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Dispensing with Experiential Acquaintance

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Abstract: Experiential acquaintance is an alleged relation between ourselves and our experiences that has sometimes been hypothesized as necessary for knowledge of our experiences. This paper begins with a clarification of 'acquaintance' and an explanation of 'experience' that focuses attention on a famous, but flawed, argument by G. E. Moore. It goes on to critically examine several recent arguments concerning experiential acquaintance and to show how internalist foundationalism can respond to a famous Sellarsian dilemma without appeal to a relation of acquaintance with our experiences. It concludes that we can dispense with experiential acquaintance.

Keywords: D. Chalmers, M. Duncan, foundationalism, R. Fumerton, G. E. Moore, Sellarsian dilemma

It is sometimes claimed that we stand in a relation of acquaintance to our experiences, or to facts about them, and that standing in such a relation is fundamental to explaining how we can know our experiences. (See, e.g., Hasan and Fumerton (2019); Chalmers (2010); Duncan (2017).) This paper examines several arguments for these claims and finds them wanting: a relation of acquaintance with our experiences is not helpful in understanding our experiences or our knowledge of our experiences. Since we should not posit relations for which we do not have good reason, we should dispense with experiential acquaintance.

Many authors seem to regard it as more or less obvious that there is an acquaintance relation. In writing this paper, I have looked for texts that purport to explicitly argue for such a relation, or for closely related claims. Thus, after explaining 'acquaintance' and 'experience' in §1, I examine arguments by G. E. Moore (§2), M.

Duncan (§3) and D. Chalmers (§4). In §5 I give a positive account of our knowledge of our experiences and explain why internalist foundationalism does not /2/ need acquaintance in order to respond to a famous Sellarsian dilemma. In §6 I summarize the paper's results.

1. Preliminaries

'Acquaintance' is sometimes used for a relation we have to objects we perceive, or even recall or hear about (Pepp, 2019, following Jeshion, 2010). This paper does not attempt to address views that understand 'acquaintance' in this liberal way; its scope is limited to experiential acquaintance, that is, to views that understand acquaintance to be a relation between subjects and their experiences or properties of their experiences. This limitation puts Relational Views (e.g., Campbell, 2002; Brewer, 2019) beyond our scope, and makes it unnecessary to compare our account to acquaintance-avoiding views of justification for perceptual or memorial judgments (see, e.g., papers in Tucker, 2013).[1] And although our discussion has some implications for theories that divide experiences into subjects, sense-data, and a relation of acquaintance between them, sense-data are not experiences, and sense-datum theories are not targets of present concern

The understanding of 'acquaintance' that is of interest in this paper is rooted in the explanation of that term given in Russell (1912/1959). Since this work is very well known, I will mention just a few key points. Acquaintance does not involve knowing

[1] It is not my intent to make room for Relational Views. Instead, their discussion would require another paper, with arguments not needed for more traditional understandings of 'acquaintance'

truths or making any inferences (46). What we are acquainted with is ‘anything of which we are directly aware’ – things of which we are ‘immediately conscious’ when we are perceiving (46). Acquaintance ‘seems obviously a relation between the person acquainted and the object with which the person is acquainted’ (50).

To see whether this understanding is merely an historical curiosity, let us turn to a few words on acquaintance from section 1 of Hasan & Fumerton (2019).

> What distinguishes acquaintance is, minimally, the following two closely related features. First, it is a nonjudgmental and nonconceptual form of awareness. . . . Acquaintance with something does not consist in forming any judgment or thought about it, or in having any concept or representation of it. . . . Second, it is a form of awareness constituting a real, genuine relation, a relation that cannot obtain without its *relata* . . . . One cannot be acquainted with something that does not exist.

/3/ This passage captures the essential point that no knowledge of truths is involved in acquaintance. Although Hasan and Fumerton do not use the term ‘directly’ (aware), the exclusion of having a concept or representation of the object of acquaintance and the exclusion of error regarding existence of the object of acquaintance seem to imply a conception that is least very similar to direct awareness. They do not use the word ‘person’ for a relatum of the acquaintance relation, but that seems implied by their use of ‘One . . . .’ I conclude that essential features of Russell’s understanding of ‘acquaintance’ are preserved in Hasan and Fumerton’s account, and I will take these features – genuine relation of awareness between a person and the object of acquaintance, not involving concepts, truth, or inference – to define ‘acquaintance’ as used in this paper.

Our focal question in this paper is ‘Are we acquainted with *our experiences*?’ To pursue this question, we need some understanding of what an experience is. Hasan and

Fumerton (2019) allow for the possibility of experiences with which one is not acquainted (they use the difference between experiences that are and are not objects of acquaintance to explain the possibility of being acquainted with the acquaintance relation). The supposedly plausible case occurs when one has a pain from which one is temporarily distracted. Allegedly, before and after the distraction one is acquainted with one's pain, and during the distraction one still has the pain, but is not acquainted with it.

