

EXPERIENCE AND THE JUSTIFICATION OF BELIEF

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I

This paper is about whether, and if so how, sensory experiences justify or contribute to the justification of beliefs. More specifically, the question is whether, and if so how, our beliefs about what is before us can derive their justification, at least in part, from our current sensory experiences. I begin by outlining a conception of justified belief which might be thought to create a difficulty for an affirmative answer. I then argue that the difficulty can be met with a suitable conception of the nature of sensory experiences.

The relevant conception of justified belief can be illustrated by considering the case where a belief derives its justification from other beliefs. This is the case where a subject A's belief that p is justified and derives its justification from other beliefs that A has, say, the beliefs that q, r, . . . I shall not attempt a complete account of what it is for A to be thus justified. However, the following conditions seem plausible and are particularly germane to the central topic of this paper.

Firstly, there is a *Causal* condition which, shorn of refinements, simply requires A to believe that p because he believes that q, r, . . .¹ Thus you might now believe that rain is imminent because you see and thus believe that dark and threatening clouds are gathering and have a belief to the effect that the appearance of such clouds indicates that rain is not far off. This would be a straightforward case. We need not worry about ruling out deviant causal links between beliefs since the other conditions will place severe constraints on the kinds of link which count.

Secondly, there is a *Rational Connection* condition which I shall express in the following terms: The propositions q, r, . . . must constitute a reason for thinking that p (or, in short, and ignoring scruples about the use of symbols, q, r, . . . must constitute a reason for p). Roughly speaking, this will be true whenever p may be legitimately inferred from q, r, An obvious case is where p is validly deducible from q, r, . . . but a plausible epistemology will

¹ The need for such a condition has been widely accepted since the publication of D. M. Armstrong's *Belief, Truth and Knowledge*, (Cambridge, 1973).

have to acknowledge legitimate inferences which are not deductively valid. We make inferences, for instance, from propositions about the behaviour of an individual to propositions ascribing pain to that individual, which, arguably, are not properly evaluable in terms of patterns of deductively valid inference.

The Rational Connection conditions demands that a certain abstract relation obtains between the content of A's belief that p and the contents of the beliefs from which it derives its justification. Conjoined with the Causal condition the effect is to require that the causal link between the belief that p and the beliefs that q, r, . . . should mirror a certain inferential link between the proposition that p and the propositions that q, r, Nevertheless for all that has been said this mirroring could be a fluke. There is nothing to require that the inferential link between the propositions concerned has anything whatsoever to do with A's believing that p because he believes that q, r, Let us call this *the problem of the accidental rational connection*.

Suppose you believe that when the light is on in your colleague's room on the other side of the courtyard your colleague is around the department. Seeing that your colleague's light is on you conclude that he is around. You reach that conclusion *because* you believe that when your colleague's light is on he is around and you believe that his light is on. Thus the Causal condition is satisfied and so, obviously, is the Rational Connection condition. Consider now why you form the belief that your colleague is around on the grounds you do. Most likely you would have a certain belief-forming habit: If you take it for granted that whenever p, q, and you see that p, and you have an interest in whether q, you conclude that q, unless other beliefs prevent you from doing so. Now for our purposes what matters is that clearly it would be no accident that you acquired this habit. You would have learned to form beliefs in that way as you acquired a mastery of the logical concept expressed by the 'whenever ---, **' construction, for it is partially constitutive of such mastery that the subject knows how to employ the concept in circumstances such as those in the example. In forming your belief that your colleague is around on the grounds that you do, you are, we might say, exercising a certain inferential competence, since your mastery of the concept in question involves a grasp of its inferential role.

