Debunking Arguments are arguments that aim to undermine some range of beliefs by showing that those beliefs are not appropriately connected to their subject matter. Absent the relevant connection, it could only be a coincidence if the beliefs are correct, and having no reason to believe that such a coincidence occurred, it would be irrational to retain those beliefs. Arguments of this sort rear their heads in a wide variety of domains, threatening beliefs about morality, mathematics, logic, color, and the existence of God.¹ There is, however, one range of beliefs that is widely thought to be invulnerable to such arguments, namely, our perceptual beliefs about which macroscopic physical objects there are, right before our eyes. I will show that this is a mistake.

Debunking arguments can and do arise in material-object metaphysics. For instance, Mark Heller maintains that we “conceptually divide up the world into objects one way rather than another because doing so will serve our purposes better,” and thus, there is little chance that the resulting ontology will be the true ontology. … In principle, we could by sheer coincidence arrive at the true ontology … I will discount the possibility of such a coincidence.²


Arguments to this effect can be found sprinkled throughout the literature on objects but have never, to my knowledge, been examined in any detail. I plan to remedy this situation. While I do think that the arguments can ultimately be resisted (I allude to my preferred solution in §7), my aim here is only to show that they are not as easily resisted as one might initially think.

1. The Debunking Argument
At the heart of the debunking arguments is the contention that there is no appropriate explanatory connection between our beliefs about which objects there are—that is, which highly visible objects there are right before our eyes—and the facts about which objects there are. Such a connection could either take the form of a world-to-mind explanation of the beliefs in terms of the facts or a mind-to-world explanation of the facts in terms of the beliefs. Is either sort of explanation available?

Very plausibly, there is no doxastic explanation of the object facts, that is, no explanation of the object facts in terms of our object beliefs or other contentful mental states. The object facts are not the products of our object beliefs, or at least wide swaths of them are not. Perhaps our creative intentions play some limited role in determining which kinds of artifacts there are. But which organisms and other natural objects there are would seem to be entirely independent of our beliefs about the world. If indeed there are trees, this is not because we believe in trees or because we have experiences as of trees.

There also arguably is no world-to-mind explanation of our object beliefs in terms of the object facts. Put another way: there is no alethic explanation of these beliefs, where our beliefs about some subject matter have an alethic explanation iff facts about that subject matter explain why we have those beliefs. To see why one might think this, imagine an ordinary situation, call it $S$, in which there are some atoms arranged treewise and, a few feet away, some atoms arranged dogwise. Upon encountering $S$, we would naturally take there to be a dog and a tree. But there are different ways in which we might have conceptualized such a situation. Instead of taking there to be a tree in $S$, we might instead have taken there to be a trog in $S$, where a trog is an object composed of a trunk and a dog. Or we might have taken there to be an uptree, where an uptree is an object composed of atoms arranged treewise but which is essentially upright. (An uptree is not simply a tree that is upright, because an upright tree doesn’t cease to exist when it is uprooted and topples over. An uptree, by contrast, ceases to exist when it topples over, at which point a downtree, composed of the same atoms, comes into existence.)

Why do we naturally take there to be a dog and a tree in $S$, but not a trog or an uptree? According to the debunker, this is entirely the result of biological and cultural contingencies. We are inclined to believe that there are trees rather than trogs in $S$ because prevailing conventions in the communities we were born into generally prohibit treating some things as the parts of a single object unless they are connected or in some other way unified. These conventions themselves likely trace back to an innate tendency to perceive only certain arrays of qualities as being borne by a single object and its being adaptive for creatures like us to so perceive the world. But the facts about which distributions of atoms do compose something, or about which arrays of qualities truly are borne by a single object, have no role to play in explaining why this is adaptive. Thus, the idea goes, we divide up the world into objects the way that we do for reasons having nothing at all to do with how the world actually is divided up. The explanation is not alethic.

Armed with a non-alethic explanation of our object beliefs, the debunker may then advance the following debunking argument.

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4. To see this, suppose that in fact there are trogs and no trees in situations like $S$. We are not thereby at any disadvantage by virtue of taking there to be trees but not trogs; creatures who conceived of $S$ as containing trogs but not trees would not thereby have greater fitness.

(A1) There is no (nondeviant) explanatory connection between our object beliefs and the object facts.5

(A2) If so, then we shouldn’t believe that there are trees.

(A3) So, we shouldn’t believe that there are trees.

We have already seen the case for A1: there would seem to be neither a doxastic explanation of the object facts nor an alethic explanation of our object beliefs. I will have more to say about the “nondeviant” clause in §5, where I show that the argument cannot be resisted simply by appealing to a causal explanation of object beliefs in terms of object facts.

Premise A2 is naturally motivated by observing that if there truly is this sort of disconnect between the object facts and the factors that lead us to our object beliefs, then it could only be a lucky coincidence if those factors led us to beliefs that lined up with the object facts; and since we have no rational grounds for believing that we got lucky, we shouldn’t believe that we did, in which case we should suspend our beliefs about which objects there are and, in particular, our belief that there are trees. As we will see in §5, however, the focus on coincidence and luck is a red herring. The realization that there is an explanatory disconnect between our object beliefs and the object facts is itself enough to undermine our perceptual beliefs about ordinary objects.

The bulk of the paper is devoted to evaluating a variety of responses to this debunking argument. In §§3–4, I examine attempts to block the argument by denying A2. In §§5–6, I examine attempts to undermine A1 by identifying an explanatory connection between the object facts and object beliefs. First, though, let us pause briefly on some preliminary issues concerning the argument’s scope and its proper formulation.

2. Framing the Argument

2.1 Scope

I frame the argument here as an argument for the conclusion that we should abandon our belief in trees. As such, the argument is directed at anyone who takes there to be trees. Which is pretty much everyone. However, there are various ways in which debunkers might wish to limit the scope of the argument.

First, ‘we’ and ‘our’ in the arguments are probably best understood as ranging only over those of us who are aware of the explanatory challenge. The philosophically innocent may be off the hook because, not realizing that there is any cause for concern about the accuracy of their object beliefs, they don’t possess a defeater for those beliefs. A1 could then be revised to say: there is no nondeviant explanatory connection between our object beliefs and the object facts and we realize that there isn’t.6

Second, some may want to wield the arguments specifically against realists, according to whom ordinary objects are mind-independent. Anti-realists, according to whom our object beliefs in one way or another give rise to the object facts, have an easy way out of the argument. They will deny A1 on the grounds that there is a doxastic explanation of the object facts. If the object facts are the products of our object beliefs, then it is no coincidence that our beliefs are accurate. For had we believed in trogs rather than trees, there would then have been trogs and no trees. I return to the anti-realist response briefly in §7.

