

Equivalence, Reliability, and Convergence: Replies to McDowell, Peacocke, and Neta

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I am grateful to John McDowell, Ram Neta, and Christopher Peacocke for their critical attention to my book.¹ Their objections and questions are exactly on the mark, and they help me to place the proposals I have made in a clearer light. McDowell and Peacocke challenge fundamental principles I use to motivate my account, and I should address their arguments first. Then I shall turn to Neta's objection, which concerns a central element of my account.

I. McDowell and the Equivalence Constraint

McDowell claims that the very first steps leading to the account I offer are deeply flawed and, furthermore, that my account is unattractive when compared to his own version of disjunctivism.² I want to examine the argument McDowell mounts for these claims.

One of my first steps in the book is to accept the following Equivalence constraint. Let the *given* in an experience e of a subject S be the total rational contribution of e to S 's view of the world. Then the Equivalence constraint is as follows:

Equivalence constraint: Experiences that are subjectively identical yield the same given.

Consider an experiencing subject S in two possible situations: in one, S undergoes a veridical experience e , say of a pink cube, and rationally arrives at the belief that there is a pink cube; in the other, S undergoes a subjectively identical experience e^* , say an illusion, and arrives at the same

¹*Empiricism and Experience* (henceforth, *E&E*).

²“The Given in Experience: Comment on Gupta.” All parenthetical references to McDowell are to the pages of this paper.

belief. The Equivalence constraint says that the given in e^* is identical to the given in e ; the rational force exerted by e^* on S 's view of the world is the same as that exerted by e . It follows that if the belief that there is a pink cube is rational in one case, it is rational in the other. Observe that the Equivalence constraint says nothing about the *nature* of the two experiences; it allows that the two experiences have different natures. It says nothing about the contents of the two experiences (assuming that experiences have contents); it allows that they have different contents. Finally, it says nothing about the truth or falsehood of the resulting beliefs; it allows that they have different truth values. The constraint concerns only the *rational* contribution of the experiences to the subject's view of the world.³

McDowell challenges the Equivalence constraint, and he offers a disjunctivist reading of examples such as the one I have just considered. McDowell says that in the veridical case it is given, for example, that there is a pink cube. But in the illusory case, it only *seems* to the subject that this is given; it is not actually given that there is a pink cube. If this reading is correct then the Equivalence constraint fails, for the two subjectively identical experiences do not yield the same given.

But how do we account for the fact that in both cases, veridical and illusory, the subject is equally rational in her belief that there is a pink cube? McDowell says that “an experience that merely seems to be one of perceiving can give its subject a reason for belief (p. zzz).” This is certainly correct: an illusory experience can provide a reason. But how does it do so? How does the “seeming” bit come into play? It may *seem* to the subject that she is perceiving that things are thus and so, yet it may not be rational for her to take it that things are thus and so; the seeming may be rooted in an irrational element in the subject's view of the world. So, how do we move, in the above example, from seeming givenness to actual rationality? More fundamentally, why introduce the qualifier ‘seems’ to begin with, and then work to erase its effects? The given, as the term is used in the book and here, concerns *rational* contribution. If one is willing to say that in

³One further point of clarification: the notion of subjective identity in play in the Equivalence constraint is not the same as that of subjective indistinguishability, i.e., the inability of the subject to tell experiences apart. Two visual experiences may fail to be subjectively identical—slightly different colors may, e.g., be presented in them—but because of, say, memory limitations the subject may be unable to tell them apart. See *E&E*, pp. 226-229, for a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the notion of subjective identity.

the veridical experience the given includes the proposition that there is a pink cube, why not say that the same holds for the illusory experience? After all, the subject's belief that there is a pink cube is just as rational in the illusory case as it is in the veridical.

There are many attractive elements in McDowell's disjunctivism. By rejecting what he calls the "highest common factor" conception of experience, McDowell puts his finger on an important error in classical empiricism.⁴ Disjunctivism about the nature and objects of experience is definitely correct: subjectively identical experiences need not share any common nature or any common object. And, of course, disjunctivism about *knowing* is perfectly correct: in the veridical case, the subject knows; but in the illusory case, the best we can say is that it *seems* to the subject that she knows (though she does not actually know). These sound elements in McDowell's disjunctivism are compatible with the Equivalence constraint. The elements that lead to the denial of the constraint, I do not find, I confess, very attractive.⁵

The disagreement over the Equivalence constraint is a manifestation of a deeper disagreement between McDowell and myself, one that centers on the role of veridical experience and knowledge in understanding empirical rationality. For McDowell, veridical experience and knowing are primary; not so for me. McDowell writes, "Givenness should be givenness for *knowing* (p. zzz)."⁶ Later he says, "It is only against a background of knowledge about the world and one's place in it that one can learn about one's environment by enjoying an experience (p. zzz)." This background knowledge is not, McDowell tells us, "straightforwardly empirical." "Once the subject is in the business of learning through experience, we can say that in a certain sense everything in her experience confirms the background (p. zzz)."