Now there is a great deal more to inferential competence than emerges from this example, but if what I have said is along the right lines we have in prospect a solution to the problem of the

accidental rational connection. We need something like the following condition: If A's belief that p derives its justification from his beliefs that q, r, ... then in believing that p because he believes that q, r, ... A is exercising inferential competence with respect to the relevant concepts. I shall call this the *Competence* condition. Insofar as A has the required competence he will be capable of recognising that q, r, ... constitute a reason for p. This is part of what it is for him to have a grasp of the inferential role of the relevant constructions, but he need have no thought to the effect that q, r, ... constitute a reason for p in forming his belief that p.²

Lastly, we need a *Basics* condition to the effect that A may legitimately take it for granted that q, r, ... There is room for differences about how this condition should be filled out in detail. Obviously, we have to allow that the intended requirement could be met through A's beliefs that q, r, ... deriving justification from other beliefs. But to avoid the threatened regress we must allow that we may legitimately take for granted certain propositions even though our beliefs to the effect that they are true do not derive their justification from other beliefs. This in itself leaves wide open the question which propositions a person may thus take for granted. For the purposes of this paper it is not necessary to take a general view on the matter. It must be stressed, however, that nothing in what follows is designed to bolster up a foundationalist epistemology.

We have then a number of important constraints relating to a central case of justified belief, that in which a belief derives its justification from other beliefs. It is far from clear that a conception of justified belief maintaining the spirit of the suggested approach can be extended so as to allow that beliefs may derive their justification from sensory experiences.

The issue is complicated by the fact that there are widely divergent views about the nature of sensory experiences (which I shall henceforth refer to simply as experiences). Mental states are commonly divided into sensations and propositional attitudes. Pains, itches, tickles, feelings of numbness, and so on, are sensations, while beliefs and desires are propositional attitudes. It is not easy to say how experiences should be classified. If we concentrate on the senses of taste and smell and possibly touch, it is tempting to rank experiences along with sensations. On the other

² Thus we avoid a regress of the Achilles-and-the-Tortoise type. For a useful discussion of related issues, see Barry Stroud 'Inference, Belief, and Understanding', *Mind*, Vol. 88, pp. 179-196.

hand, there are considerations which can make it seem natural to classify experiences as propositional attitudes. For instance, experiences can be described in ways which involve the ascription to them of propositional contents. We can say that it visually seems to someone that p, where the point of the ascription is not to say what the subject believes, or is even inclined to believe, but simply to say how the experience represents things as being.

Concerning sensations Donald Davidson has made the following remark:

The relation between a sensation and a belief cannot be logical, since sensations are not beliefs or other propositional attitudes. What then is the relation? The answer is, I think, obvious: the relation is causal. Sensations cause some beliefs and in *this* sense are the basis or ground of those beliefs. But a causal explanation of a belief does not show how or why the belief is justified.³

Reading the phrase 'logical relation' liberally as capturing the sense of my 'rational connection', Davidson's point could be developed in terms of the considerations about justification outlined above. It is tempting to generalise these considerations to the view that if a belief derives its justification at least in part from a mental state S, then something analogous to the Rational Connection and Competence conditions must be satisfied. Otherwise it is difficult to see how S could have a justificatory rather than merely a causal role. But the mooted generalisation seems to require that mental states having a justificatory role should be propositional attitudes. As yet we have no clear idea how states which are not propositional attitudes could satisfy anything analogous to the two crucial conditions. If Davidson is right sensations could not fit the bill.

A way of trying to do justice to our intuitions would be to hold that the class of sensations and the class of propositional attitudes are not exclusive. Experiences could be treated as hybrids which have, as it were, both sensational and propositional dimensions.⁴ The differences between experiences and itches and experiences and beliefs can readily be accommodated on such a view. Itches could be regarded as pure sensations and beliefs, if they have no distinctive phenomenology, as pure propositional attitudes.

³ Davidson 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge' in E. Le Pore (ed.), *Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford, 1986). The passage occurs on p. 311.

⁴ This is now a familiar approach. See, for example, Colin McGinn *The Character of Mind* (Oxford, 1982), ch. 2 and Christopher Peacocke *Sense and Content* (Oxford, 1983), ch. 1.

Defenders of the view that experiences have a justificatory role could avail themselves of this approach.⁵ There would remain the task of spelling out the nature of the rational connections between experience contents and belief contents, but Davidson's immediate worry would be circumvented.

