Replies to Selim Berker and Karl Schafer

I want to thank Selim Berker and Karl Schafer for their generous remarks about my book and for their probing questions and criticisms. Berker and Schafer raise a broad range of important issues, and they deftly explore the responses and counter-responses their criticisms may entail. In these replies, I shall not even try to do full justice to their intricate discussions. I shall confine myself to some of the larger issues they raise, and here too, I shall be unable to go into all the relevant details. I shall have time to offer only outlines of replies.

§1. Subjective Character and the Given (Schafer)

Schafer helpfully compares two competing positions on experience and the given (= the rational contribution of experience). The first, which he calls ‘Dogmatism’, is similar but not identical to the position so named by James Pryor in his paper, “The Skeptic and the Dogmatist.” The second position is similar to the one I offered in Empiricism and Experience (henceforth: E&E) but is subtly different from it.

According to the first position, Schafer’s Dogmatism, introspection reveals that experience has, what Schafer calls, a rich subjective character: “When I first introspect upon the subjective character of my current experience, it seems to present me with a rich experience of the world around me (p. 6).” The rich subjective character of an experience e makes available a set of thick propositions, propositions that can be about external objects. The given in e, according to Dogmatism, consists in e’s providing the subject with defeasible entitlements to the propositions in this set. If the subject has no reason not to accept a proposition in the set, then she is entitled to accept the proposition outright.¹ For example, as I look out over my room, I have a visual experience, and it is a part of the rich subjective character of this experience that there are several

¹This is just one of several ways of spelling out the idea of defeasibility.
books before me. This experience thus provides me with a defeasible entitlement to the proposition that there are several books before me. Since I have no reason not to accept this proposition, I am entitled to accept the proposition outright.

According to the second position, introspection reveals that experience has not only a rich subjective character but also, what Schafer calls, a thin subjective character. The thin subjective character of a visual experience (e.g.) consists of the way “colors, shades, shapes, and the like are distributed in three-dimensional space (p. 6).” The given in an experience is determined, the second position maintains, by the thin subjective character; elements in the rich character that go beyond the thin are irrelevant to the given. Finally, according to the second position, the given is not propositional but, as proposed in *E&E*, hypothetical. Experience does not provide entitlement, even defeasible entitlement, to any proposition. Instead, it establishes rational links between views and perceptual judgments. Entitlement to perceptual judgment follows only if the subject’s antecedent view is rational.

Schafer raises two concerns about the second position. First, he doubts that experience has a thin subjective character. He writes,

But when I try to focus my attention on this thinner sort of subjective character, I am not at all sure that I am able to locate it in my own experience. I, at least, simply cannot “strip away” the rich content of my experience in the manner I would have to do in order to isolate its thin subjective character. At most, I can pretend to myself that I am, say, viewing a painting which depicts the scene that occupies my visual field. But even when I do this, the subjective character of my experience still involves the presentation of a rich content (pp. 7-8).

A little later, he adds ironically, “perhaps . . . my introspective powers are lacking in certain crucial respects (p. 8).”

Schafer’s second concern is that even if experience has a thin subjective character, it can be doubted that only this thin character is relevant to the given in experience. Why could it not be

2 Strictly speaking, only the relevant part of the view need be rational. Henceforth, I suppress this qualification.
that the further elements found in the rich subjective character also contribute to the given?

In the theory I offer in *E&E*, subjective character is an abstraction founded on the notion of subjective identity. To say that experiences share a subjective character is to say that they are subjectively identical. In the theory of *E&E*, talk of subjective character has no metaphysical significance. That two experiences have the same subjective character does not imply that they literally share some attributes. Nor does it imply that the experiences are directed to the same kinds of objects or even to the same properties.