What is this background knowledge that experience can never overturn, that is a prerequisite for learning through experience? How did we humans come by this knowledge? And

⁴See McDowell's "Criteria, Defeasibility, and Knowledge," §3.

⁵I own that my footnote 14 (*E&E*, p. 22) is misleading in its suggestion that disjunctivism is only a metaphysical doctrine. I ask that the first sentence of the note be replaced by the following: "The constraint is consistent with several "disjunctivist" accounts, metaphysical and others, of perception."

⁶I am taking this claim to be substantive, not merely analytic of the concept of givenness. Under the latter interpretation, McDowell's argument against the Equivalence constraint reduces to an *ignoratio elenchi*.

what is its original rational ground, if not experience? Furthermore, does this background knowledge include substantive claims about sensible qualities such as colors, shapes, and odors; and about space and time that structure their instantiations? What claims are these, and why should we think that experience can never overturn them?

These are some of the questions that become urgent if we accept McDowell's picture, and I am highly skeptical that these questions have any satisfying answers. It is a virtue of the picture I have offered that it prompts no such questions. Under my proposal, we can understand the rational role of experience without any commitment to the idea that we possess some trans-empirical knowledge of the world and our place in it. The proposal makes sense of the possibility that even though we begin our rational inquiry into nature with radically misconceived ideas about the world and our place in it, experience corrects our misconceptions and guides us to the truth. The proposal allows us to see all of our substantive knowledge of the world as rationally grounded in, and under the jurisdiction of, experience.

Finally, I should address McDowell's charge that my conception of the given is Cartesian. McDowell writes,

On Gupta's picture, someone who enjoys an experience is in a position to know that something is given in it, and what that given is, independently of whether things are as they appear to be in the experience. This idea of the given, as knowable independently of the facts about the environment, has a strikingly Cartesian character (p.zzz).

It is true that in my picture, the given in an experience is independent of whether the experience is veridical. The given depends solely on the subjective character of experience: a veridical experience can be subjectively identical to, for example, a hallucination; hence, the veridical experience can yield the same given as the hallucination. If it is Cartesian to take seriously the subjective character of experience in assessments of the subject's empirical rationality, then my picture is definitely Cartesian—and I want it to be Cartesian.⁷ The entire point of my book is that

⁷I do not think that in my picture the "*knowability* of the given" is Cartesian in any interesting sense. I hold the given to be analogous to an argument scheme. So, in my picture, "knowing the given" cannot be "knowing that things are thus and so." "Knowing the given" must instead be understood somewhat as follows: being prepared to make certain transitions or to treat

one can be a Cartesian in this sense while avoiding all commerce with certainty, privileged access, private sense-data, and the like. In particular, one can take the subjective character of experience seriously without thinking of experience in the Cartesian way: as a relation obtaining between the self and some special, subjective entities.

Both McDowell and I want to reject Cartesian conceptions of experience, but our ways of doing so are different. Perhaps one way of highlighting the difference is as follows. Suppose we think of conscious experience in this generic way: in experience, certain entities are *present* before one's conscious self; but we leave open the nature of these entities. Then, Cartesian conceptions of experience arise from a combination of two ideas:

(a) the Equivalence constraint, and

(b) that presence implies immediate knowability; so, if *a*'s being *F* is present in an experience then the subject can immediately know that *a* is *F*.⁸

Since in a subjectively identical hallucination, mind-independent things are not known, it follows that even in the veridical experience mind-independent things are not present before the conscious self.⁹ This is a conclusion that both McDowell and I want to resist. I do so by rejecting (b): I maintain that presence does not imply knowability (let alone, *immediate* knowability). Even in a

certain transitions as rational. That this sort of knowledge can be independent of facts about the environment would be allowed not only by the Cartesians but also by their severest critics.

⁸In his classic defense of a Cartesian conception of experience, Russell writes,

The faculty of being acquainted with things other than itself is the main characteristic of a mind. Acquaintance with objects essentially consists in a relation between the mind and something other than the mind; it is this that constitutes the mind's power of knowing things (*Problems of Philosophy*, 42).

Note that 'acquaintance' is Russell's term for immediate knowledge; hence, Russell accepts a version of (b): presence implies acquaintance.

⁹Chapter 2 of *E&E* provides resources for turning this quick and dirty argument into a slow and clean one.

veridical experience, things may be present to consciousness which that consciousness is not in a position to know. But I preserve (a), and thus I take seriously the idea of subjectivity and its role in understanding rationality. As I conceive it, a fundamental philosophical problem posed by empirical knowledge is to make sense of subjectivity without falling into Cartesian conceptions of experience. I offered in my book one logical idea—namely, the hypothetical given—that I think helps us with this problem.