The trouble with this line of thought is that it is by no means clear that sensory experiences are indeed propositional attitudes. Too often the view that they are is simply taken for granted or inadequately grounded. I want to consider what can be made of the view that experiences contribute to the justification of beliefs if experiences are not propositional attitudes. And in doing so I want to keep to the spirit of the approach to derivative justification outlined earlier in this section. The aim will be to find analogues of our constraints on derivatively justified belief for cases in which a belief derives its justification in part from a current experience. In the next section I shall outline the conception of sensory experiences with which I shall work.

II

There is a way of describing experiences which is best introduced by comparison with a natural method of describing pains. We can say what a pain is like in terms of circumstances which produce pains of its type. Thus a pain of the type produced when you cut a finger with a knife is different from a pain of the type produced by touching a hot stove. Note that for a pain to be of the type produced when you prick your finger with a needle it need not have been actually produced by pricking your finger with a needle.

A somewhat similar typology applies to sensory experiences. Thus a visual experience may be of the type produced when you look at a blue car. A tactile experience may be of the type produced when you pass your hand over a sheepskin rug. More generally, let us say that an experience in the modality of M (sight, touch etc.) is F-type if and only if it satisfies the following condition: in suitable environmental conditions an F would produce such an experience in an observer who is suitably positioned and orientated and whose sense of M is normal. As rough shorthand, I shall say that F-type

⁵ A more radical approach would be to deny that experiences have a sensational dimension in any sense which is not reducible to the acquisition through sensory stimulation of dispositions to belief. I take it that this is the approach of D. M. Armstrong *Perception and the Physical World* (London, 1963) and George Pitcher *Perception* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1971). Peacocke *op. cit.*, ch. 1 gives good reasons for rejecting any such approach.

experiences are ones which Fs (would) yield. Thus a visual experience may be (red thing)-type. An aural experience may be (clap of thunder)-type. I shall assume that a refined account of the suitability and normality conditions would be restrictive enough to deliver the result that F-type experiences are of the sort which an F would yield if it were clearly in view and, for those suitably equipped, recognisable as an F. Thus a grouse completely merged into its grassy background would not yield a grouse-type experience. Nor would a grouse which is clearly in view but whose distinctive features are not.

This typology, which I shall call the 'F-type' typology, admits of an interesting refinement. Thus far the descriptions which specify the type of an experience have pertained to situations in the environment. But there are some experiences which cannot be adequately characterised unless mention is made of a special condition of the subject. Examples would be the sorts of experiences you have when you make yourself see double or if you screw up your eyes. More specifically, an experience might be (cup [as seen with screwed up eyes])-type or (book [as seen double])-type.

As I indicated earlier, experiences are often described in terms of how things seem to their subjects. Thus we can say that an experience is such that it seems to the subject that a book/cup/car/red thing is before him and we thereby ascribe to the experience a propositional content. This raises the question how such content ascriptions relate to ascriptions of a type to an experience in accordance with the 'F-type' typology. To answer this we need to be clearer about what is meant by describing an experience as being such that it seems to its subject that an F is there. As a first approximation I shall say that your experience can be correctly described in this manner if and only if it is such that in the absence of countervailing considerations you would believe that an F is there.⁶

An issue of fundamental importance in this area concerns the relation between experience and concepts. There can be no

⁶ The condition given here is similar to that given in Peacocke *op. cit.*, ch. 1. for what it is for an experience to have the representational content that an F is there. The distinction between an experience's being F-type and its being such that it seems to the subject that an F is there is akin to a distinction made by Paul Churchland between a sensation which is of ϕ and a sensation which is of ϕ . See his *Scientific Realism and the Plasticity of Mind* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 14. Churchland takes his distinction to mark two types of intentionality, subjective and objective, hence the subscripts. I do not regard his objective intentionality as a form of intentionality at all because it does not necessarily involve propositional content.

question of its seeming to you that an F is there unless you possess the concept of an F. Its seeming to you that an F is there is a matter of your being disposed to believe under certain conditions that an F is there. To be thus disposed you must possess those concepts which are ingredients of the content that an F is there, including the concept of an F. By contrast, to have an F-type experience you need not possess the concept of an F. Consider the pain case again. To specify the type of a pain via a situation which normally produces it is simply to say what sort of pain it is, not what sort of pain the subject thinks it is. Of course, you cannot understand what it is for a headache to be of the type you get when the muscles in the back of your neck are all tensed up unless you have a grasp of that description. But it by no means follows that you cannot have such a pain unless you have a grasp of the description. Similarly, a person could have the sort of experience which, say, a red fountain pen yields, a (red fountain pen)-type experience, even if he does not possess the concept of a red fountain pen.