Third, some will want to wield the arguments specifically against conservatives (‘commonsense ontologists’), according to whom there are dogs and trees but not trogs or uptrees. Permissivists—according to whom there are dogs, trees, trogs, uptrees, and all manner of other

5. By ‘object beliefs’, here and throughout, I mean beliefs about which highly visible objects there are, e.g., that there are trees or that there are tables. This is not meant to cover any beliefs we may have about which objects there aren’t, e.g., that there are no trogs or uptrees.

6. In other words, we should probably understand the debunker as an undermining debunker, not a blocking debunker; see White (2010: 575). Cf. Merricks (2001: 74–75) and Bedke (2009: 200–201).

extraordinary objects—look to have an easy way out of the argument. They will deny A2: having accurate beliefs about which kinds there are is a trivial accomplishment (not a coincidence), since there are objects answering to virtually every way that we might have perceptually and conceptually divided up a situation like S into objects. Thus, one might think that it is conservatives who are the proper target of the debunking arguments. I take Theodore Sider and John Hawthorne (both permissivists) to be advancing debunking arguments against conservatives in the following passages:

On [conservative views] the entities that exist correspond exactly with the categories for continuants in our conceptual scheme: trees, aggregates, statues, lumps, persons, bodies, and so on. How convenient! It would be nothing short of a miracle if reality just happened to match our conceptual scheme in this way. Or is it rather that the world contains the objects it does because of the activities of humans? This is an equally unappealing hypothesis.

Barring a kind of anti-realism that none of us should tolerate, wouldn’t it be remarkable if the lines of reality matched the lines that we have words for? The simplest exercises of sociological imagination ought to convince us that the assumption of such a harmony is altogether untoward, since such exercises convince us that it is something of a biological and/or cultural accident that we draw the lines that we do. If we are

**Debunking Perceptual Beliefs about Ordinary Objects**

to be charitable towards ourselves without being unduly chauvinistic, it seems that we should posit ever so many more objects than we habitually talk about, in order not to credit ourselves with too much luck or sophistication in successfully hitting ontological targets most of the time.

I return to the permissivist response in §3, where I argue that, despite appearances, the debunking arguments are just as much a threat to permissivists as they are to conservatives. Fourth, the arguments are best understood as targeting only those who believe in ordinary objects *for the usual reasons*, namely, that it seems perceptually as if there are objects of the relevant kinds. Debunkers will say that the perceptual experiences that underwrite our belief in trees and other such objects are “theory-laden”: when we encounter S, we experience the qualities distributed treewise as being borne by a single object, and we experience that object as a tree, largely as a result of the aforementioned biological and cultural contingencies. The debunking arguments undermine our belief in ordinary objects by undermining their perceptual source. Accordingly, those who have purely theoretical reasons for believing in trees and the like, and whose object beliefs are not ultimately based on the debunked experiences, escape the challenge.

That said, even philosophers do not typically have any such reasons for their belief in ordinary objects. Permissivists, for instance, do offer

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8. See my (2011: §1.3) for discussion of some of the varieties of permissivism.
9. More cautiously, it is a trivial accomplishment *given* that we are right about how matter and sensible qualities are distributed before us. But there is nothing in the debunking arguments under consideration that challenges our reliability on such matters.
12. Alternatively, debunkers may opt for a “sparse” conception of perceptual content, on which all that the experience itself presents as being the case is that certain sensible qualities are distributed in such and such a way. The debunker will then say that the aforementioned biological and cultural contingencies explain why we spontaneously form the beliefs we do about which of those qualities are borne by a single object and about the kinds to which those objects belong. For ease of exposition, I assume throughout that perceptual content is richer than this. See Siegel (2010: ch. 4) on rich content.
theoretical arguments for believing in the whole plentitude of ordinary and extraordinary objects, but, as we shall see in §3, those arguments almost invariably proceed from an undefended assumption that the ordinary objects exist and argue from there to the existence of all the other objects. Thus, it is not obvious that this restriction in the scope of the argument actually lets anyone off the hook.13

2.2 Explanation and Sensitivity
As I present the argument here, the crucial premise is that there is no appropriate explanatory connection between the object facts and our object beliefs. There are other options. For instance, one might instead give center stage to a sensitivity constraint on justification. S’s belief that p is insensitive iff: were p false, S would still have believed that p and would have believed it for the same reasons. Arguably, once one is made aware of the insensitivity of some range of beliefs, one is no longer justified in retaining them. In other words, recognized insensitivity is a defeater. The debunking argument may then be reframed as follows. Even if it were false that there is a tree in S (holding fixed the distribution of atoms in S), the same biological and cultural pressures would have led us to experience such situations as containing trees. Thus, we would still have believed that there were trees in S and would have had the same (perceptual) reasons for believing it. Once the debunker makes us aware of the insensitivity of these beliefs, we are no longer justified in retaining them.14

13. Possible candidates include van Inwagen (1990) and Merricks (2001). They eliminate a wide range of ordinary objects but argue that a special exception should be made for persons and certain other composites, and their arguments do not rely in any obvious way on debunked experiences. I leave it as an exercise for the reader to determine whether their arguments rely in some non-obvious way on debunked sources of information.

While I do think this sensitivity-based formulation of the debunking arguments is worth exploring, I also think there are good reasons for focusing (as I do) on the explanatory formulation.

First, the sensitivity constraint is open to well-known counterexamples. I am justified in believing that the sun will rise tomorrow, despite realizing that I would have believed this, and for the same (inductive) reasons, even if the sun weren’t going to rise tomorrow.15 It is less obvious that these sorts of cases undermine the explanatory constraint operative in my formulation of the argument. I believe that the sun will rise on the basis of my observations about the behavior of the sun, which in turn is the subject matter of that belief. So there is an alethic explanation of the belief.

Second, given plausible closure principles, we have to be able to know that we’re not brains in vats in order to know anything about the external world. And the belief that we aren’t brains in vats is plainly insensitive: we would have believed it even if we were brains in vats. But we surely have at least some knowledge about the external world, if only about the distribution of colors, shapes, and other sensible qualities. So the aforementioned sensitivity constraint on justification must be rejected on pain of complete external world skepticism.16 And most epistemologists already do reject it, for just this reason. The explanatory formulation, by contrast, is not just another Cartesian skeptical argument. Whereas the usual skeptical arguments turn on the mere possibility of there being a disconnect between belief and reality, the explanatory argument asserts that there in fact is a such disconnect.

