

A Dilemma for Dogmatism

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I want to consider something in the background of "Merits of Incoherence".

In "The Skeptic and the Dogmatist", Pryor writes: "when it perceptually seems to you as if P is the case, then you have a kind of justification for believing that P, that does not presuppose or rest on your justification for anything else." It is tempting to understand this formulation as specifying a condition that the subject who believes that P could express by saying "It perceptually seems to me as if P", and could appeal to in order to justify believing that P. The problem is that this condition is not something that the subject can intelligibly take to justify believing that P; as he could put it: "It is consistent with what I have to go on that P is not so—so how can it possibly justify believing that it is so?" Dogmatism, understood as the claim that such a condition can be intelligibly taken by the subject to justify believing that P, is false. To avoid this, it is tempting to understand the formulation as instead specifying a condition that a theorist could express by saying "It perceptually seems to the subject as if P", and could appeal to in order to render the subject's belief rationally intelligible. It belongs to the earlier condition that the only one who could express it is the subject—it is an aspect of his self-consciousness. But this does not belong to the present condition. Dogmatism, understood as the claim that such a condition can be intelligibly taken by a theorist to render the subject's belief rationally intelligible, avoids falsity—but only by not engaging with skepticism. This is because skepticism is a difficulty that arises for the subject when he reflects on what is in the scope of his self-consciousness—on (as he could put it) "what I have to go on"—and asks whether this justifies believing that P. Epistemology is engaging with this difficulty only insofar as it is seeking to specify what is in this scope.

So, there is a dilemma for dogmatism: either it is specifying an aspect of the subject's self-consciousness—in which case it is false; or it is specifying an aspect of a theorist's consciousness—in which case it is not engaging with skepticism.