The distinction between the notion of an experience's being F-type and that of an experience's being such that it seems that an F is there suggests an appealingly simple picture of how experiences interact with conceptual capacities. There are concepts which are applicable to things on the basis of current experience in some modality. Assume that the concept of an F is of this sort, then although subjects who have and subjects who lack a mastery of the concept of an F can have F-type experiences, for a subject who has this mastery such experiences are apt to be such that it seems that an F is there. It might be argued, however, that this picture is defective for the following reasons. Let it be granted that we can make sense of the notion that a person who has and a person who lacks the concept of an F could have experiences of the same type when looking at an F, in particular, experiences which are F-type. Still, this rather weak assumption is consistent with the possibility that a refined typology would be capable of capturing differences between the experiences such subjects would obtain by looking at an F, differences which are due to the difference in their conceptual capacities. We have already observed that the 'F-type' typology can be refined so as to capture characteristics of experiences which are due to special conditions of the subject. It might be suggested that these special conditions should include the particular conceptual capacities which the subject has exercised. The motivating thought here would be that the experience of one who has an F-type experience such that it seems that an F is there is bound to be

intrinsically different from that of one who has an F-type experience, but for whom it does not seem that an F is there.

What are the differences supposed to be? In the cases of looking at things with screwed up eyes or looking at things so as to see double we have a fairly definite idea of how the condition of the subject affects the experience. But how is possession of the concept of, say, an apple supposed to affect the experiences obtained looking at apples? Some light on the matter might be sought from familiar facts about experience and recognition. You can have a person's face in view for some time and then suddenly recognise who the person is. It is not just that you are now in a position to say who the person is. It seems that as you recognise the face the visual experience actually changes. A similar phenomenon can occur when, for instance, you see that a cushion-like object which has been in your line of sight is actually a cat which is curled up on a sofa. Again the difference before and after recognition is more than just a difference in your capacity to describe what you see. It is a difference in the experience itself. The facts are familiar enough. The question is, 'What do they show?'. In the case of the cat on the sofa what I shall call the strong view has it that the experience you receive after you have recognised the cat could not be the way it is unless you had recognised the cat as a cat. But that goes further than the facts require and raises problems of its own. There is indeed a phenomenal difference before and after recognition but that is consistent with the suggestion that as your eyes play over the object certain features of it become salient – the ears, the texture of the fur, and so forth – and the salience of these features enables you to recognise the object as a cat. The suggestion here is that far from recognition explaining the phenomenal change in your experience, the phenomenal change in your experience explains recognition. The strong view reverses this order of explanation and makes it seem mysterious that recognition should have taken place at all.

Against this response it might be argued that the notion of salience smuggles in recognitional capacities. Perhaps you recognise the cat because you recognised the features mentioned. So even if you do not need to possess the concept of a cat in order to have the kind of experience in virtue of which you were able to recognise the cat, nevertheless, the argument would go, unless you had concepts of the relevant features you could have no such experience. The problem with this suggestion is that it simply is not clear why salience should be conceived in terms of recognition if recognition is conceived in the familiar full-blooded way as

involving the application of concepts. The point I have in mind can be brought out with the help of another example.