Third, the sensitivity-based debunking arguments turn on elusive judgments about (what by its targets’ lights are) counterpossible situations. Very plausibly, if there are actually trees in situations

15. Bedke (forthcoming: n.13), a friend of sensitivity formulations, acknowledges the problem.
3. Permissivism

3.1 From Permissivism to Accuracy

We will see in §§5–6 that it is no easy task to deny A1 and identify an appropriate explanatory connection between our object beliefs and the object facts. However, it would seem that those who accept permissivism have no need to deny A1. For, as we saw in §2.1, permissivists are well positioned to reject A2. Permissivists take there to be objects answering to virtually all of the alternative ways that we might have perceptually and conceptually divided up a situation like S into objects. We believe in trees and, indeed, there are trees. Had we instead believed in trogs or uptrees, our beliefs would still have been accurate, because there are trogs and uptrees. Accordingly, the mere fact that there is no explanatory connection between our object beliefs and the object facts does not give us reason to think that our object beliefs are unlikely to be true.20

This line of response, while initially compelling, does not survive scrutiny. Given the way in which the usual reasons for accepting permissivism are bound up with our ordinary perceptual beliefs, it is epistemically unstable for permissivists to grant A1. Or so I shall argue. The upshot is that permissivists must find a way to resist A1 if they wish to escape self-defeat.

3.2 From Accuracy to Permissivism

Let’s begin with what Hawthorne flags as the best reason for accepting permissivism (or better anyway than the argument from vagueness, which I discuss in §3.3). In the second half of the passage quoted below, Hawthorne argues from the accuracy of our object beliefs to the truth of permissivism. The reasoning runs as follows:

[1] Our experiences and perceptual beliefs are accurate: there are trees and other ordinary objects.

20. Remember that I use ‘object beliefs’ to cover only positive beliefs about the presence of particular kinds of objects. I set aside any negative beliefs we may have about the non-existence of trogs, uptrees, and the like.

17. Though see Cameron (2007) for a dissenting voice.

18. Worse, it’s unclear whether we should even hold fixed the fact that atoms are arranged treewise when we evaluate whether our belief that there are trees is sensitive. For arguably, the closest worlds in which the belief that there are trees is false are ones in which there aren’t atoms arranged treewise either. And since we don’t believe that there are trees in the closest such worlds, the belief turns out to be sensitive after all.

19. Though see Clarke-Doane (forthcoming a) for an attempt to drive a wedge between explanation and sensitivity.

containing atoms arranged treewise, then necessarily there are trees in situations containing atoms arranged treewise. Thus, assessing what we would have believed if there weren’t trees in such situations is a lot like assessing what we would have believed if 1+2 weren’t 3. Even those who think that counterpossibles are assessable and (contra Lewis) aren’t all trivially true will find these ones particularly hard to evaluate. In assessing what would have happened (or in selecting the “nearest” impossible world), do we hold fixed how our brains are configured? Or do we hold fixed the fact that we are very good at simple perceptual and arithmetic judgments? It’s unclear. But if we cannot answer these questions, then we cannot assess whether the beliefs in question are sensitive and, thus, cannot assess a crucial premise of the sensitivity-based debunking argument.18

Finally, the explanatory questions that my preferred formulation brings to the fore are plausibly more fundamental than questions of sensitivity. To the extent that we’re inclined to think that our object beliefs are insensitive, it’s presumably because we think that there is no explanatory connection between the object facts and our object beliefs. And one who does take there to be an explanatory connection—perhaps involving some innate capacity for apprehending compositional facts (see §7)—will probably insist that the beliefs are sensitive: if atoms arranged treewise composed uptrees and not trees, then our properly functioning capacity for apprehending such facts would have led us to believe in uptrees rather than trees.19
[2] Presumably, we’re not just lucky to have ended up with accurate beliefs about which objects there are, as we would be if there were only the ordinary objects. [3] And the best explanation for the accuracy of our experiences and beliefs is that there are both the ordinary and the extraordinary objects.

In his own words:

It is something of a biological and/or cultural accident that we draw the lines that we do. If [1H] we are to be charitable towards ourselves … it seems that [3H] we should posit ever so many more objects than we habitually talk about, [2H] in order not to credit ourselves with too much luck or sophistication in successfully hitting ontological targets most of the time.21

(I take some interpretive liberties here. As I understand the “line-drawing” metaphor, the idea is that, if tasked with drawing lines around the regions in S that we naturally take to be filled by a single object, we would draw a single line around the trunk, roots, branches, and leaves, but we wouldn’t draw a line circumscribing just the trunk and the dog.22 Presumably, the reason that we would draw the former line is that it looks to us as if there is a tree there, and the reason we wouldn’t draw the latter line is that it doesn’t look to us as if there is a trog there.23 Thus, I take [1] to be a fair rendering of [1H].)


22. An alternative interpretation takes Hawthorne to be speaking about drawing a single line, with the objects we believe in on one side and the objects we don’t on the other. But this doesn’t mesh well with his talk of “the lines we have words for” earlier in the passage (quoted in full in §2.1).

23. This is not to say that it looks to us as if there is no trog. The claim is that there is an absence of representation, not a representation of absence.

The problem with this defense of permissivism is that it is epistemically unstable (for one who grants A1, anyway). To help see this, consider the following case.

_Birds_. Bill is in the gift shop at the World Bird Sanctuary, flipping through a picture book of American birds. Alice, who works in the gift shop, is looking over his shoulder. Each time he flips to a new page, she points to the bird depicted there and names a state in which it can be found. Presuming her to be an expert, Bill believes what she says. But Bill later overhears Alice confess to a co-worker that she was naming states at random and has no idea where the birds can be found.

Obviously, the rational thing for Bill to do would be to suspend belief about where the birds can be found. But Bill doesn’t suspend belief. Instead, he attempts to assure himself of the accuracy of these testimonial beliefs by means of the following patently absurd line of reasoning:

[1’] Alice’s testimony and my testimonial beliefs are accurate: those birds can be found in the indicated states.

[2’] Presumably, I’m not just lucky to have ended up with accurate beliefs about where these birds can be found, as I would be if each could be found in only one or two states.

[3’] And the best explanation for the accuracy of her testimony and of my beliefs is that each bird can be found in all fifty states.