Suppose we think of experience in the following generic way: in experience, some objects and their properties and relations are presented to the subject. Then the point I am making is that two experiences may be subjectively identical even though different kinds of objects (and even different properties) are presented in them. One of the experiences may be veridical, and it may present the subject with a bit of external reality and its attributes. The other experience may be a hallucination, and it may present the subject with mere images and their qualities. Yet the two experiences may be subjectively identical.

If the given in experience is construed as propositional, then there is a strong motivation to think of subjective character in Cartesian terms (see *E&E*, chapter 2). It is now tempting to think that, in experience, special objects and properties are presented to the subject—objects and properties that the subject can directly apprehend. Talk of subjective character can now be interpreted literally: in subjectively identical experiences, the same characteristics and the same types of objects are present before consciousness. These experiences literally share subjective characteristics, characteristics that can be discovered through a special kind of reflection or introspection.

If, however, we think of the given as hypothetical, then these motivations and temptations disappear. We can now recognize that the subjective character of an experience does not fix the objects and properties presented in the experience. Furthermore, these objects and properties cannot be discovered merely by introspection. Their discovery requires a substantive empirical inquiry.

I am willing, then, to allow talk of subjective character, and I am willing to say that it is
thin and that it fixes the given. However, I want to reject the idea that there are special
characteristics of experience that are discoverable by introspection. It is not as if in visual
experience (e.g.) the thin subjective character lies on a special mental film that has mental paint
splattered on it. Thin subjective character is not something that one can reach by somehow
chipping away at rich subjective character. It does not have a special location in experience. Thin
subjective character is a useful abstraction, and no more. It provides a useful way of talking about
subjectively identical experiences. But this talk should not seduce us into accepting traditional
doctrines such as that of introspective access, of privacy, and of special concepts founded on
subjective character. We can do justice to subjectivity (i.e., to the subject’s viewpoint) while
abandoning these traditional traps. Indeed, to establish that this is possible was one of my primary
goals in *E&E*.

What Schafer calls rich subjective character is not really a feature of experience. It is, as
Schafer notes, a product of experience and view. Rich subjective character captures how things
seem to the subject, i.e., how the subject *takes* the world presented in experience to be. Rich
subjective character makes available a set of proposition, and plainly, what propositions these are
depends in part on the subject’s view. This has two important consequences. First, the subject has
entitlement to a proposition in this set only if the subject’s view is rational. If the view is not
rational, the subject does not necessarily have a defeasible entitlement to the proposition. Second,
elements in the rich subjective character that go beyond the thin are irrelevant to the given. These
elements arise from view, not from experience. Hence, they have no bearing on the given, for the
given captures the rational significance of *experience*, and only of experience. The contributions
of other items are, by definition, excluded from it.

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3 The subjective character is thin in that external objects are not constituents of it: two
experiences may be subjectively identical even though one of them is veridical and the other is a
sheer hallucination.

4 We can think of the rich subjective character of an experience *e* as the value of the
hypothetical given $\Gamma_e$ at the subject’s view $v$. If this is right, then I do not think that the thin
subjective character is in general recoverable from the rich one.

5 By giving the defeasibility theorists the option that the irrationality of antecedent view
defeats entitlement, Schafer blurs the distinction between two quite distinct types of theories. See
(iii) on p.10—a rare unhelpful passage in an otherwise very helpful discussion.
§2. Transition from the Hypothetical to the Categorical (Berker)

Berker raises a highly general difficulty for the picture of empirical rationality I offer in *E&E*. I argued that the hypothetical given is compatible with the idea that a series of experiences $\mathcal{E}$ generates categorical entitlements to particular propositions $P$. If the revision process generated by $\mathcal{E}$ converges to $P$—i.e., if the rational pressure of experiences $\mathcal{E}$ transforms each admissible view to one that contains $P$—then, I suggested, $\mathcal{E}$ generates a categorical entitlement to $P$. Berker raises a problem for this transition from the hypothetical to the categorical. He formulates the idea of the hypothetical given thus:

\[(1) \quad \text{Entitlement to view} + \text{Experience} \Rightarrow \text{Entitlement to Perceptual Judgments.}\]

And he writes,

I fail to see how hypothetical entitlements, on their own, can yield categorical entitlements, even when convergence occurs. We still need there to be categorical entitlements standing at the head of the revision process. . . . [I]n order to get categorical entitlements out, we need to put categorical entitlements in; but Gupta has not explained how we can put categorical entitlements in, so he has not explained how we can get categorical entitlements out (pp. 18-19).