Suppose that Fred has been brought up in a contrived environment. While this environment shares many similarities with ordinary environments its distinctive feature is that among the many things which it contains only one is red, a vividly coloured wooden block. Fred has never learned to use the expression 'red' or any synonymous expression. Indeed, we may suppose that he has never learned any colour words. But people sometimes point to the block asking others to fetch it. Sometimes they ask Fred and he does. Assuming Fred to have normal sight, the role of the block in such interchanges guarantees that it is salient in Fred's visual field – Fred can visually pick it out from its background. Indeed, there is a sense in which the colour of the block is salient for Fred, for he can pick out the block by its colour and that is a matter of his behaviour being keyed to the experiences he obtains when looking at the block. In the terminology I have introduced, Fred has (red thing)-type experiences when he looks at the block and these experiences have a causal role in his fetching activities, yet on the face of it these facts do not of themselves amount to his having the concept of something red. To have the concept of something red is a matter of being able to form and evaluate beliefs to the effect that such-and-such a thing is red. This is a sophisticated capacity involving as it does an appreciation of, for instance, the difference between being red and only appearing red. It seems that we could be disposed to respond differentially to (red thing)-type experiences, yet lack this capacity for belief formation and evaluation. And if Fred lacks the concept in question then it cannot be that as he looks at the block it seems to him that something red is there.

The crucial point of this tale is that a feature can be salient to a subject who has no concept of that feature as such, that is, no concept of what it is to have the feature. If this is right then in the cat example there is no reason to suppose that you must have recognised those features whose salience prompted your recognition of the object on the sofa as a cat. You can register the presence of a feature *Q* through having experiences with features which correlate with the presence of *Q*, but that is a different matter from its seeming to you that something having *Q* is before you.⁷

These reflections make it doubtful that the familiar facts concerning experience and recognition alluded to above can sustain

⁷ This point is accommodated by the treatment of sensational properties in Peacocke *op.cit.*, ch. 1.

the idea that an F-type experience which is such that it seems that an F is there is bound to be intrinsically different from an F-type experience which is not such that it seems that an F is there. This has a direct bearing on whether experiences should be conceived as propositional attitudes. To appreciate why this is so consider the following principle, which I shall call the *Intrinsicity principle*.

If token propositional attitudes in a given category (belief, desire or whatever) have different contents then they are of different types within the category.

This principle is partially constitutive of the notion of a propositional attitude.⁸ It is to be read as implying that if Kate's belief *B* is the belief that *p* and Ken's belief *B'* is the belief that *q*, and the proposition that *p* is not the same as the proposition that *q*, then *B* and *B'* are different beliefs, in the sense of being beliefs of different types. Propositional attitudes may thus be said to possess intrinsic contents in that possession of a particular content by a token attitude in a given category is intrinsic or essential to its being the type that it is within the category, that is, the belief type that it is, the desire type that it is, and so forth.

There is a sense in which experiences can be said to possess or bear propositional contents. Such contents are ascribed to experiences via the 'seems that' locution. The difficulty of conceiving of experiences as being propositional attitudes, albeit attitudes of a peculiar sort, is that we can make sense of the idea that distinct token experiences may have different contents, yet for all that be experiences of the same type. We can give substance to the claim that they are of the same type using the 'F-type' typology. Both may be F-type, and in all other respects the same, yet one may be such that it seems to its subject that an F is there and the other not. Such contents as experiences may be said to possess are not intrinsic to their being the experiences they are.⁹ Perhaps seeing,

⁸ There are different methods of individuating content, so we have coarse- and fine-grained contents and broad and narrow contents. I am inclined to think that no single method will capture all the relevant intuitions and theoretical requirements. Nevertheless, I contend that for any given method of individuating contents plausibly regarded as ascribable to mental states the Intrinsicity principle holds. So if relative to some fixed method of individuation the contents of *S* and *S'* differ there will be a corresponding sense in which *S* and *S'* are different states.