McDowell, if I read him correctly, rejects (a) and opts for (b)—or a thesis in its neighborhood. According to him, in conscious experience, the fundamental relation of mind to world is that of knowledge. We saw earlier his claim that “givenness should be givenness for *knowing*.” His disjunctivism holds (correctly) that the same entities cannot be present in subjectively identical experiences, one veridical and the other hallucinatory. He concludes that the given in the two experiences cannot be the same, and thus he denies the Equivalence constraint.¹⁰ McDowell’s move—in particular, the tight connection he holds between experience and knowledge—makes it difficult to understand the subjective dimension of experience and, consequently, the rationality of a subject’s empirical beliefs. McDowell writes,

[I]t is only against a background of knowledge that an experience is what it is, affording or seeming to afford an opportunity for knowing, at all. If we want “experience” to mean something epistemically significant, we must recognize that the ability to have experiences at all is something we acquire only as we acquire the background (p.zzz).

This claim does not seem to me correct. A background of *knowledge* is not necessary for an experience to *seemingly* “afford an opportunity for knowing.” The subject’s conception of the world and his place in it may be so utterly wrong that it is inappropriate to talk about the subject’s *knowledge*. Still, his experiences can make it *seem* to him that, for example, he sees that things are thus and so. Indeed, even though the subject has little knowledge, his empirical beliefs may all be perfectly rational. (An extreme, and familiar, example: A brain in a vat has no knowledge of its

¹⁰I myself reject the last inference. Differences in entities present do not necessarily imply differences in the given. Two experiences in which different entities are present can be subjectively identical, and thus they can yield the same given.

environment, but its experiences can render rational its claims about the world.)¹¹

McDowell's picture of experience is rich and in many ways attractive—but it is also highly externalistic. And I, for one, do not see how his picture makes room for a notion of subjectivity robust enough to help us understand empirical rationality.¹²

II. Peacocke and the Reliability Constraint

Peacocke raises in his paper many interesting objections and questions. I will set aside one group of questions, however: those that Peacocke puts under the head “The Need for a Finite Basis.”¹³ Excellent though these questions are, they are not so much an objection to my account as they are an invitation to expand it—an expansion that would require more space than I have available here. I therefore defer these questions to another occasion, and I focus on more pressing issues raised by Peacocke. Many of these center on the following Reliability constraint, which I take to govern any account of the given.¹⁴

Reliability constraint: The given in an experience is not erroneous.

This constraint implies that if the given in an experience is a proposition, then the proposition must be true. If it is an object, the object must exist. And if, as in my proposal, the given

¹¹I do not accept the second claim in the last quotation from McDowell. This claim might be acceptable if one follows McDowell and takes the epistemic significance of experience to be propositional. But in my account of the epistemic significance, the claim can be resisted. I insist that experiences have great epistemic significance, but I remain neutral on whether the capacity to have experiences requires that the subject possess concepts.

¹²As already remarked, subjective identity of two experiences cannot be understood as subjective indistinguishability, i.e., the incapacity of the subject to distinguish the two experiences.

¹³Section 3(ii) in Peacocke's “Perception, Content and Rationality” (henceforth, PCR).

¹⁴Though as I point out in the book (*E&E*, p. 229), the theory I offer does not *require* that the Reliability constraint be accepted. I take it as a virtue of the theory that it respects the constraint.

establishes rational links between views and perceptual judgments, then the constraint requires these links to be truth preserving: *if* the view is correct, *then* the perceptual judgments must be true (see *E&E*, pp. 27-30 & 83-87).

Peacocke objects to the Reliability constraint and to the conclusions I base on it. In addressing his objections, I confront a preliminary obstacle. Peacocke frames his objections using the notion “content of an experience,” and while this notion is central in Peacocke’s own theory of perceptual experience, it plays no role in mine. Now, I do not need to reject the notion of content altogether. I *can* associate a content with an experience—and that, too, in any one of several ways. Here is one way (see *E&E*, pp. 233-234). Let Γ_e be the given in an experience e . Then, for any view v , $\Gamma_e(v)$ is a totality of propositions.¹⁵ By fixing a value for v —say, by letting v be a particular view held by the subject when she undergoes experience e —I can associate with e a content, namely, the conjunction of the propositions in $\Gamma_e(v)$. If a different view were selected, a different content might well be associated with the experience. And there are yet other ways of assigning contents to experiences. I will assume for the space of this section that somehow a content is associated with each experience. Following Peacocke, I will take it that this content has the following characteristics. (a) It is propositional. (b) It can be false, and it is false when the subject suffers from a perceptual illusion such as the Müller-Lyer. (c) It is indicative of how the world appears to the subject when she undergoes the experience. Again following Peacocke, I shall speak of this content as the “face value” of the experience; to take an experience at its face value is to accept the content of the experience. The question that separates Peacocke from me is this: What is the epistemic role of the content of an experience? For Peacocke, content serves a crucial epistemic role; for me, it does not.

Let us compare the position I have put forward to that of Peacocke. As I have indicated, I accept the Reliability constraint. And I maintain that the given in an experience is hypothetical: whether a perceptual judgment is rendered rational by an experience depends upon the view that is antecedently rational for the subject; the same experience when conjoined with different rational views can yield different perceptual judgments as rational. Peacocke does not accept the Reliability constraint; he favors instead a variant, which he calls the “Ratifiability Condition”:

¹⁵More precisely, it fixes such a totality in each context.