Even if it were true that each bird is found in every state, Bill obviously can’t come to be justified in believing that on the basis of this silly line of reasoning. Why not? Because Alice’s confession serves as a defeater for [1’]: it undercuts the authority of his testimonial source. Once his source is discredited in this way, by his own admission, it
Now let us return to Hawthorne’s reasoning (remembering that in this section we are restricting our attention to permissivists who grant A1). With [1], the permissivist simply takes for granted that her experiences are veridical, without further argument. That in itself is not problematic; there is widespread agreement in epistemology that, on pain of global skepticism, we are entitled to accept that our basic sources of information are reliable even in the absence of independent evidence of their reliability. The problem is that granting A1 (like accepting Alice’s confession) is an authority-undercutting concession. The permissivist discredits the experiential source of her beliefs, but illicitly continues to take their accuracy for granted in an inference to the best explanation of their accuracy.

How exactly does A1 defeat the permissivist’s belief in [1]? In just the way that Alice’s confession defeats Bill’s belief in [1’]: in accepting A1, the permissivist thereby acknowledges that there is no explanatory connection between her object beliefs and the object facts. True, it is not a coincidence by the permissivist’s lights that her experiences and perceptual beliefs are accurate, but—as the Birds case plainly shows—that alone does not deflect defeat. And true, the permissivist need not think that it is a matter of random chance that our experiences represent the objects that they do; rather, they are the products of largely non-random evolutionary pressures. But, as we saw above, we continue to judge that Bill’s reasoning is illicit even when we suppose that Alice’s verdicts are the products of a non-random procedure. The fatal flaw in the envisaged permissivist reasoning is the same as the fatal flaw in Bill’s reasoning: the concession that there is no explanatory connection.

Perhaps Hawthorne himself never meant to grant that there is no explanatory connection; perhaps he would reject A1 and say that the presence of the tree does explain why I have an experience as of a tree. But one does not simply “reject A1”. As we will see in §5, it is far from obvious how there could be an appropriate explanatory connection, even supposing that objects of the relevant kinds are out there causing our experiences.

\[24\] A competing explanation which I will not discuss here is that he is thereby acknowledging that her testimony and his testimonial beliefs are insensitive, in the sense discussed in §2.2.
### 3.3 Other Unstable Defenses of Permissivism

I turn now to two other influential arguments for permissivism: arbitrariness arguments and the argument from vagueness. My aim will be to show that these arguments, when coupled with the acceptance of A1, are unstable in just the same way as the argument from the previous section. They rely on perceptual beliefs about which kinds there are, and, accordingly, those who undercut these perceptual beliefs by accepting A1 cannot think these arguments give us good reason for accepting permissivism.

Arbitrariness arguments aim to establish the existence of extraordinary objects by way of showing that there is no ontologically significant difference between those objects and certain ordinary objects. Here is one such argument:

- (B1) There is no ontologically significant difference between uptrees and islands.
- (B2) If so, then: if there are islands, there are uptrees.
- (B3) There are islands.
- (B4) So there are uptrees.\(^{25}\)

B1 draws its plausibility from the fact that both uptrees and islands would seem to be objects that cease to exist without their constitutive matter undergoing any intrinsic change, and B2 may be defended by appeal to a not-impossible prohibition on certain kinds of brute facts. These premises are controversial, but never mind that. Focus on what seems to be the most innocuous premise: B3. Presumably, any justification we have for believing that islands exist ultimately derives from experience, for instance, from looking out across the water and seeming to see an island. So this argument does not yield justification for permissivism that is independent of the sorts of experiences whose authority is undercut by A1.

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The same is true of the argument from vagueness, which purports to show that either every plurality of objects has a fusion or none do. The basic idea is that any restriction on composition is bound to be vague, and there cannot be borderline cases of composition.\(^{26}\) Those moved by the argument (whose details needn’t concern us here) might reason as follows:

- (C1) Either every plurality of objects has a fusion or none do.
- (C2) Some pluralities of objects have a fusion.
- (C3) So, every plurality of objects has a fusion.
- (C4) If every plurality of objects has a fusion, then there are trees and all the rest of the permissivist’s ordinary and extraordinary objects.
- (C5) So, there are trees and all the rest of the permissivist’s ordinary and extraordinary objects.

Forget about C1, and focus again on the most innocuous premises. Is there reason to accept C2 and C4 that is independent of our (discredited) experiences?

Let’s begin with C2. The most obvious reason for accepting C2 is one that is not available to the A1-affirming permissivist, namely, that we have experiences as of trees and other composites. For this permissivist has undercut the authority of such experiences. Permissivists might insist that there are independent theoretical reasons for accepting C2, turning on the possibility of “atomless gunk”, that is, composites all of whose parts have proper parts.\(^{27}\) For instance, one might argue for C2 as follows:

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\(^{25}\) Cf. Hawthorne (2006: vii) and my (2010: §5) on islands and incars. Similar arguments can be used to establish the existence of trogs and other such strange fusions, and perhaps the whole permissivist ontology.

\(^{26}\) See Sider (2001: §4.9) or my (2011: §2.2) for a detailed presentation of the argument.

\(^{27}\) See Sider (1993, 2003: 724–725); cf. Van Cleve (2008: 325). I find it somewhat puzzling how anyone could be persuaded that there are composites solely on the basis of such arguments. If you are sufficiently suspicious of the intuition that composite tables are possible to regard nihilism as a live option, you presumably will not, or at least should not, be moved by the intuition that
(D1) It is possible for there to be gunk.

(D2) If it is possible for there to be gunk, then it is possible for pluralities of objects to have a fusion.

(D3) If it is possible for pluralities of objects to have a fusion, then (actually) some pluralities of objects have a fusion.

(C2) So some pluralities of objects have a fusion.

Forget about D1 and D2, and focus on D3. The idea behind D3 is that our world contains what would seem to be paradigm cases of composition, for instance, treewise arrangements of stuff; so if composition occurs anywhere, it surely occurs here. But where could this conviction that treewise arrangements are paradigm cases of composition be coming from, if not from experiences that represent stuff arranged treewise as making up a single object? Thus, the best theoretical reasons for accepting C2 likewise ultimately depend on the discredited experiences.28 Thus, the best theoretical reasons for accepting C2 likewise ultimately depend on the discredited experiences.

How about C4? There are atoms arranged treewise, so it follows from C3 that there is a single object composed of those atoms. What does not follow is that this object is a tree.29 Perhaps the atoms compose only an uptree, or only a mereological sum which exists when and only when those very atoms exist. Apart from debunked experiences as of trees, there would seem to be no reason to believe that the tree-shaped, tree-sized composites are trees.31 Accordingly, it would be epistemically unstable for the permissivist to think that this argument is a good argument while at the same time conceding that there is no explanatory connection between the kinds that there are and the kinds that our experiences present there as being. So this premise too ultimately relies on the discredited experiences.