As Berker sees it, to get categorical entitlements out, I need to assume the following:

\[(*) \quad \text{Before undergoing } \mathcal{E}, \text{ the subject is absolutely entitled to hold at least one admissible view.}\]

And this is something I do not want to assume. Indeed I think (*) is false.

Berker’s problem arises because he formulates the hypothetical given as (1)—a formulation that I cannot accept. An experience $e$ establishes, under my proposal, rational links
between views $v$ and certain judgments $J$. These links are analogous to those between premisses
and conclusions in valid arguments. Suppose we represent the rational link established by a valid
argument from a premiss $\varphi$ to a conclusion $\psi$ thus:

(2) $\varphi \vdash \psi.$

Then the rational links established by experience may be represented thus:

(3) Assuming $e$ obtains: $v \vdash J.$

Observe that the force of (2) is not captured by

(4) Entitlement to $\varphi \Rightarrow$ entitlement to $\psi,$

because scheme (4) does not sustain argument by cases: given that a subject is entitled to the
belief that $P$ or $Q$, and given that inference to $R$ from each of $P$ and $Q$ is valid, we are unable to
derive entitlement to $R.$ Under (4), entitlement to $R$ follows if the subject is entitled to accept $P$
or is entitled to accept $Q$, but not if the subject is merely entitled to the disjunctive belief that $P$ or
$Q$. The problem Berker is raising is an artifact of his reading (3) as (1), just as the problem with
the argument from cases is an artifact of reading (2) as (4).

A generalized argument from cases underlies the idea of convergence. Let $v_0, v_1, \ldots, v_n, \ldots$
be all the admissible views. Initially the raimex is entitled to no particular view $v_i$. But she is
entitled to restrict consideration to admissible views; that is, she is entitled to take it that one of
the views $v_i$ obtains. Now, by convergence, $P$ is in the outcome of the rational revision of each of
the views $v_i$ under experiences $\mathcal{E}$. Hence, by an analogue of argument by cases, the raimex is
entitled to $P$. To get categorical entitlements out we do not need categorical entitlement to any
particular view. We need only entitlement to a (massive) disjunction of views—or, more
accurately, we need entitlement to restrict the range of views.

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\textsuperscript{6}This is so even if we assume that $R$ is consistent with the subject’s beliefs and that the
subject is fully aware of the implications.
Berker’s objection highlights, I think, an interesting problem: the problem of how to spell out rational links in terms of entitlements. But this is a general problem; it arises even with formal validity. It is not a special problem for the theory I offered in _E&E_. In particular, it is not a special problem for the account I give of the transition from the hypothetical to the categorical.

§3. Convergence (Berker and Schafer)

Berker and Schafer, both, raise the important question whether convergence can ever occur. In _E&E_, I put forward three constraints on admissible views: receptivity, internal coherence, and non-rigidity. And I showed how these constraints suffice to rule out some troublesome views that threaten convergence, e.g., solipsism. Berker and Schafer argue that the constraints I laid down do not rule out all troublesome views. I myself would not be surprised if they were right in their conclusion. I never thought of the three constraints as constituting a complete and definitive list. Even in _E&E_, I explored other possible constraints on admissibility. I have no difficulty, then, with Berker’s and Schafer’s conclusion. However, I do want to resist their arguments for their conclusion. The examples they put forward do not require, it seems to me, any new constraints; they can be handled by the three constraints before us. Here is one of Berker’s two examples:

**No-Writing-in-the-Sky Solipsism.** Only I and my sense-data exist, unless I have an experience as of the stars in the sky aligning themselves to read, “You are a creature living in an external world created by God,” in which case a commonsense, religious view of the

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Berker is right that the “wide-scope” reading considered in his fn. 20 will not do.