Ratifiability Condition: “Whenever a mental transition is rational, there is a condition of soundness that it meets. This soundness condition involves the notion of truth, and it is a condition that concerns the correctness or fulfillment of the contents of one or more of the mental states involved in the transition (PCR, §3(i)).”

And Peacocke accepts the following rule that links the content of a perceptual experience to entitlement or rational acceptance.¹⁶

Rule for Perceptual Entitlement: For observational propositions p , if S 's perceptual experience has p as a part of its content then S is defeasibly entitled to accept p —that is, S is rational to accept p if S has no good reasons to doubt that S is perceiving properly.¹⁷

In *Realm of Reason*, Peacocke sketches an account of “observationality.” But I will not enter into this account here, for it raises issues that will take us too far afield. I will work with some simple examples of perceptual content that intuitively count as observational.¹⁸

¹⁶I shall use ‘entitlement’ and ‘rational acceptance’ interchangeably: a subject is entitled to a proposition p on an occasion iff the subject is rational to accept p on that occasion. Peacocke, too, makes no distinction between these notions in PCR. See also Peacocke’s *Realm of Reason*, pp. 10-12.

¹⁷I have chosen not to work with the version of the rule Peacocke states in PCR, §3(i): “There is perceptual entitlement only in circumstances in which there is no reason to doubt that taking perceptual experience at face value will contribute to the goal of making only true judgements.” This formulation does not adequately capture Peacocke’s idea. It is in one respect too weak (and, as will be evident from the examples given below, it is in another respect too strong). The formulation states only a necessary condition for perceptual entitlement, and thus it is consistent with the possibility that a subject has no perceptual entitlements at all.

I have based the formulation of the rule above on Peacocke’s *Realm of Reason*. A number of different, non-equivalent formulations of the rule can be derived from this book, no one of which seems to me to qualify as *the* best. I have chosen to work with what seems to me to be *one* of several best formulations.

For some alternative formulations of the rule, see James Pryor, “The Skeptic and the Dogmatist,” and Roger White, “Problems for Dogmatism.”

¹⁸Versions of objections given below hold also, I believe, when the Rule is read with Peacocke’s stricter and more technical notion of observationality.

Here is a simple illustration of the way the Rule works. Say that I am out for a walk, things are normal, and that, seeing a crow sitting on a branch of a tree, I make the perceptual judgment that a crow is sitting on a branch. Plainly, I am rational in making the judgment. The Rule explains this rationality in three steps: (i) The proposition that a crow is sitting on a branch is observational, and it is a part of the content of my visual experience (or, at any rate, something that implies the proposition is a part of this content). (ii) I am thus defeasibly entitled to the proposition that a crow is sitting on a branch. (iii) I have no good reasons to doubt that I am perceiving properly; hence, I am entitled *tout court* to the proposition that a crow is sitting on a branch.

The Rule for Perceptual Entitlement, though it has some initial plausibility, does not seem to me satisfactory. Here are some problems with it. Example (A): This is a variant of the example we have just considered. Suppose that I know quite a bit about crows, their evolution and their natural history. But through culpable inattention, I am wrong about their visual phenomenology: I take all large, black birds to be crows. Now, it would appear that the proposition that a crow is sitting on a branch is a part of the content of my visual experience: the bird before me *is* a crow; the visual appearances are exactly the same as in the previous example; and I do possess, and mobilize, the concept “crow.” So, according to the Rule, I am defeasibly entitled to the proposition that a crow is sitting on a branch. But, as I have no good reasons to doubt that I am perceiving properly, it follows that I am entitled *tout court* to the judgment that a crow is sitting on a branch. Yet it is plain that I am not so entitled. Since the links between phenomenology and the concept of crow are not rational, my judgment that there is a crow on the branch is not rational.

Example (B): This, too, is a variant of the first example. Suppose I know that my perceptual system is not functioning properly—suppose that I suffer from a neurological disorder which makes everything a bit blurry, and I know this fact. Nevertheless, I may be perfectly entitled to judge that a crow is sitting on a branch: my perception of the crow may be clear enough. But the Rule does not yield this entitlement, for now I have a good reason to doubt that I am perceiving properly.¹⁹

¹⁹It will not do to revise the Rule by reading the defeasibility condition thus: “*S* is rational to accept the proposition *p* if *S* has no good reasons to doubt the truth of *p*.” This can be seen

The Rule for Perceptual Entitlement is similar in one important respect to the hypothetical given I have proposed: it, too, yields only conditional entitlements. The difference between the two proposals centers on the condition that must be fulfilled before we have entitlement *tout court*. According to the Rule, the condition is the absence of good reasons for doubting that one is perceiving properly; according to the hypothetical given, the condition is the rationality of the antecedent view.²⁰ The above examples cast doubt on the condition imposed by the Rule, but not on the one found in the hypothetical given. In Example (A), the view is not rational, for the relevant phenomenological links are not rational; hence, the rationality of the perceptual judgment is not implied. In Example (B), the relevant links to phenomenology are rational, and the rationality of the perceptual judgment remains intact.