For all I have said, these may be perfectly good arguments for permissivism. What we have seen, though, is that the arguments are not available to one who undercuts the authority of experience by accepting A1. Thus, absent some reason for accepting permissivism that does not ultimately rest on perceptual beliefs about ordinary objects, the envisaged permissivist strategy for resisting the debunking arguments is unstable.

4. Deflating and Bootstrapping

Other attempts to resist the debunking arguments without denying A1 face the same sorts of problems as the permissivist strategy. I’ll consider two such attempts.

4.1 Quantifier Variantism

Deflationists contend that there are numerous equally good ways of dividing up the world into objects—into dogs and trees, or into trogs and uptrees—but not because there exist objects belonging to all of these kinds, as permissivists would have it. One prominent way of developing this (elusive) idea is Eli Hirsch’s quantifier variantism, according to which there are countless alternative existence-like concepts that are on a par with our concept existence.32 Trees and

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28. One might cite the intuition that atoms arranged treewise compose something, but such intuitions presumably have the same discredited source as our perceptual belief in trees.

29. An alternative argument worth exploring is van Inwagen’s (1990: 73) argument against nihilism: I think; if so, I exist; if so, I am composite; so there are composites. The question is whether the final premise can be motivated independently of the sorts of experiences that are undermined by accepting A1.

30. Cf. Unger’s (1979: 150) non-nihilistic eliminativism: “[T]here are physical objects with a diameter greater than four feet and less than five. . . . It is simply that no such objects will be ordinary things; none are stones or planets or pieces of furniture.” See also Heller (1990), Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (1997), and Van Cleve (2008).

31. Again, one might cite the intuition that atoms arranged treewise compose a tree as the missing reason, but such intuitions presumably have the same discredited source as our perceptual belief in trees.

dogs exist and trogs and uptrees do not exist, whereas trogs and uptrees exist* and trees and dogs do not exist*. 33 Which existence-like concept a population ends up with is largely determined, in accordance with a metasemantic principle of charity, by which kinds it divides the world into.

Quantifier variantists, like permissivists, look (at first) to be well positioned to block the debunking arguments without denying A1. The aforementioned principle of charity more or less guarantees that we get an existence-like concept that vindicates our perceptual beliefs. We perceptually divide up the world into dogs and trees, and so we get the concept existence and accurately represent dogs and trees as existing. Had we perceptually divided up the world into trogs and uptrees, we would instead have gotten the concept existence* and accurately represented trogs and uptrees as existing*. Thus, quantifier variantists can evidently concede that there is no explanatory connection between object beliefs and object facts without being driven to skepticism. For even supposing that there is no such explanatory connection, we still have reason to think that our beliefs are likely to be true. A2 is false.

For exactly the sorts of reasons we saw in §3.2, it would be epistemically unstable for quantifier variantists who accept A1 to endorse quantifier variantism on the strength of the following Hawthorne-style argument:

\[1''\] My experiences and perceptual beliefs are accurate: there are trees and other ordinary objects. \\
\[2''\] Presumably, I’m not just lucky to have ended up with accurate beliefs about which objects there are, as I would be if some non-deflationary view were correct. \\
\[3''\] And the best explanation for the accuracy of my experiences and

33. More cautiously: Those who deploy the concept existence* would speak truly in saying ‘Uptrees exist* and trees do not exist*’. It may be that my attempt to express the view without this sort of semantic ascent is simply incoherent. But I stick with it for ease of exposition.

occurred. Having set sail for Bermuda, you fall asleep at the wheel. In the morning, you find that you have hit land, and your first sight is a banner reading “Welcome to Bermuda.” You recognize that it would have taken a tremendous stroke of luck for the winds to carry you to Bermuda. Nevertheless, it is perfectly rational for you to believe that you are in Bermuda.\(^{35}\)

What reason could you have, then, for believing that you luckily have accurate object beliefs and associated experiences? One might suggest the following. You can check (using your eyes) whether there is a table before you, and indeed there is. You can then check (using introspection) whether you are having an experience as of a table, and indeed you are. You can then draw the straightforward inference that the experience is accurate. You can perform similar checks for the chair, computer, and coffee mug that you seem to see. And, recognizing that there is no explanatory connection between these experiences and the object facts, you can conclude that you are extremely lucky to have coincidentally ended up with experiences that accurately represent which objects there are.

This line of reasoning is blatantly circular: one assures oneself that one’s experiences are accurate by checking the deliverances of one’s experiences against those very experiences. That said, this style of reasoning would seem to be licensed by widely endorsed foundationalist theses.\(^{36}\) Some may even be willing to concede (surely begrudgingly) that one can in this way come to be justified in believing one’s experiences to be accurate. Yet even supposing that this sort of “bootstrapping” is sometimes legitimate, it cannot confer justification on one who accepts A1. This was the lesson of the Bill and Alice case: one cannot rationally rely on a source of information once one has discredited it by accepting that there is no explanatory connection between that source and the range of facts that it purports to be delivering information about. Even supposing that bootstrapping can sometimes be rational, it cannot be accompanied by a conviction that one’s beliefs bear no explanatory connection to their subject matter.

### 5. Causal Connections

The moral of §§3–4 is that attempts to block the debunking argument without denying A1 are prone to self-defeat. So those who would like to keep trees in their ontology must identify some appropriate explanatory connection between our object beliefs and the object facts. Yet one does not need to look far to find what would seem to be a perfectly straightforward explanatory connection. There is a tree in S and it causes me to have an experience as of a tree. Thus, A1 is false: the presence of the tree explains why I have an experience as of a tree and, in turn, why I believe there to be a tree there. Indeed, the availability of this sort of causal explanation is precisely why perceptual beliefs about ordinary objects are frequently cited (in other literatures) as a paradigm case of beliefs that are not susceptible to debunking arguments.\(^{37}\)

The problem with this line of reasoning is that if one merely supposes that there is a causal explanation—and does not go in for one of the more robust explanatory connections sketched in §7—then one must admit that the causal connection is, at best, a case of deviant causation. And the recognition that the connection is at best deviant undermines one’s justification for believing that there is a causal connection in the first place. In advancing this line of objection, it will be useful to treat conservatives and permissivists separately.