See _E&E_, p. 108, for an account of the view I am calling ‘solipsism’.

This kind of objection has been put to me by many friends and colleagues. It was first raised by Chris Hill long ago when in the course of a conversation I sketched to him the idea of the hypothetical given. It is raised by Ram Neta in “Empiricism about Experience.” I respond to Neta in “Equivalence, Reliability, and Convergence.” Some of the material from my response to Neta is included in what follows.

The other can be handled in a parallel way.
Berker observes that unlike solipsism, this view is not rigid: certain kinds of experiences can bring about a fundamental change in it, the change from solipsism to a commonsense, religious view. Moreover, if the view is admissible then it ruins convergence to the commonsense view (assuming that we have never experienced the stars in the sky aligning themselves to form a sentence). In response, I want to say that No-Writing-in-the-Sky Solipsism is not an internally coherent view. For, why does a particular visual sense-datum precipitate the specific radical transformation envisaged in this view? Considered in itself, apart from all experience, the view is logically defective. Its parts do not fit together into a coherent whole, and thus the view is inadmissible.\footnote{Berker offers a different but interesting objection, namely, that solipsism is not ruled out by the three constraints. In particular, Berker objects, solipsism is not ruled out by the rigidity constraint because experience can transform a solipsist view to a fundamentally non-equivalent one. A solipsist view that countenanced four types of sense-data (e.g., visual, tactile, olfactory, and gustatory) can be moved by a novel experience to one that countenances a new type of sense-datum (e.g., auditory).

In response I want to insist that the two solipsist views, before and after the novel experience, are fundamentally equivalent. The conceptions of the self and of the objects of experience remain the same in two views. In good views, in admissible views, the nature of the objects of experience ought to be up for empirical discovery. Solipsism, by its very definition, rigidly fixes the nature of the object of experience. (The same can be said of the nature of the self.)

Berker’s objection is helpful because it clarifies the notion of “fundamental equivalence” in play in the definition of “rigidity.”

Schafer offers a different kind of counterexample. Let us follow Schafer and understand the normal minimal response to an experience to be “the (maximal) proposition that this experience, given a normal background view, would justify without any further inference or reasoning (p. 13, italics in the original).” Then, the view Schafer offers is this:

**The Deceiver.** My experiences are the product of an evil demon whose aim is to disguise the true nature of reality from me. When the normal minimal response to my experience is

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Schafer’s Deceiver, I am willing to grant, does not contain arbitrary and incoherent elements. But the view is rigid and is therefore inadmissible. The deliverances of experience under the Deceiver are exceedingly weak: they are negations of long conjunctions. I do not think these weak perceptual judgments have the rational power to bring about a fundamental change in view. Let me stress two points about admissibility constraints. First, the need for these constraint is implied by a fundamental feature of perceptual judgments, a feature that lies at the foundations of the account I offer in *E&E*. This feature is the interdependence of perceptual judgments and views. Wherever there is interdependence, there is a potential for vicious pathology, and perceptual judgments are no exception. Since these judgments depend on views, the potential exists for a vicious epistemic trap. The view may render the perceptual judgments so weak (as in Schafer’s Deceiver) that they are rendered inert. A principal motivation for admissibility constraints is to protect the epistemic power of experience in face of the interdependence of judgments and views.

Second, admissibility constraints reflect 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

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13P. 15. I have condensed and slightly reformulated Schafer’s presentation of the view.

I say this because Schafer defines normal minimal response to be *the* maximal proposition of a certain sort. Uniqueness and maximality suggest that the normal minimal response is the conjunction of judgments in the given relative to the normal background view. I think the problem about rigidity will remain even if Schafer were to define a normal minimal response to be *a* maximal proposition of the particular sort indicated in his definition.