More generally, the rationality of a perceptual judgment depends upon the rationality of a complex of factors—factors that are a part of what I call the subject’s *view*. It is impossible to demarcate in advance the elements of this complex; hence, at a schematic level, I say that the rationality of the perceptual judgment is conditional on the rationality of the antecedent view, though I recognize that on a particular occasion only a specific part of the view may be relevant to the perceptual judgment (see *E&E*, pp. 165-7). Given an experience, a rational view determines both (i) what perceptual judgments are rational and (ii) whether a subject has any good reasons to doubt that he is perceiving properly. But as the above examples show, (ii) does not determine (i).

There are some other reasons to prefer the condition found in the hypothetical given to

from the following example which, too, is a variant of the first example above. Example (C): Suppose that before I begin my walk, my daughter, Donna, who is otherwise highly trustworthy, tells me that I will see an albino crow sitting on a branch; and I naturally believe her. Now, when I see the black crow, I am entitled to the judgment that a black crow is sitting on a branch. But not according to the revised rule, for now I have a good reason—namely, my daughter’s testimony—to doubt the judgment.

This example shows also that it will not do to read the defeasibility condition thus: “*S* is rational to accept the proposition *p* if *S* has no good reasons to doubt that *S* is perceiving properly *with respect to p*.” Since in the present example, I have a good reason to doubt that a black crow is sitting on a branch, I have a good reason to doubt that my perceptual system is functioning correctly in delivering this information. A good reason to doubt a conjunct is also a good reason to doubt the conjunction.

²⁰I am ignoring the possibility that perceptual judgments precipitate such a revision of the antecedent view that their own rationality is undermined (see *E&E*, p. 81).

that stated in the Rule. First, as Peacocke himself observes, rationality may be in play even when the subject has no concept of experience or of perception (PCR, §1(i)). In such situations, all talk of a subject's reasons to doubt that he is perceiving properly is moot; not so for talk about the rationality of the subject's view. It is not a requirement on views that they contain claims about experience. Views can range from simple and unsophisticated ones, like those of little children, to highly complex and rich ones, like those of philosophers.²¹

Second, if the condition stated in the Rule fails—that is, if the subject has a good reason to doubt that he is perceiving properly—then the Rule renders the experience rationally inert. Not so under the hypothetical given: that he is not perceiving properly may be a part of the subject's rational view, yet this view when conjoined with experience can yield rational perceptual judgments. This point is important for, as I argue in the book, the special rational power of experience lies in the breadth of views for which it provides conditional entitlements. Each conditional entitlement taken in itself is meager; but taken together, they endow experience with enough rational power to sustain empiricism—or so I argued in the book.²²

Peacocke objects that the hypothetical given meets neither Reliability nor Ratifiability (PCR, §3(i)). He claims that if a subject suffers an unexpected perceptual illusion, then the

²¹This addresses the objection raised by Peacocke in PCR, §1(i). The above discussion also addresses, I believe, the point raised in PCR, §1(ii), about nonconclusive entitlement. My own proposal invokes the idea of nonconclusive entitlement. The debate between Peacocke and me centers on how the nonconclusive character of perceptual entitlement is to be understood.

The phenomenon of testimony provides no special comfort, it seems to me, to Peacocke's position (see PCR, §1(iii)). The rationality of a belief that the proposition p is true acquired on the basis of, say, oral testimony depends on the rationality of a complex set of elements of the antecedent view—a complex consisting of various beliefs and such things as the phenomenological links between auditory experiences and concepts such as “affirms that p .” The mere fact that a witness affirms that p , or that it seems to the subject that the witness has done so, does not render it rational for the subject to take it that p has been affirmed, let alone to take it that p is true.

²²Peacocke says that if an experience had no face value, “perceptual judgment based on experience would then be either an irrational leap in the dark, or something inferential (PCR, §2).” I can allow, as we have seen, that experience has face value, but a more important observation here is this: the denial of epistemic significance to face value does not force on us Peacocke's dilemma. A third alternative exists, namely, that perceptual judgments are rendered *non-inferentially* rational by the conjunction of experience and view. (This note is prompted by a suggestion of Chris Frey).

hypothetical given will not be truth preserving. But this claim is not right. For now, the false proposition that the subject is not suffering a perceptual illusion will be a part of the subject's view (or, at least, there will be erroneous links between phenomenology and perceptual judgments). Hence, the antecedent view will fail to be correct. It is true that in the situation imagined, the subject will be entitled to false perceptual judgments (assuming that the antecedent view is rational), but the reliability of the given is not thereby impugned. Peacocke is led astray here, I think, because he sometimes assumes that when I say that the given in an experience is perfectly reliable, I am saying that the content of the experience is true (see PCR, §3(i)). But this is not what I am saying; I allow that the content of an experience may be false (*E&E*, p. 28). What I *am* saying is that the given is truth preserving in this sense, that if the view is correct, then the entailed perceptual judgments are true.

