of this, too, in an attempt to accept PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY.
includes. But it also seems that no matter how we fill in these additional details, you will not get any additional justification to believe that the wall is red once you learn that it is you whose blindfold will be removed. Since your evidence about the reliability of your own experience is on a par with your evidence about Other's, it seems that learning which of you will go on to have the reddish experience should not affect your justification to believe that the wall is red. To deny this would be tantamount to accepting an arbitrary kind of chauvinism about one's own experiences.

We can again use JUSTIFICATION GIVES CONFIDENCE to drive home the unattractiveness of this sort of chauvinism. Consider your situation once you know that someone will have a reddish experience, but before you learn that it will be you. If at this stage you withhold belief concerning the color of the wall, it would seem irrational for you then to grant belief once you learn that it will be you who has the reddish experience. (It would seem similarly irrational for you to believe that the wall is red at first, and then to withhold belief if you were instead told that it is Other whose blindfold will be removed.) But if getting additional justification to believe that the wall is red allows you to justifiably increase your confidence that the wall is red, then it seems that the chauvinist must license this increased confidence as justified. And any view that takes knowledge of one's own future experiences to provide proprietary justification, regardless of the theoretical rationale it provides, is bound to license this seemingly irrational way of updating your credences.

4.3 Third Option: Rejecting Evidentialism about Defeaters

Recall that PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY says that having an experience sometimes gives you a distinctive proprietary justification for a perceptual belief. It need not say that it does so all the time. The final response for the anti-Cartesian is to claim that your reddish experience in ANTICIPATED EXPERIENCE does not confer proprietary justification, even though in other cases your experiences can do so. An anti-Cartesian who takes this option owes us a story about what feature of the ANTICIPATED EXPERIENCE case prevents you from receiving proprietary justification from your experience. This seems tough to do. For the feature would need to be an essential feature of the case, or else the case could simply be modified to remove it. And it would need to be a feature that is plausibly absent in many ordinary cases of perception, or else anti-Cartesianism will lose its anti-skeptical force. It seems that the only feature fitting the bill is that in ANTICIPATED EXPERIENCE you have reflective awareness of your experience. For it is essential to the example that you know that you have a reddish experience at noon. And it is not clear that we ordinarily do know what our experiences are, even though we are able to come to know what they are if we stop to reflect. So the final option for the anti-Cartesian is to claim that this reflective awareness

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25 As Karl Schafer has pointed out, there is room for a distinction between two kinds of chauvinist views here. One of them grants that in VISUAL PERCEPTION SEQUEL you are not justified in believing your own experiences to be objectively more reliable than Other's, but says that you nevertheless gain justification to believe that the wall is red when you learn that you are the one who will have a reddish experience. The other kind of chauvinist view instead says that even though your a posteriori evidence concerning the reliability your own and Other's visual experiences is on a par, you nevertheless can be justified in believing your own experiences to be more reliable than Other's on account of your having special a priori or default justification to believe in the reliability of your own perceptual experiences. Though I think both of these views are unattractive, I do not consider this to be a decisive mark against views that entail one or the other. If I am right, any anti-Cartesian must accept some unattractive consequence or other—and accepting Cartesianism instead is itself unattractive.
alone is enough to defeat the distinctive proprietary justification that those experiences otherwise would give you for perceptual beliefs.

To be clear, the idea is not that reflective awareness defeats any justification you might have for believing that the wall is red. Given the right background evidence, you can infer from the fact that Other seems to see a red wall that the wall is red, and you presumably can be in an equally good position to make such an inference from knowledge of your own experiences. Rather, the idea is that reflective awareness undermines the distinctive sort of proprietary justification that your experiences usually can provide.

Although I am more sympathetic than most are to this third option for anti-Cartesianism, it faces objections. After considering one objection that does not impress me much, I will consider another objection that is in my view stronger.

The objection that does not impress me appeals to an assumption that nothing you can do “from the armchair” can change your epistemic position. According to this assumption, the only thing that can change your epistemic position is gathering up new evidence using sensory perception. Things you do from the armchair, like reasoning through the consequences of your existing evidence, or reflecting on your existing mental states, can only help you to achieve justified beliefs about things that you already had justification to believe. If you are able to arrive at a justified belief just by reasoning through your existing evidence, then that means that you already had (propositional) justification for that belief, even before you did the reasoning. And the same goes, according to the objection, for another thing you do from the armchair: reflecting on your existing mental states, like your existing experiences. If this is right, then merely reflecting on your current experiences cannot give you a new defeater for your perceptual beliefs, since it cannot change your epistemic position at all.

I am sympathetic to the objection’s contention that reasoning through the consequences of your existing evidence cannot change your epistemic position. But I think that reflection (or introspection) often changes your epistemic position—i.e., that it is a way of gathering up new evidence that you did not already have, even though it is a kind of evidence-gathering that can be done from the armchair. An example might help to reinforce the point. Suppose I ask you “How many states have names beginning with the letter ‘M’?” If you know the names of all the states, then it seems that there is an important sense in which the answer to this question is already among the things implicitly built in to your current evidence. So when you reason through this evidence to a justified belief, it is plausible that you are merely coming to believe something you already were in a position to justifiably believe. But suppose I instead ask you “How many states remind you of your grandmother?” You might be able to determine the answer without getting out of your armchair. But you would have to do so through a process of internal experimentation and observation that plausibly involves acquiring new evidence that you did not possess already.