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15We have more hope of avoiding rigidity if we change the example and say that an experience, *e*, delivers not the negation of the long conjunction, but the totality of the negations of the conjuncts. So, if *P* is a proposition that *e* yields under the normal view, then *e* now yields not-*P*. This move may avoid the problem with rigidity, but it puts the coherence of the view in doubt. The normal response to a funny-shaped blotch on the wall may include both “that blotch is not triangular” and “that blotch is not rectangular.” Under the present proposal, the experience will yield a blatantly incoherent set of perceptual judgments, a set that includes both “that blotch is triangular” and “that blotch is rectangular.”
former course is appropriate with, for example, a view that takes the geometry of space-time to be Euclidean; the latter with, for example, a view that is inconsistent. Views such as solipsism and the Deceiver 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 admissibility requirements, we are spelling out what these non-empirical grounds are. It is a distinctive virtue of the model I offer 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).

§4. Empiricism (Berker and Schafer)

Even if it is granted that the model of empirical rationality I offer in *E&E* is viable, an important issue raised by Berker and Schafer remains. Does the model deserve the title I claimed for it, namely, *empiricism*? Berker writes,

> [I]f there is such a thing as pure theoretical reason, then it is compatible with Gupta’s proposal that pure reason on its own could secure substantive truths about what we have (non-conditional) reason to believe (p. 16).

Berker claims further that not only is the model compatible with the idea of pure theoretical reason, it positively assigns to reason a substantial role. Berker thinks I must countenance synthetic *a priori* truths.

Schafer also thinks that I assign reason far too large a role to claim the mantle of empiricism. Schafer says of the constraints I put on admissible views that “these constraints on their own seem to give us a basis for at least some deeply contingent *a priori* knowledge.” He adds a little later, “these constraints would give us an *a priori* basis for knowledge that none of these [inadmissible] hypotheses obtains (p. 16).” According to Schafer, the model I offer belongs

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16This issue is raised also by Valeriano Iranzo in “On the Epistemic Authority of Experience.”
more to the Kantian tradition than to the empiricist one:

it might be best to regard Gupta's response to skepticism as most similar, not to traditional forms of empiricism, but instead to the sort of combination of empiricism and rationalism that we encounter in work in the Kantian tradition. After all, in the way his response to skepticism is based on both experience and a priori constraints on belief, Gupta seems to me to be closer to Kant's reply to skepticism than he is to traditional forms of empiricism (p. 17).

Berker is right that the abstract model I present—i.e., the hypothetical given plus convergence—is compatible with rationalism. The model does not, by itself, settle the debate between empiricists and rationalists; instead it provides a framework for conducting the debate. The burden on the rationalist in this debate is to produce some synthetic a priori principles and show that they are essential for empirical rationality. The burden on the empiricist is to produce a rich and well-motivated conception of admissible views, one sufficient to undergird empirical rationality. The debate here parallels the traditional debate between the rationalists and the empiricists. I argued in E&E that under the traditional conception, with its propositional given, the rationalist wins the debate hands down. But under the model I offer, with its hypothetical given, this is not so. The empiricist has a fighting chance in the debate.17 So: Berker is right that the abstract model, when taken by itself, does not rule out rationalism. I want to insist, however, that the model is more hospitable to empiricism than its traditional counterpart.

Berker objects that the model countenances synthetic a priori truths. He writes, “for Gupta, statements about the proper extension of the \( \Gamma_a(v) \) function are synthetic, a priori truths, discoverable through reason alone (p. 12).” However, the status of a statement as analytic or synthetic, or as a priori or a posteriori, depends not only on what the statement is about but also on the concepts deployed in the statement. Both the following statements,

If Bill has a unique brother then Sam is a brother of someone, and

17See E&E, chapter 2 & pp. 158-160.
If Bill has a unique brother then Bill’s brother is a brother of someone,

are about Bill and his brother (assuming Sam is Bill’s only brother), but the first is plainly synthetic and the second is arguably analytic. Hence, one cannot pin a unique status (e.g., synthetic) on statements in general about a particular thing (e.g., the proper extension of the \( \Gamma \) function). The status is likely to vary from statement to statement.