Similarly, the idea of the hypothetical given faces little difficulty in meeting the Ratifiability Condition: it meets the Condition as easily as does any valid rule of inference (e.g., *modus ponens*). It may be objected that the Condition is not met if it is taken literally, for it then requires reference to the content of experience and this content is not in play in the hypothetical given. *Response*: The role played by content in Ratifiability is unspecific. Ratifiability requires that the soundness condition “*concerns* the correctness or fulfillment” [italics added] of the content, and the hypothetical given can meet such a soundness condition. More important, insofar as Ratifiability presupposes that the given in experience is propositional, it cannot serve as a touchstone in the present debate.

In fact, it is the Rule for Perceptual Entitlement that has trouble meeting Ratifiability, when that condition is understood in a robust way. Understood thus, Ratifiability reduces to Reliability, and Peacocke's own example of an unexpected perceptual illusion creates a problem. The subject in such a situation may well have no good reasons to doubt that she is perceiving properly, yet her perceptual judgments would be erroneous. It is this kind of example that motivates Peacocke to formulate Ratifiability in a loose way: the rational transitions must meet “*a* condition of soundness”; it is left open what precisely soundness comes to. Peacocke cannot require that rational transitions preserve truth at the actual world, for his own account of rational entitlement fails to meet that requirement. So, he loosens the requirement to say, in effect, that rational transitions must preserve truth in certain other worlds, more or less distant from the

actual world.²³ But this requirement does not respect the underlying motivation for Ratifiability, namely, that the principal aim of judgment is truth (PCR, §3(i)). The principal aim of *actual* judgment is truth *at the actual world*, not at some other worlds. Hence, rational transitions made in the actual world, one would think, must be truth-preserving at the actual world. But this requirement is not met by Peacocke's account of perceptual rational transitions.

I conclude that both the Reliability condition and the hypothetical given are in better accord with Peacocke's own underlying motivations than are Ratifiability and the Rule for Perceptual Entitlement.²⁴

III. Neta and Convergence

The rational contribution of experience, under my proposal, can appear excessively weak. I propose that the given in an experience is entirely hypothetical; that is, the rational demands that an individual experience imposes on a subject are all conditional: if the subject accepts such-and-such a view, then she must adjust it in light of such-and-such perceptual judgments. It appears, however, that empirical rationality can impose unconditional demands. A subject's experiences can render irrational her belief that, for example, the tides are caused by the movements of giant turtles. This irrationality is absolute, not relative to a view. Indeed, something stronger appears to

²³See *Realm of Reason*, pp. 12-13.

²⁴I should comment briefly on Peacocke's objections (in PCR, §2) to my Argument from the Propositional Given (*E&E*, chapter 2). My argument has two prongs, and it aims to show that a Cartesian conception of experience is inevitable if the given in experience is propositional. One prong of the argument is based on the Reliability constraint, and by defending the constraint, I have defended this part of the argument. The other prong dispenses with Reliability. Peacocke objects that this part of the argument neglects the possibility that experience provides only nonconclusive entitlements to propositions. However, it seems to me that the argument given in the book (in fns. 27 & 28 in chapter 2) works equally well for nonconclusive entitlements. The argument, as stated in the book, begins with supposition that an experience provides entitlement to a proposition of the form "that *K* is *F*" and concludes that *K* must be true of such entities as sense-data. But an exactly parallel argument goes through if the supposition is taken to be that experience provides *defeasible* entitlement to such propositions. (See also fn. 29 in chapter 2 of *E&E*.)

hold: empirical rationality can demand of a subject that she accept *one* particular view of the self and the world. But how can the hypothetical given be reconciled with the categorical demands of empirical rationality?

The key to the desired reconciliation is the idea of *convergence*. This idea is defined using two concepts: (i) admissible view, and (ii) the series of views \mathcal{V} ($= \langle v_0, v_1, v_2, \dots, v_j, \dots \rangle$) that results when a view v ($= v_0$) is revised in light of a series of experiences \mathcal{E} ($= \langle e_0, e_1, e_2, \dots, e_j, \dots \rangle$). Here v_{n+1} is the view that results when v_n is revised in light of the given in e_n . ($n \geq 0$). Let us say that v_n is *the view that results at the n^{th} stage of revision when v is revised in light of \mathcal{E}* . Then, the idea of convergence is captured by this thesis:

Convergence thesis: A series of experiences \mathcal{E} entitles a subject to a proposition p [or a view v] at a stage n if, and only if, the revision process generated by \mathcal{E} converges to p [or to v] at stage n , where the notion of convergence of revision processes is defined as follows.

Definition of convergence: *The revision process generated by a series of experiences \mathcal{E} converges to a proposition p at a stage n if, and only if, for all admissible views v , p belongs to the view that results at the n^{th} stage of revision when v is revised in light of \mathcal{E} .*²⁵

Admissible views are those that are proper starting points of revision. To declare a view inadmissible is not to declare it untrue, nor to declare it unworthy of rational acceptance; it is only to declare the view unworthy of being a *starting point* of revision. The idea behind the Convergence thesis is thus this: if, given one's course of experience, one must end up accepting a proposition p irrespective of the admissible view one begins with, then one is entitled to accept p . Neta challenges the Convergence thesis. Before I address his objection, I should clarify the claims

²⁵Convergence to a view is defined in a parallel way.