⁹ In 'What's in a Look?' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Vol. 86, 1985/86, pp. 83–97, I suggested that experiences do not have propositional contents, essentially on the grounds that they are not propositional attitudes. Mark Sainsbury, in a paper commenting on the argument and delivered in Stirling in December 1985, helped me to see that even if experiences are not propositional attitudes they could still be said to have extrinsic propositional contents.

properly so-called, always does essentially involve bringing things under concepts. But the question is whether the experience you have when it visually seems to you that an F is there could be had by someone who lacks the concept of an F and for whom, therefore, the experience could not be such that it seems that an F is there. If the correct answer is, as I have suggested, affirmative then the content that an F is there is not intrinsic to the experience's being the type that it is. The content is, one might say, detachable from the experience type. It would be quite wrong to infer from this that we read contents into our experiences or that we must do anything to endow them with content.¹⁰ We simply have the experiences and they come to bear such-and-such contents depending on our conceptual capacities.

III

Section I concluded with a problem. How can beliefs derive their justification in part from the current sensory experience of the subject if (a) experiences are not propositional attitudes and (b) justification is conceived in the spirit of the approach outlined in Section I? The proposed approach requires that for cases in which beliefs derive their justification in part from current experience there are analogues of the conditions of justified belief identified earlier. But, reflecting on Davidson's remarks on the subject, it might seem that if experiences are not propositional attitudes such analogues are not to be found. Let us call this *Davidson's problem*. I shall argue that if we dig a little deeper the problem can be resolved.

In the case where a belief derives its justification from other beliefs the required rational connection is an inferential link between the content of the belief in question and the contents of those on which it is based. Moreover, the fact that the belief in question is based in the way it is must be the outcome of a competence which consists in a mastery of the relevant concepts. So, for example, if you have a mastery of the concept of pain then you will be able to form and evaluate beliefs to the effect that someone is in pain, in ways which are sensitive to the inferential links between propositions pertaining to a person's behaviour and propositions to

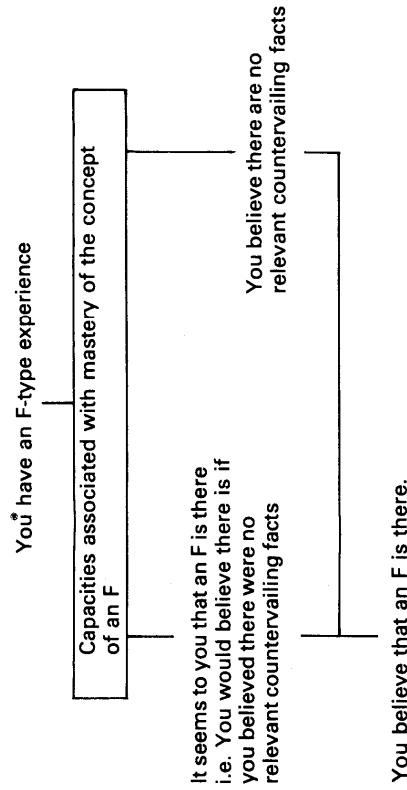
¹⁰ In 'Values and Secondary Qualities' which appears in Ted Honderich (ed.) *Morality and Objectivity* (London, 1985), John McDowell is rightly critical of the metaphor of 'reading in content' but he is wrong, I think, to suppose that the view that experiential contents are extrinsic to the experiences which bear them licences its use.

the effect that that person is in pain. Davidson's problem arises from the thought that experiences do not have rational connections with beliefs. But Davidson overlooks the possibility that mastery of certain concepts requires sensitivity not just to inferential links between propositions but also to inference-like links between experience-types and propositions.

In order to appreciate the nature of these links we must first take a closer look at the conditions under which we may form beliefs about the present scene on the basis of current experience. Consider a simple if rather boring case. Suppose that you have what, in the terminology introduced the last section, would be called a (red thing)-type experience. Under what conditions would you believe that something red is there? Our previous discussion suggests that if this experience engages in the right way with the conceptual capacities associated with your mastery of the concept of a red thing then it will seem to you that a red thing is there, and that means that in the absence of countervailing considerations you would believe that a red thing is there. Suppose then that it does seem to you that a red thing is there. Clearly you would not believe that there is if you had beliefs to the effect that certain countervailing facts obtain, that is, facts which either cast doubt on whether your sense of sight is functioning normally or on whether environmental conditions are suitable for detecting red things or independently cast doubt on whether a red thing is there. It might be suggested then that all that is required for you to believe that a red thing is there is that you lack such beliefs. But there is an important difference between merely lacking such beliefs and having at some level registered that no countervailing facts obtain. Assuming that you have full mastery of the concept of something red then you will be aware of a range of possibilities in which countervailing facts obtain and you will be, as it were, geared up to withholding belief in circumstances where such facts might well obtain. For instance, in old fashioned department stores where the interior lighting distorts the colours of things you will not be satisfied that a garment is the particular shade of red you want until you take it into daylight. So if you lack a belief that countervailing facts obtain on some occasion when you have a (red thing)-type experience it will not be because you do not know what would count as countervailing or are indifferent to such matters but rather because one of two alternatives obtains. The first alternative is that no countervailing facts come to your attention. Even then you will be primed to take up the default position which is to take it for granted,