As I see it, the value of the \( \Gamma \) function is fully determined by its arguments, namely, experience and view; nothing extraneous is needed. A view, as I understand it, is not merely a complex of judgments. It contains also links between experiences and perceptual judgments: the view determines how the subject is to respond to an experience.\(^{18}\) The transition from view and experience to perceptual judgment is analogous to the transition from the premisses of \textit{modus ponens} to its conclusion. Nothing synthetic mediates the transition.

I want to resist also Schafer’s claim that the constraints on admissibility “give us an \textit{a priori} basis for knowledge that none of these [inadmissible] hypotheses obtains (p. 16).” Admissibility constraints restrict only the \textit{starting points} of revision. They entail no restrictions on views that may occur in the revision process. For instance, the rigidity constraint rules out solipsism as a starting point of revision. But this leaves it completely open whether the revision of a view—even an admissible view—can result in solipsism. So admissibility constraints do not yield \textit{a priori} knowledge that solipsism is false. They do not even yield \textit{a priori} directives on belief, e.g., that one ought to believe that solipsism is false.

Berker and Schafer are correct that the role I assign to reason is different from the role assigned to it in traditional empiricism. Traditional empiricism assigns reason a purely formal role, and it is led to do so because it treats the given as propositional. I see the given as hypothetical, and this enables me to assign reason a robust role in empirical knowledge. Nevertheless, I do not attribute to reason the power of revealing substantive truths about the world (such as that space is three-dimensional, that every event has a cause, or that solipsism is false). The role I assign reason is perfectly compatible with the core empiricist idea, namely, that on matters of fact, experience is the supreme epistemic authority. The distinctive role of reason, in the account I offer, is to remove obstacles that would hinder experience in its exercise of its epistemic authority. The role

\(^{18}\)See \textit{E&E}, pp. 82-83.
of reason is to serve experience.

Schafer says that my position is close to Kant’s, and he does not say this in a critical tone. He regards this a positive feature of my position. I join Schafer in his admiration of Kant. I must point out, however, one crucial difference between the picture I offer and Kant’s picture. It is fundamental to Kant’s epistemology that experience is a product of sensibility and understanding. Kant is led to this idea for a complex of reasons, including his Copernican revolution and his aim to provide a foundation for synthetic \textit{a priori} judgments. Recent Neo-Kantians, though they abandon Kant’s complex of reasons, preserve the idea that experience is a product of sensibility and understanding. The Neo-Kantians think that this idea is needed to make sense of the rational role of experience. What I wish to observe, for better or for worse, is this: the account I give of the rational role of experience does not require us to see experience as a product of sensibility and understanding. We do not need to see experience as containing, even implicitly, judgments or forms of judgments. Instead, we can see experience, as far as rational consciousness is concerned, as sheer receptivity. In this important respect, the picture I sketch is closer to that of the traditional empiricists than it is to that of Kant and the Neo-Kantians.

§5. Reliability (Schafer)

Schafer challenges me on the two motivations I offered for the Reliability constraint—one from the passivity of experience and the other from empiricism. In challenging the first motivation, Schafer considers an example of a rational but false perceptual belief. He notes that from the perspective of rationality, nothing is to blame in this case. But he goes on to claim that experience may nevertheless be the source of the error in the belief. Now I can happily accept Schafer’s claim if ‘source’ is read as ‘cause’: experience may well be a cause (perhaps even \textit{the} cause) of the false belief. In his example of the falling chalk, ‘source’ has precisely this meaning: the chalk is the source of the injury, in the sense of being the cause of the injury. However, this is not the reading Schafer wants. Schafer thinks that in the example of a rational but false perceptual belief, experience can be the source in the sense that the given in the experience may be erroneous. I disagree. The given is supposed to capture the rational contribution of experience. If the
Perceptual belief is rational, if from the perspective of rationality experience is playing its proper role, why should we see the error as residing in the given, which by definition captures the rational role of experience?