Note that the notion defined here is different from that of Peircean convergence. The latter notion is that of approximating a particular view in the long run, and it is structurally similar to a notion of convergence found in Real Analysis. The former notion, in contrast, has little to do with the long-run behavior of revisions.

I am making, for plainly Convergence presupposes a highly idealized setting. My central claim is (A); without it, the ensuing claims, (B)-(D), would not be viable.

- (A) Convergence thesis shows that if we accept the hypothetical given, there is a way of making sense of the categorical demands of rationality. (See *E&E*, §4B.)
- (B) Convergence thesis spells out an ideal of empirical rationality, one that makes sense of our best epistemic practices. I want to stress that I do *not* make any descriptive claim of the following sort: that we arrive at our beliefs via revisions of arbitrary admissible views, or that our current view of the world should be taken to be a product of such revisions. The descriptive claims I make concern only the ideal of empirical rationality. Convergence, I want to say, makes clear the commitments we take on when we commit ourselves to being empirically rational. (See *E&E*, §§6A & chapter 8.)
- (C) The ideal of convergence is superior to that of foundationalism, and to that of coherence. For instance, contrary to foundationalism, it is not a demand of rationality on empirical beliefs that a proof be available for them that appeals only to propositions in the foundationalist base.²⁶ Our empirical beliefs may be perfectly rational even though no such proofs are possible for them. (See *E&E*, §§4B & 7A.)
- (D) The proposed ideal makes available an attractive empiricism. (See *E&E*, §§6B & 6C.)

Neta's objection is a modified version of one I considered at length in my book (and it is so presented by him). The objection I considered is based on a view I called *Solipsism*.

Solipsism: I am a mind that has direct awareness of my present sense-data, which are

²⁶Proofs, as I am using the term, may be non-deductive.

private. I accept nothing that cannot be justified on the basis of my sense-datum judgments. (A subject who holds the Solipsist view makes only sense-datum judgments in response to experience.)

The possibility of Solipsism, according to the objection, ruins convergence, for no course of experience will transform Solipsism to the ordinary view. My account now implies that our ordinary view and our ordinary perceptual judgments cannot be rational; thus, (A) fails, and with it so also do (B)-(D).

My response to the objection is that Solipsism is not admissible; hence, it does not ruin convergence. The very feature of Solipsism that precludes convergence is a reason to rule it inadmissible. Solipsism is *rigid*: no possible course of experience can change the fundamental conception of the self and world it embodies. But our view of ourselves and of the world, even in its fundamentals, ought to be responsive to experience. Solipsism is an epistemic trap. It so strips experience of its power, that once we accept the view, we remain confined to it. The present objection, far from showing a weakness in my proposal, brings out one of its strengths. In classical empiricism, Solipsism is given a place of honor at the foundations of empirical knowledge. In my picture, the view is brushed aside as inadmissible. This dismissal fits better with our best epistemic practices. We feel no necessity (except when confused by a fallacious philosophical argument) to construct proofs, on solipsist bases of, for example, our ordinary judgments of perception. We do not find Solipsism a view worthy of serious exploration. Instead, we find it absurd, and we reject it *a priori*. The model I provide makes sense of these natural and *rational* attitudes. (For a more extended discussion, see *E&E*, §5E.)

Neta does not question my response to Solipsism. Instead he argues that certain modifications of Solipsism create trouble for me. One example he offers is following view, which I shall call v^* .²⁷

View v^* : “[I]f I have a visual experience of a particular shade of orange uninterrupted for 10 seconds, then there are things distinct from my experiences that are causing me to have

²⁷This is the second of his two examples. I will not consider the first, for it can be addressed using the resources mobilized to deal with the second.

those experiences; if I have a visual experience of a particular shade of orange uninterrupted for 20 seconds, then the only things that exist are my present experiences; and otherwise, there is no basis for deciding between these two possibilities (p. zzz).”²⁸

The interesting feature of Neta’s example is that view v^* is not rigid, and yet for certain sequences of experiences (perhaps, including the subject’s actual course of experience), v^* guarantees failure of convergence to ordinary judgments of perception—if, that is, v^* is admissible.²⁹ My proposal faces an acute difficulty if no grounds are available to rule v^* inadmissible.

Neta offers at the end of his paper a way out. He suggests that we accept the propositional given—that is, we think of experience as entitling us, by itself, to some beliefs. And he goes on to propose that “a view is admissible for an epistemic subject only if the subject is entitled to hold that view. Her entitlement to hold that view may derive solely from her antecedent experiences (p.zzz).” I am appreciative of Neta’s constructive spirit, but I must decline his present offer. Neta’s proposed account presupposes the very notion that admissibility is meant to illuminate, namely, a subject’s entitlement to a view. And the appeal to the propositional given will land us in greater difficulties; for, as I argued in *E&E*, it will force us into a Cartesian conception of experience.³⁰

The key to addressing the difficulty is to observe that non-rigidity is only a necessary condition for admissibility, not a sufficient one. I offered in the book a number of conditions that

²⁸Neta, “Empiricism about Experience.” All parenthetical references in this section are to the pages of this paper.