#### 5.1 Causal Connections in a Conservative Setting

Here is a paradigm case of a deviant causal chain.

**Colorization.** A digital camera snaps a black-and-white image of a red ball. The image is then opened in a computer program which colorizes the image, based on

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35. The example is from White (2010: 589).
the shades of grey in the original. Some colors produce indistinguishable shades of grey, and in such cases the program selects among the candidate colors on the basis of the ink levels of the attached printer. This is just such a case: red and blue produce the same shade of grey, and the program colors the ball in the image red rather than blue, not because the ball was red, but because there is more red ink than blue ink available in the attached printer.

So it is true that the image of a red ball is caused by a red ball. But the causal chain leading from the ball to the image is a deviant causal chain.\footnote{The example is adapted from Peacocke (1979: 128). It is notoriously difficult to say what exactly it is for a causal chain to be deviant. The following will have to do for our purposes here. The causal chain leading to some representation R is deviant iff: for some feature F that R represents something as having, (i) that which R represents is indeed F, but (ii) its being F exhibits the kind of independence from R's representing it as F that one finds in the colorization example. The hard part is specifying what that “kind of independence” is. See Peacocke (1979: §2) for one attempt.}

Now suppose that someone, oblivious to the peculiar process leading to the production of the image, sees the colorized image and continues to believe that the item photographed really was a ball and that there is a tree-shaped matter-filled region in S. But once one becomes convinced that the connection is deviant.

much the same way as the one in the Colorization case. We encounter S, and various perceptual and cognitive processes operate on the raw sensory input of sensible qualities (colors, shapes, etc.) distributed thus and so to yield an experience which represents certain of those qualities as borne by one object and others as borne by other objects. In other words (and grossly oversimplifying), when we encounter the leafiness of the leaves, the woodiness of the trunk, and the furriness of the dog, we have an experience of the form $\exists x [\text{Leafy}(x) \& \text{Woody}(x)] \& \exists y [\text{Furry}(y)]$. Why, though, do we end up with an experience of that form rather than a “troggish” experience of the form $\exists x [\text{Leafy}(x)] \& \exists y [\text{Woody}(y) \& \text{Furry}(y)]$? The answer (the debunker contends) is entirely in terms of the biological and cultural contingencies described in §1. It is independent of whether it was a tree or a trog that was responsible for that raw sensory input, in much the same way that the colorization of the black and white image is independent of whether it was something red or something blue that was responsible for the resulting shade of grey. Thus, the mere fact that a tree causes the experiences and beliefs is not enough to secure a nondeviant explanatory connection.

The epistemological consequences of accepting all this are plausibly the same as in the Colorization case. As in the Colorization case, certain beliefs about the external world remain unscathed, for instance, that there is something brown in S, that it isn’t a pelican, and that there is a tree-shaped matter-filled region in S. But once one recognizes the deviance of the causal process leading from worldly items to perceptual contents, one ought to suspend one’s belief that there is a tree in S, and even the belief that there is a single object there that is the bearer of the leafiness and the woodiness. One cannot stably resist the debunking argument merely by citing one’s antecedent belief that trees cause trees beliefs, any more than the subject in the Colorization case can rationally retain her belief that the photographed ball was red merely by citing her antecedent belief that a red ball caused the image. For these causal beliefs are undermined once one becomes convinced that the connection is deviant.
5.2 Causal Connections in a Permissivist Setting
The permissivist may seem to be in an importantly different position from the conservative. For even supposing that trees cause our experiences, once the conservative concedes that it is a biological or cultural accident that trees and dogs cause $\exists x[\text{Leafy}(x) \land \text{Woody}(x)] \land \exists y[\text{Furry}(y)]$ experiences rather than $\exists x[\text{Leafy}(x)] \land \exists y[\text{Woody}(y) \land \text{Furry}(y)]$ experiences, she must concede that it would be a coincidence if we ended up with accurate object beliefs. This concession undermines the belief that there is indeed a tree causing our experiences, which in turn undermines the belief that there is an explanatory connection between tree beliefs and tree experiences.

But by permissivist lights, there are trees and trogs and uptrees all causing us to have experiences as of trees. True, it’s a biological or cultural accident that these objects cause $\exists x[\text{Leafy}(x) \land \text{Woody}(x)] \land \exists y[\text{Furry}(y)]$ experiences. But had they instead caused $\exists x[\text{Leafy}(x)] \land \exists y[\text{Woody}(y) \land \text{Furry}(y)]$ experiences, we would still have had accurate object beliefs; it’s just that they’d be accurate beliefs about a different range of objects. So it’s not a coincidence that we ended up with accurate object beliefs, and the realization that the form of our experiences is hostage to the envisaged biological and cultural contingencies gives us no reason to think that our beliefs are unlikely to be true.

It’s true that permissivists have resources that are unavailable to conservatives. But, as I am about to show, given the sorts of reasons they have for accepting permissivism in the first place, they cannot avail themselves of those resources.

To see this, consider another case of deviant causation (which is more easily adapted to the case of permissivism than the Colorization case).

**Citrus Detector.** A citrus detector is a peculiar device, designed to project a hologram of a citrus fruit whenever it detects the presence of citric acid. Which type of citrus it projects is not determined by which type actually triggers the device. Rather, for each batch of citrus detectors that leaves the factory, the programmers select one type of citrus fruit (from a database of several dozen), and those devices invariably project that type when triggered.

Now, let’s suppose that you glance into a room, seem to see a grapefruit, and believe on that basis that there is a grapefruit in the room. You then learn that what you saw was a hologram projected by one of these citrus detectors. Upon learning this, you can rationally retain your belief that there is something containing citric acid in the room (perhaps just a puddle of grapefruit juice). But you obviously cannot rationally retain your belief that there is a grapefruit in the room. And you cannot resist defeat simply by citing your antecedent belief that a grapefruit was causing your experience and insisting that there is an explanatory connection between the citrus facts and your citrus beliefs, for that causal belief is undermined by what you have learned. That was the lesson of §5.1.

Ah, but suppose you convince yourself that there is also a lime, a lemon, an orange, and indeed one of every type of citrus fruit in the room, all hidden from view but simultaneously triggering the device. In that case, no matter which type of citrus it had been programmed to project, you would have ended up with a true belief. Then would it be rational to retain the belief that there’s a grapefruit there?

That depends on your grounds for believing in this citrus plenitude. In particular, it depends on whether you have a reason for believing in the citrus plenitude that is independent of your antecedent belief that a grapefruit caused your experience. For instance, if you enter the room and see that it contains one of every type of citrus fruit, then it would be rational to go on believing that a grapefruit was causing your experience (by causing a hologram of a grapefruit).