Perceptual belief is a product of two distinct elements, one passive and the other active. The passive element is experience, while the active element is the view. It is the latter that is rationally malleable (to a certain degree), and it is better to see error as residing in it, not in the experience. Experience, being passive, does not assert or even conjecture anything. It is not the kind of thing that is true or false. Experience can be a source of false belief, but it is not a source in the way false testimony can be a source of false belief. A piece of testimony can be a source of false belief in at least two ways: (i) as a cause of false belief and (ii) as a supplier of false content. With testimony, falsity in belief can be traced to falsity in the testimony. Not so for experience. Testimony can be true or false, but experience is not the kind of thing that is true or false.

I do not expect, and did not expect, this sort of motivation to persuade a theorist who opposes Reliability. In my book, motivation is one thing, and argument suitable for use in a debate with an opponent is a different thing. My goal in the sections in which I invoke Reliability is to show that Cartesian conceptions of experience have a stronger motivation than many recent discussions of them would have us believe. Cartesian conceptions are not products of some silly little argument from illusion, or some linguistic confusion about the words ‘looks’ and ‘appears’. These conceptions have, I argued, a powerful motivation. I offered two reconstructions of an argument for Cartesian conceptions, each step in which, I suggested, is well-motivated. One reconstruction dispensed entirely with Reliability. The other, which is closer to traditional arguments (e.g., those given by Berkeley), appeals to Reliability. The motivations I offered for

\footnote{Only this argument in \textit{E&E} appeals to the Reliability constraint, and even here I provide an alternative that bypasses the constraint. In the overall argument of \textit{E&E}, then, Reliability plays a minimal role—and this is so by design. It is true that if Reliability is accepted, as I think it should be, then a powerful argument becomes available for the positive theory offered in \textit{E&E}. I recognized, however, that this argument is ineffective in a debate with, e.g., a Dogmatist. In this debate, Reliability is as much in question as is the positive theory of \textit{E&E}; hence, appeals to Reliability do little work. The crucial issue in this debate is not Reliability but which account makes better sense of empirical rationality. For my part, I claim that it is the theory of \textit{E&E}, with its conception of the given as hypothetical, that does so (see \textit{E&E}, chs. 6 & 8). A defense of this claim requires no appeal to Reliability. So, if I succeed in defending the claim then that provides a reason for accepting Reliability. In the}
Reliability pointed to some advantages of retaining it. These motivations do not refute, and are not meant to refute, a philosopher who denies Reliability. Nonetheless, they are useful because they point to areas where a denial of Reliability is likely to cause trouble.

This last point is illustrated by the second motivation I offered for Reliability. I claimed that a denial of Reliability causes a problem for empiricists. For how will the empiricists account for the rational acquisition of one particular view of the world on the basis of the inconsistent deliverances of experience? How will they rule one part of the given as erroneous and the other as error-free? Schafer responds that the empiricists can appeal to explanatory coherence: of two competing carvings of propositions in the given, the one that yields beliefs with the greater degree of explanatory coherence is to be accepted. But this response only highlights the problems I was pointing to. As Schafer recognizes, we have no account of the notion “degree of explanatory coherence,” which is crucial to his proposal. Perhaps an account of this notion can be developed, but without it we do not have even the beginnings of a theory of empirical rationality. More importantly, the burden taken on by Schafer’s proposal is special to it, and it arises in part because Reliability is denied. A theorist who accepts Reliability does not need a general, linear notion of degree of explanatory coherence—a notion that enables us to compare, and that too in a linear manner, the degree of explanatory coherence of arbitrary views. The account I offered in E&E needs no such notion. The account appeals only to the idea that some views are, while others fail to be, (absolutely) coherent. It does not appeal to any notion of degree of explanatory coherence or even to any comparative notion of explanatory coherence.²⁰ Schafer’s proposal thus illustrates nicely the burden that a denial of Reliability can entail.