²⁹Chris Hill first brought to my attention, some years ago, examples that illustrate this point.

³⁰Neta suggests that the argument can be blocked by rejecting, on empirical grounds, the following thesis:

For any veridical experience, a subjectively identical non-veridical experience is possible.

However: (i) The modality invoked in the thesis is not that of physical or empirical possibility. Hence, even though, as Neta says, we can learn about experience and about subjective identity empirically, this fact provides no grounds for doubting the thesis. And, in any case, (ii) the argument to Cartesian conceptions can be made independent of the thesis; see *E&E*, pp. 34-5.

admissible views should meet. One such is *receptivity* (*E&E*, pp. 95-6). This condition requires a view to yield different perceptual judgments when experiences are subjectively distinct. A view that always yields, for example, the judgment “Red is present,” irrespective of the phenomenology of experience, is not receptive and hence not admissible. Neta’s example v^* , as specified above, does not meet the condition of receptivity. Still, it is easy to modify the example to meet the condition. Let us understand $v^\#$ to be our commonsense view modified somewhat along the lines indicated in the specification of v^* above. So, in this view, most experiences yield ordinary judgments of perception. But an uninterrupted visual experience of a particular shade of orange for twenty seconds shifts the character of all perceptual judgments; henceforth, they are all sense-datum judgments.³¹ View $v^\#$ retains the crucial feature that made v^* a problem for me: $v^\#$ is non-rigid but it ruins convergence for a range of experiences. Now, however, a second condition I imposed on admissible views is violated—namely, *internal coherence* (*E&E*, p. 95). View $v^\#$ assigns significance to certain experiences that make no sense from within a commonsense perspective. Why should experience of a particular shade of orange for a particular duration precipitate the radical transformation to Solipsism? Considered in itself, apart from all experience, view $v^\#$ is logically defective. Its parts do not fit together into a coherent whole; the view is therefore inadmissible.

I do not say that this is a full reply to the concern raised by Neta. The dialectical moves of the previous paragraph can be iterated. Perhaps v^* or $v^\#$ can be modified in a way that ruins convergence but satisfies all three conditions on admissibility I have introduced so far: non-rigidity, receptivity, and internal coherence. Instead of pursuing the dialectic further here, let me close with some general remarks.

(1) The notion of admissibility reflects an aspect of our ordinary epistemic practices. When we rationally resist a competing view of the world, we can proceed in one of two ways. Either we can provide empirical refutation of the competitor (say, by performing a series of experiments), or we can rule out the competitor on non-empirical, broadly logical grounds. The former course is appropriate with, for example, a view that takes the geometry of space-time to be Euclidean; the

³¹I am dropping the last clause in the specification of v^* , for it suggests that the view loses all receptivity under certain courses of experience. Hence, a version of the receptivity requirement rules the view inadmissible.

latter with, for example, a view that is inconsistent. Solipsism and its modifications, v^* and $v^\#$, belong in the second group. Setting aside all epistemological theorizing, it is plain that we should resist such views on non-empirical grounds, not empirical ones. In spelling out the requirements for admissibility, we are spelling out what these non-empirical grounds are. It is a distinctive virtue of the model I have offered that it provides a thick understanding of the non-empirical grounds, an understanding that enables us to rule out even coherent contingent views (e.g., Solipsism).

(2) The notion of admissibility can be enriched in several ways; hence, my proposal is not without resources for addressing variants of Neta-style examples. Some ways of enriching admissibility are these: (i) The requirement of non-rigidity can be strengthened. (I considered one way of doing so in *E&E*, §5E.) (ii) The receptivity requirement can be strengthened also. The general idea behind receptivity is that views should respect the rich phenomenology of experience. But, as formulated above, the demand it imposes is weak; stronger demands are possible. Chris Frey has formulated one such demand in an unpublished paper.³² (iii) Limitations of epistemic resources motivate strong restrictions on admissibility. The more limited the resources of a subject, the greater her danger of falling into an epistemic trap; hence, the stronger is the demand on views admissible for her. (See *E&E*, chapter 7.)

(3) If the account of experience I have offered is correct, then the debate between rationalism and empiricism reduces to a debate over admissibility requirements. The rationalist position holds that admissible views must include certain substantive *a priori* truths. The empiricist position, on the other hand, resists all such invocation of the *a priori*. It conceives the admissibility requirements as restricting only the starting points of revision. With the present model, unlike with Cartesian conceptions of experience, empiricism has a fighting chance of holding its ground. The debate between rationalism and empiricism cannot be expected to have a quick and easy resolution; hence, nor can the issue of the precise characterization of admissibility. This issue, raised by Neta's objection, is large and important.³³

³²Frey, "On the Rational Contribution of Experiential Transparency."

³³Thanks to Chris Frey, Chris Hill, José Martínez-Fernández, John McDowell, and Mark Wilson for their comments on this essay.

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