albeit tacitly, that no countervailing facts obtain. The other alternative is that something makes you suspect that countervailing facts might obtain. You then check out the situation and satisfy yourself that none do.

More generally, we can represent the transition from the occurrence of an F-type experience to the formation of the belief that an F is there by means of the following diagram.



The diagram represents cases in which the input experience is appropriate for the belief which is formed in response to it. But there can be cases where the input experience is inappropriate. Nectarines are rather like certain varieties of red apples. Even so they are visually distinguishable from red apples. You can have an experience which is (red apples)-type and not nectarines-type, and vice versa. Imagine that you are shopping and look at a shelf on which nectarines are clearly in view. You have a nectarines-type visual experience yet because you are distracted by conversation you do not attend to what you clearly see. So it visually seems to you, and you actually believe, that apples are there although the experience to which this is a response is not apples-type. Another sort of case involves glimpsing the fruit in such haste that you do not properly focus on it. Your experience is neither apples-type nor nectarines-type but it prompts you nevertheless to believe that apples are there. In these cases the transition from experience to belief is incorrect and it is the possibility of this kind of evaluation which enables us to make sense of the idea that there can be abstract inference-like links between experience-types and belief contents.

Let us call these inference-like links quasi-inferences. Patterns of

legitimate quasi-inference can be conceived as conforming to the following schema, where 'T(F)' denotes the type to which F-type experiences belong:

T(F)

There are no relevant countervailing facts

An F is there

The proposal is that for an experience to be appropriate for a belief formed on its basis, is just for there to be a quasi-inferential link of this sort between the type of the experience and the proposition which comprises the content of the belief. Moreover, the mastery of certain concepts, including certainly colour concepts, requires an ability to form and evaluate beliefs in ways which are sensitive to these links.

With these considerations in mind, we can now formulate a number of conditions which need to be satisfied if A's belief that an F is there is justified and derives its justification from a current experience e and a belief to the effect that there are no relevant countervailing facts. Firstly, we have a Causal condition demanding that A believe that p because he has e and believes that there are no relevant countervailing facts. Secondly, we have a Rational Connection condition which demands that there be a legitimate quasi-inferential link between the type of e, the proposition that there are no relevant countervailing facts and the proposition that an F is there. This requirement would be satisfied if the experience were F-type. Thirdly, we have a Competence condition. A's believing that an F is there on the basis of e and his belief that there are no relevant countervailing facts must be the outcome of the exercise of competence on his part in employing the concept of an F. This competence is to be understood in terms of sensitivity to the appropriate quasi-inferential links. Fourthly, we have a Basis condition. A must be in a position to take it for granted that there are no relevant countervailing facts. He may have taken steps to satisfy himself that this is so but the account does not require him to have done so. As I suggested above a person may take up the default position of taking it for granted that there are no countervailing facts in circumstances in which nothing occurs which suggests that such facts might obtain. Any account of justification which is to be psychologically realistic and reflect our ordinary evaluative practice must allow that this is legitimate and

suffices to meet the Basis condition. We do not require a separate clause in the Basis condition to deal with the token experience *e*. That is because there can be no question of whether you ought to have *e* in the way that there can be a question of whether you ought to believe that there are countervailing facts. Recall, however, that the Rational Connection condition requires that *e* be of an appropriate type.