²⁰ An account of rational transition imposed by an experience from one view to another may invoke a notion of degree of explanatory coherence. But this notion is not the same as the one needed by Schafer’s empiricist. This notion, unlike Schafer’s, concerns the degree of explanatory coherence of possible changes in a given antecedent view. Here, the antecedent view provides a rich context for assessments of explanatory coherence. The notion needed by Schafer’s empiricist, in contrast, concerns the degree of explanatory coherence of entire views. No background view is available here to undergird assessments of explanatory coherence.
§6. Entitlements as Permissions (Berker)

Berker argues that entitlements are permissions, not obligations, and that this fact causes a problem for me. For, if the given in experience yields entitlements and entitlements are read as permissions, then we have little reason to think that convergence ever obtains.

Berker observes that in the realm of practical normativity, entitlements are permissions, not obligations. To vary his example just a little, if I have an entitlement to use a particular chair, it does not follow that I have an obligation to use it. Berker thinks that something similar holds in the realm of epistemic normativity. Suppose a rational being is entitled to a view \( v \) and suffers an experience \( e \). Then, Berker thinks, “the rational being is rationally permitted to believe each of [the propositions in \( \Gamma_s(v) \)], not that she is rationally required [to do so] (p. 26).” If this is right then, convergence is bound to fail: at each stage of revision, the rational being can simply decline to follow through on any of the rational permissions granted her by her experience. The being can thus rationally persist with any view with which she initiates the revision process.

The issues raised by Berker are interesting and complex. To address them fully, one would need to take account of the manifold limitations on our resources—something that is not at all easy to do.\textsuperscript{21} I want to confine myself to only one observation here: the given in experience must not be read as generating merely permissions. If an ideally rational being holds a view \( v \) and suffers an experience \( e \) then she \textit{must} adjust her view in light of the propositions in \( \Gamma_s(v) \). It is true that we, finite beings that we are, count as rational (in one sense) even though we do not meet the demands on the ideally rational being. But this is to be explained by the limitations on our resources. The rational obligations are all there, but they are mitigated by our limitations.

Suppose you and I are debating a theoretical issue. At one point in the debate, you direct me to look at a voltmeter, and you ask me to accept the proposition that the needle stands at three volts. Having looked at the meter and suffered the appropriate experience, I cannot simply decline to accept the proposition you put forward. And this on the ground that my experience yields mere permissions! Contrast this with a parallel situation in a practical debate. If in the course of this debate you ask me to sit in a particular chair (which, let’s suppose, I am entitled to use), I am perfectly within my rights to decline your request. Plainly, perceptual consequences are not like

\textsuperscript{21}For a brief discussion of the limitations, see \textit{E&E}, chapter 7.
practical entitlements.

Perhaps Berker is right that entitlements are invariably permissions. If so, then talk of perceptual entitlement is appropriate only for perceptual beliefs. It is not appropriate for the given in experience. The given generates rational links, and these links are not indicative of mere permissions.

§7. Final Remark

If criticism is measured, as it should be, by how productive it is of fruitful reflection, then Berker’s and Schafer’s criticisms deserve high marks indeed. And I thank them for their stimulating essays.22

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22This essay is a slightly revised version of my contribution to the Author-Meets-Critics session on Empiricism and Experience held in December 2008 at the Eastern Division Meetings of the American Philosophical Association. Selim Berker and Karl Schafer were the critics, and David Sosa chaired the session.
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