There is, however, another way to understand this case, namely, that a pain is one kind of experience, and what it is to be an experience is to be an essentially conscious event. Like all of our experiences, pains have complex physiological causes, and what happens when one is 'distracted from pain' is that some of the causes of pain are no longer present. It is compatible with this understanding, that *some* of the causes of pain experience remain during the distraction. For example, nociceptors in a region of bodily damage may still be in a highly activated state, while their effect in the brain, on which pain depends, is inhibited by interference from the distractor. When the distraction is over, the full set of required causes is restored, and a new pain experience ensues.

Hasan and Fumerton's treatment of pain suggests that acquaintance is part of ordinary pain cases – that is, cases in which we have a pain and are not distracted. Pains, however, are also ordinarily understood to be experiences in their own right. People *have* pains, and when they have one their conscious life (their stream of consciousness) is partly constituted by that experience. It is not *evident* that any relation additional to being a part of one's conscious life is required for an ordinary case of /4/ pain. It is reasonable, therefore, to begin with a view that does not build an acquaintance relation into ordinary (i.e., distraction-absent) cases, and that is how we shall proceed. It is, of course, compatible with such a

beginning that there may a reason to introduce an additional relation of acquaintance. This paper, however, will argue that several reasons offered for such an addition are not good reasons.

Everyday experiences are typically complex; e.g., we experience colours of various objects, often while experiencing sounds, tastes or scents. This paper will not be concerned with complexes. The issues of interest here arise for, e.g., experiences of green, and simple cases of that kind will be used for illustration.

2. Reflections on Moore's Argument

We are, unfortunately, not done with terminological matters. There is a short argument that may seem to threaten the proposed understanding regarding pain and distraction.

[1] One can correctly be said to have an experience of pain.

[2] 'Of' always denotes an external relation. SO,

[3] When one is correctly said to have an experience of pain, one's experience stands in an external relation to one's pain.

[4] Items that stand in an external relation are distinct items that can occur separately.

SO,

[5] A pain can occur separately from an experience of pain.

The weak premise in this argument is [2]. One counterexample occurs in the predicate '____ is a game of football', which does not express an external relation between a game and

football, but instead identifies the nature of the game that is being referred to in the subject position.

One may, however, reject [2] and still think that a relational reading of ‘experience of pain’ is mandatory. After all, one might think, if we generally do not stand in a relation to our pains – a relation that might be called ‘acquaintance’ or (see Russell, 1912) ‘direct awareness’ – then we would be typically unaware of them; which is clearly an unacceptable view. The stance of this paper is that this way of thinking harbours a deep misunderstanding. To understand how to correct it, we must begin by examining its likely source in a famous argument given by G. E. Moore (1903, p. 444).

> We all know that the sensation of blue differs from that of green. But it is plain that if both are sensations they also have some point in common. What is it that they have in common? And how is this common element related to the points in which they differ?
>
> I will call the common element 'consciousness' without yet attempting to say what the thing I so call is. We have then in every sensation two distinct terms, (1) ' consciousness,' in respect of which all sensations are alike; and (2) something else, in respect of which one sensation differs from another. . . .
>
> We have then in every sensation two distinct elements, one which I call consciousness, and another which I call the object of consciousness. This must be so if the sensation of blue and the sensation of green, though different in one respect, are alike in another: blue is one object of sensation and green is another, and consciousness, which both sensations have in common, is different from either.

This argument is invalid, as can be seen from the following parallel.

> We all know that an instance of grass differs that of dirt. But it is plain that if both are instances, they also have some point in common.
>
> I will call the common element ‘instancehood’. We have then, in every instance two distinct terms, (1) ‘instancehood’ in respect of which all instances are alike; and (2) something else, in respect of which one instance differs from another.
>
> We have then in every instance two distinct elements, one which I call instancehood, and another which I call the object of the instance. This must be so

> if the instance of grass and the instance of dirt, though different in one respect, are alike in another.

But neither an instance nor instancehood is a distinct element of an instance of grass or of dirt. Similarly, the shade of red that is crimson differs from the shade of red that is scarlet, but neither red, nor a shade of red, nor a shade, is a distinct element of crimson or scarlet, nor are they distinct elements of an instance of crimson or scarlet. In general, determinables are not distinct elements of determinate properties or their instances.

Let us return for a moment to premise [2] of the argument at the beginning of this section. That premise may seem plausible at first blush, because it is true that 'of' *often* denotes external relations. Above, I offered one counterexample to [2], but we should realise that counterexamples are legion: the city of New York, a patch of grass, a pint of beer, a period of time, an army of ants, and so on.