This does not mean that every case of reflection changes your epistemic position in the same way. But it does speak against a general ban on reflection ever changing your epistemic position.

Now for the objection that I think is more serious. Instead of claiming that reflection cannot give you new evidence, this objection says simply that the evidence that you do gain

26 Thanks to Jim Pryor for a helpful amendment to this example.
by reflection is not a defeater for your perceptual belief. The objection appeals to a widely accepted evidentialist model of defeaters, which holds that defeaters must take the form of evidence that directly or indirectly speaks against the truth of what you believe. More precisely, the idea is that for one’s awareness that d to give one a defeater for the belief that p, the fact that d must either oppose one’s belief by directly supporting that p is false, or else undermine one’s existing evidence for the belief by supporting that that evidence does not really support that p (or something to that general effect).27

If we accept this evidentialist model of defeaters, then we apparently cannot allow reflective awareness that you have a reddish experience to give you a defeater for your belief that the wall is red. For the fact that you have a reddish experience will not in ordinary cases amount to evidence directly supporting that the wall is not red. Nor will it in any obvious way amount to evidence that your existing evidence fails to support that the wall is red. To be sure, there are difficulties in applying the usual model of undermining defeaters, which is on its home turf concerning beliefs which are justified by indirect evidence, to putatively non-inferentially justified perceptual beliefs. But roughly and approximately, it seems the proponent of the evidentialist model should require an undermining defeater for a perceptual belief to take the form of evidence that one’s experiences do not provide a good guide to the external world (or something to that general effect). The fact that one has taken a hallucinogenic drug might be an example of such a defeater. But the mere fact that one has a reddish experience typically is not.

Now I have some sympathy for an anti-Cartesianism that denies this evidentialist model of defeaters. But I think that anyone who takes this option owes us a positive explanation of how reflective awareness of one’s experiences can defeat one’s proprietary justification even without providing one with undermining evidence. Again, I do not take this option to be a non-starter, as many apparently do. But it is a difficult task to offer a satisfying explanation of how it can be accepted.28

4.4 Conclusion

Any kind of anti-Cartesianism worth having will allow us to accept PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY, for without it the core motivations for anti-Cartesianism are lost. But in accepting PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY, the anti-Cartesian faces serious objections stemming from one’s possible knowledge of one’s own future experiences. One option is to simply bite the bullet, and claim that even when one knows of an experience in advance, one gets stronger justification for a perceptual belief once one actually has the experience. Another is to license the seemingly chauvinistic practice of increasing your confidence that the wall is red upon learning that you will have a reddish experience at noon, even when you already knew that either you or Other would have such an experience. The final option is to reject

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27 See, e.g., (Weatherson, Ms., Sec. 2.1) for a recent discussion of defeaters along these lines.

28 As Karl Schafer has emphasized to me, an anti-Cartesian who takes this third option furthermore appears committed to a major concession to the skeptic. Since one will have distinctive proprietary justification for one’s perceptual beliefs only so long as one is not reflectively aware of them, one will not be justified in one’s perceptual beliefs in contexts where one is reflectively aware of them. I think it is not obvious whether this concedes too much to the skeptic, and I will not attempt to settle the matter here. Instead, I will note only that this concession to skepticism is not too far off from those of prominent contextualist and subject-sensitive invariantist responses to skepticism, which concede in different ways the truth of skepticism in certain kinds of reflective contexts.
evidentialism about defeaters, and claim that merely being reflectively aware of your experiences must defeat the proprietary justification that they otherwise provide.

Does the anti-Cartesian have any other options? No. For if we reject the third option, then we will say that an unreflective agent who has a reddish experience has no more justification to believe the wall is red than does an agent who has reflective awareness of her reddish experience. And if we reject the second option, then we will say that such a reflective agent, who has a reddish experience and who knows she has had it, has no more justification than an agent who knows that she will have a reddish experience but who has not had it yet. And if we reject the first option, then we will say that such an agent, who knows that she will have a reddish experience but who has not had it yet, has no more justification than does an agent who knows that someone else will have a reddish experience. So if we reject all three options, then it follows that an unreflective agent who has had a reddish experience has no more justification to believe that the wall is red than does an agent who merely knows that someone else has had such an experience—in direct contradiction of PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY. Since the most appealing and well-motivated forms of anti-Cartesianism accept PERCEPTUAL PARTIALITY, it seems that the rejection of a Cartesian epistemology of perception brings with it some difficult choices.\footnote{For helpful comments and discussion, I am grateful to Earl Conee, Sinan Dogramaci, Hilary Kornblith, Jim Pryor, Karl Schäfer, Miriam Schoenfield, David Sosa, Katia Vavova, and audiences at the University of Texas at Austin, Mount Holyoke College, and the Creighton Club meeting at Syracuse University.}
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