But suppose you don’t have any such independent evidence about what’s in the room. Suppose instead that you come to believe in the citrus plenitude on the basis of the following, Hawthorne-style line of
reasoning: “My belief that there was a grapefruit causing my experience is correct; presumably I’m not just lucky to have ended up with accurate citrus beliefs, as I would be if there were only the grapefruit there; and the best explanation of the accuracy of my citrus beliefs would seem to be that the room contains grapefruits as well as every other type of citrus fruit.” Or suppose you run through some other line of reasoning that likewise ultimately relies on your hologram-induced perceptual belief that there’s a grapefruit in the room, for instance, “This is Stacy’s room; Stacy once told me that if she were ever to buy a grapefruit, she’d also buy one of every citrus fruit; and there is a grapefruit there; so there must be one of every other type of citrus as well.”

Obviously, it would be irrational for you to go on believing that there’s a grapefruit in the room, even after embracing the citrus plenitude on the basis of some such line of reasoning. But why exactly? Not because you accept that there’s no explanatory connection between your citrus beliefs and the citrus facts: by your lights, there is a causal explanation of your belief that there’s a grapefruit in terms of the presence of a grapefruit. Not because you accept that it would be a coincidence if the device led you to accurate citrus beliefs: by your lights, no matter which type of hologram the device had been programmed to project, you would have ended up with accurate beliefs about some kind of citrus. Rather, it’s irrational because you recognize that the causal chain supposedly leading from a grapefruit to your belief that there is a grapefruit is at best a deviant causal chain: which type of citrus fruit you seem to see is independent of which (if any) type of citrus fruit is triggering the device. This realization undermines your perceptual belief that there is a grapefruit along with anything else built on that foundation, including your belief that a grapefruit is causing your experience and your belief in the citrus plenitude.

The same goes for the envisaged permissivists. It would be one thing if permissivists had some reason for believing in their plenitude of ordinary and extraordinary objects that is independent of our seeming to see trees and other ordinary objects. But, as we saw in §3, they don’t. So, it would be irrational for them to retain either their ordinary perceptual beliefs or their belief in the plenitude of extraordinary objects. Not because they accept that there’s no explanatory connection between their object beliefs and the object facts: by their lights, there is a causal explanation of tree beliefs in terms of the presence of trees. Not because they accept that it would be a coincidence if our experiences led us to accurate object beliefs: by their lights, no matter how our experiences had grouped perceived qualities into objects, we would have ended up with accurate beliefs about some kind of object. Rather, it’s irrational because they recognize that the causal chain supposedly leading from a tree to the belief that there is a tree is at best a deviant causal chain: which kinds of objects are represented in experience—and which qualities are represented as coinstantiated by a single object—is independent of which kinds of objects are causing the experience. This realization undermines their perceptual belief that there is a tree as well as everything else built on that foundation, including the belief that a tree is causing our experiences and the belief in the plenitude of ordinary and extraordinary objects.

It is worth emphasizing that all of this is so even if there truly is an appropriate explanatory connection between the object facts and the permissivist’s object beliefs. Suppose that the permissivist is right that there is a plenitude of ordinary and extraordinary objects. Suppose further that we are the products of intelligent design, and our designer wanted us to attend to a certain subset of the plenitude—dogs and trees but not trogs—and so saw to it that we would have $\exists x(\text{Leaf}(x) \& \text{Woody}(x)) \& \exists y(\text{Furry}(y))$ experiences rather than $\exists x(\text{Leaf}(x)) \& \exists y(\text{Woody}(y) \& \text{Furry}(y))$ experiences. In that case, there would be an appropriate explanatory connection. But so long as the permissivist herself denies that there is some such robust explanatory connection, and accepts the debunker’s account of why our experiences group qualities into objects the way they do, she has a defeater for what would otherwise be perfectly rational beliefs.
6. Externalism and Eligibility

I turn now to two further strategies for identifying an appropriate explanatory connection between object facts and object beliefs: one turning on the doctrine of semantic externalism and the other turning on the doctrine of reference magnetism.

6.1 Externalism

Here on earth, we encounter trees and believe that there are trees. On twin earth, where there are no trees but only twees—superficial duplicates of trees with entirely different evolutionary histories and internal constitutions—our intrinsic duplicates believe that there are twees. This suggests that the presence of a certain kind of object can and does explain why our kind concepts represent things of that kind and why in turn we form beliefs about things of that kind. This is just good old-fashioned externalism. Is that enough to undermine A1?

Here is why good old-fashioned externalism does not supply the sort of explanatory connection needed to disarm the debunking arguments. Even dyed-in-the-wool externalists must accept that the descriptions that we associate with kind terms and kind concepts constrain which (if any) things in the environment are picked out by those terms and concepts. To see this, imagine a biologist who discovers a new species of insect, points at one, and introduces the name ‘bumblefly’ for things of that kind. There are numerous things before her: the bumblefly, its head, its facing surface, etc. Furthermore, the bumblefly itself belongs to numerous kinds: bumblefly, insect, organism, etc. So how is it that ‘bumblefly’ came to denote all and only bumbleflies rather than something else? It must be because the biologist (at least tacitly) associates certain application conditions with the term ‘bumblefly’, which single out bumbleflies—rather than all insects or just the heads of bumbleflies—as the denotation of the term. And the same is surely so for already-entrenched kind terms like ‘tree’:

their reference is partly determined by the application conditions that speakers associate with them.39

Suppose, then, that there indeed are trees and no trogs. Given that we deploy a kind concept that we take to apply to bearers of qualities distributed treewise, the presence of the tree can explain why our term ‘tree’ and the associated kind concept have tree rather than twee or trog as their content. But we could have conceived of qualities distributed treewise as being constantiated by nothing at all, and instead conceived of qualities distributed trunkwise and dogwise as collectively having a single bearer. In that case, our kind concept for these scattered objects, which we take to be made up of a dog and a trunk, would not pick out trees, because trees do not come near enough to satisfying the application conditions we associate with the concept.

Here is why this is a problem for the envisaged externalist response. Trees are able to give rise to tree beliefs only because we conceive of qualities distributed treewise as being borne by a single object. And we take these to be borne by a single object—rather than conceptually bundling qualities into objects in some radically different way—because we experience the qualities distributed treewise as being borne by a single object. In short, it is because we have ∃x[Leafy(x) & Woody(x)] & ∃y[Furry(y)] experiences. If we had instead had ∃x[Leafy(x)] & ∃y[Woody(y) & Furry(y)] experiences, we would not have formed a concept of trees—even in the presence of trees, and even supposing that externalism is true. We would have formed a concept of trogs.