These conditions are in obvious ways analogous to the conditions set out in Section I for the case in which a belief derives its justification from other beliefs. They give content to the claim that experiences not merely cause beliefs but contribute to their justification, and thus show how the challenge posed by Davidson's problem can be met while keeping to the spirit of the general approach to justification with which we started.

A pleasing feature of the proposed account is that it allows beliefs to derive justification from current experience even when the subject has not engaged in any reflection on current experience. The account does demand that those who have justified experience-based beliefs should be able to evaluate transitions from experiences to beliefs, for that is part of what it is to have the relevant kinds of competence. We do have such abilities. Think of a witness at a trial reappraising a belief, formed earlier on the basis of visual experience, to the effect that a man with dark hair came out of a certain building. The witness could be led to such reappraisal by, as it were, replaying in imagination the experience had at the time and realising that he did not after all clearly pick out the colour of the man's hair.¹¹ We can also evaluate the experience-based beliefs of others. We do this, for example, in situations in which we wonder whether people had a good enough look at a scene to be in a position to believe what they did about it. These kinds of evaluations make it natural to think of experiences as contributing to the justification of beliefs. In this paper I have sought to defend this way of thinking in the face of Davidson's problem.¹²

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¹¹ See W. Lyons *The Disappearance of Introspection* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1986).

¹² The main themes in this paper are more fully explored in my *Reasons and Experience* (forthcoming, Oxford University Press). An earlier version was read at a meeting of the Scots Philosophical Club held in Stirling in December, 1987. I am grateful to many who were present then for helpful comments and encouragement. Detailed discussions in this area with my colleagues Andrew Brennan and Tony Pitson have been invaluable.

A DEFINITION OF NEGATIVE LIBERTY

Philip Pettit

Negative liberty is usually taken to require exemption from external constraints: exemption from interference by others. It looks like a clearly defined ideal, particularly in comparison with the various notions of positive liberty: these require exemption also from internal constraints, the proper exercise of the opportunity provided by exemption from constraints, or whatever.¹ But as many recent discussions have made clear, the appearance of clarity may be an illusion. Negative liberty allows of almost as many construals as positive. Hence the need for a definition.

The definitional task is particularly important for those who use the notion of negative liberty in presenting their political philosophies. Those who use the notion include libertarians, for whom it is the only important value; liberals in the style of Rawls, who think of it as an indispensable value but one that needs to be supplemented by other concerns; and republicans. Republicans start with negative liberty as the core political value but interpret its requirements in such a way that their effective concern is with promoting equality for all before a suitable form of law and custom. I have argued elsewhere for a republican line and so I regard the task of defining negative liberty as a particularly important one.²

There is no right or wrong about the definition of a concept like that of negative liberty. There is no natural essence for the definition to reflect and there are not enough linguistic intuitions available to determine it. But still the definitional exercise is important. It is a debt of clarity and honesty owed by anyone who invokes the notion in their thinking.

In recognising that any definition of negative liberty is underdetermined in this way, I agree with John Gray in rejecting what he

¹ See Tom Baldwin 'MacCallum and the Two Concepts of Freedom', *Ratio*, Vol. 26, 1984.

² See Philip Pettit 'The Freedom of the City: A Republican Ideal' in Alan Hamlin and Philip Pettit, eds, *The Good Polity*, Blackwells, Oxford, 1989 and particularly John Braithwaite and Philip Pettit *Not Just Deserts: A Republican Theory of Criminal Justice*, Oxford University Press, forthcoming, chapter 5. The republican credentials of the notion are argued for in those writings with reference to recent work by Quentin Skinner; see for example his 'Machiavelli on the Maintenance of Liberty', *Politics*, Vol 18, 1983 and 'The idea of negative liberty: philosophical and historical perspectives' in R. Rorty, J. B. Schneewind and Q. Skinner, eds., *Philosophy in History*, Cambridge University Press, 1984. Skinner stresses that Machiavelli develops his republican approach on the basis of a negative conception of liberty.