The debunker maintains that we have the ∃x[Leafy(x) & Woody(x)] & ∃y[Furry(y)] experience rather than the ∃x[Leafy(x)] & ∃y[Woody(y) & Furry(y)] experience as a result of biological and cultural contingencies that are not themselves influenced by the facts about which of those qualities are constantiated by a single object. Externalism does not provide an alternative explanation. (It would be an extraordinary externalism indeed—nothing good or old-fashioned about it—on which the mere presence of trees can have the needed affect on the

form of our experiences.) But given the debunker’s explanation, it would seem that the envisaged explanation of our tree beliefs in terms of the presence of trees is at best a deviant connection, and, as we saw in §5, recognizing that the envisaged connection would be deviant undermines our reasons for believing that such a connection obtains in the first place.

6.2 Eligibility
Similar remarks apply to appeals to intrinsic eligibility (a.k.a. reference magnetism).40 Some think that certain items are intrinsically more eligible than others to serve as the semantic values of our terms and concepts, and they might be tempted by the following line of thought. Trogs not only do not exist, they cannot exist, and the uninstantiability of the kind trog makes it intrinsically less eligible to feature in the contents of our beliefs and experiences than instantiated kinds like tree. Thus, facts about trees and trogs do explain how we end up with tree beliefs. A1 is false.

Never mind that troghood is instantiateable. Even conservatives should agree that there could be trogs if (say) a trunk were to sprout out of the back of a gigantic dog. The problem, again, is that an intrinsically eligible kind is poised to serve as the content of some kind concept only if it comes near enough to satisfying our associated conception of the kind.41 Such conceptions in turn are (again) determined by which sensible qualities are presented in experience as being coinstantiated by a single object. If instead of experiencing and conceiving of S as containing a […] that is partly leafy and partly woody, we experienced and conceived of S as containing a […] that is partly woody and partly furry, the kind tree would not come near enough to matching the experience and conception to fill in the blank ([…]). How is it, then, that we ended up with experiences and conceptions that are near enough to being satisfied by the eligible content, tree? Debunkers will say that it is a biological or cultural accident we have $\exists x (\text{Leafy}(x) \& \text{Woody}(x)) \& \exists y (\text{Furry}(y))$ experiences rather than $\exists x (\text{Leafy}(x)) \& \exists y (\text{Woody}(y) \& \text{Furry}(y))$ experiences. And the doctrine of intrinsic eligibility does not yield any competing explanation for why our experiences group perceived qualities the way they do.

Thus, like the externalist response, the eligibility response does not by itself supply an explanatory connection that (by its proponents’ lights) is nondeviant.

7. Desperate Times, Desperate Measures
We have examined a variety of responses to the debunking arguments that fail because they do not identify an appropriate explanatory connection between our object beliefs and the object facts: permissivism, deflationism, bootstrapping, externalism, reference magnetism, and a simple appeal to causal connections. What would it take to secure the needed explanatory connection? I will close by considering three responses that, whatever other problems they might have, do look to have what it takes to block the debunking arguments.

The first is the anti-realist response discussed in §2.1. Here the idea is that there is a doxastic explanation of the object facts: the object facts are as they are because we have the sorts of beliefs that we do. A1 is false.

The second is a theistic response, according to which we have the object beliefs (and associated experiences) that we do as a result of intelligent design.42 Because there are trees and not trogs, and because our benevolent designer wanted us to have accurate

40. See Merrill (1980), Lewis (1983: 370–377, 1984: 226–229), and Sider (2001: xxi, 2011: §3.2). Similar remarks apply also to appeals to “naïve realism,” on which the tree itself in some sense constitutes the experience—when the experience is veridical, that is. When the experience isn’t veridical, all bets are off. So, once again, the question becomes: what explains why the experience is veridical in the more basic aspects that would enable the objects to constitute the experience?


42. Cf. Rea (2002: ch. 9). Appeals to intelligent design needn’t in principle be theistic. But the supposition that we were designed by intelligent Martians will likely fall prey to debunking arguments concerning the status of their object beliefs.
beliefs about which objects there are, she arranged for us to have experiences that represent trees and not trogs. So there is an alethic explanation. \(A_1\) is false.

The third is a rationalist response, according to which we intellectually apprehend—through some capacity for rational insight—relevant facts about composition, coinstantiation, and kind membership. For instance:

- when qualities are distributed treewise (as they appear to be in \(S\)), there is a single object that bears those qualities.
- when there is a single object that bears qualities distributed treewise, that object is a tree.
- when a dog and a trunk are so arranged (as they are in \(S\)), they do not compose anything.

Our apprehension of these facts, together with our perceptual awareness of the qualities in \(S\) and background knowledge about qualities occluded from view (e.g., of the insides and backsides of the objects), accounts for why we have an experience as of a tree, and no experience as of a trog, when we encounter \(S\). So there is an alethic explanation. \(A_1\) is false.

Needless to say, the theses that underwrite these responses—anti-realism, theism, and rationalism—are highly controversial. Some might even say: intolerable. They do, however, avoid the problems that plagued the other responses considered above. Unlike the views considered in §§3–4, these ones do not undercut the authority of our experiences by conceding that there is no explanatory connection between the object facts and our object beliefs. Unlike the responses considered in §§5–6, these responses identify an explanatory connection that would make the accuracy of the beliefs non-accidental, noncoincidental, and nondeviant. But in different ways. The theist and rationalist reject the debunker's claim that it is a biological or cultural accident that our experiences represent the kinds of objects that they do, or that they represent qualities distributed treewise as being borne by a single object. The process leading from the objects to the beliefs is, in one way or another, intelligently guided. The anti-realist, by contrast, may well agree with the debunker that this is a biological or cultural accident, but will insist that it is no accident that these experiences correctly represent which objects there are, since these experiences determine which objects we believe in and, in turn, which objects there are.

My own view is that the rationalist response is the correct response, though I leave a defense of the response for another occasion. My aim here has only been to show that there is no easy way out of the debunking arguments against our perceptual beliefs about ordinary objects.\(^{44}\)

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\(^{43}\) The idea would have to be that our experiences are "cognitively penetrated" by the envisaged states of apprehension. See Siegel (2012) for general discussion of cognitive penetration.
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