It would, obviously, be contentious to simply assume that sensations of blue, experiences of pain, or awarenesses of foul odours or of experiences belong on the same list, i.e., that the 'of's in those phrases do *not* denote external relations. There is some reason to make that assumption: an awareness existing by itself, separated from being an awareness of any particular kind or of any particular thing, is not *obviously* possible. The stance of this paper, however, is to be neutral about the grammar of 'of' in 'experience/awareness of F'. In light of nonrelational occurrences of 'of', the presence of 'of' cannot support affirmation of relational structure. Likewise, absence of 'of' in 'F experience' or 'F awareness' cannot support denial of relational structure. Substantive views about the structure or epistemology of experience cannot rest on the grammar of 'of'.

This conclusion applies to Russell's (1912) introduction of acquaintance. The phrases quoted from that work include (direct) 'awareness' and the claim that acquaintance 'seems obviously' to be a relation. But if Moore's argument is invalid and 'of' does not always denote a relation, the assumption that direct awareness involves a (genuine, or 'real') relation can reasonably be denied to be 'obvious'.

The neutrality regarding 'of' is confined to the exclusion of drawing any inferences from the *grammar* of 'of'. This paper is not neutral on the question of the relationality of awareness. The view to be argued for is that we *have* experiences, which are episodes of consciousness, which are instances of certain properties, and that we do not need, in addition, a further relation of acquaintance.

This statement may raise a worry that I am merely making a verbal adjustment, according to which 'consciousness' and/or 'experience' will be used in a way that amounts to incorporating a relation of acquaintance as part of their meaning. I believe it will be clear as we proceed that I am not doing that, but it may be helpful to consider what the consequences would be if one held that an experience was constituted by a relation of acquaintance between a person and some item. Since people can have more than one experience, there must be something, *x*, that at least partially constitutes being a person and that is distinct from any single experience. Now suppose that an experience, call it 'E1', is constituted by *x* standing in relation to an experience, call it 'E2'. E2 cannot be the same experience as E1, because E1 (we are supposing) has *x* as a constituent that is distinct from (the whole of) E1. So, in diagrammatic form, E1 will be [*x* – acquainted with – E2]. But then, a reiteration of the same reasoning will require E2 to be a something that is acquainted with a yet further experience, E3. Thus, E1 would

turn out to be [*x* – acquainted with – {*y* – acquainted with – E3}] (where *y* might be *x* or some other subject). The same reasoning could be reiterated indefinitely.

To avoid such a regress while holding that an acquaintance relation is incorporated in an experience, one must thus accept that an experience is a case of one item (a person, or an awareness) standing in the acquaintance relation to something that is not an experience. Such a non-experiential *relatum* was indeed the role of sense-data in Russell's (1912) view. Contemporary advocates of acquaintance, however, often deny sense-data, and affirm that we are acquainted with our experiences, which they take to be episodes of consciousness. What will be argued here is that episodes of consciousness are enough; i.e., once we have them, we do not need, in addition, a relation of acquaintance between ourselves and those experiences. Readers will need to be careful not to slide into thinking of acquaintance with our experiences as a relation between *parts* of an experience that are not themselves experiences, but which compose an experience when they are related by a relation of acquaintance. They will also need to avoid reading 'experiences are episodes of consciousness' as 'experiences are instances of a relation of acquaintance holding between items (neither of which are experiences themselves). They will need to bear in mind that the fact that '(someone is) conscious of an experience' is a grammatical phrase does not justify an inference to the view that when it applies, there is an experience *and* a relation of being conscious of it. The claim to be debated here (and ultimately denied) is that experiences, which are taken to be episodes of consciousness, are *also* related to us by a relation of acquaintance.

3. Duncan's Argument

A paper by Duncan (2017) is largely concerned with Russell's introduction of 'acquaintance' and his reasoning about it. Near the end of the paper, however, Duncan states an argument that he accepts and that he regards as the best argument for acquaintance. I am concerned here only with this final proposal.

The argument involves 'The (conditional) Doubt Test'. Duncan is not suggesting that there is any such thing as conditional doubt. A previously considered, and rejected, version used a biconditional; the preferred version uses only a one-way connection. The argument for acquaintance is this.

> (1) If x passes The (conditional) Doubt Test – that is, if, given one's seeming awareness of x, one cannot doubt that x exists – then one is acquainted with it.
>
> (2) Some of our experiences pass The Doubt Test.
>
> (3) Therefore, we are acquainted with some of our experiences. (Duncan, 2017, p. 472)

There is a sense in which I cannot doubt that the books on my desk exist. I can, of course, entertain sceptical arguments concerning them, e.g., maybe I am only a brain in a vat receiving computer inputs. But I cannot generate a realistic worry about their existence. I cannot generate what we may call a *robust* doubt about them.[2] The doubt that figures in

[2] This is not to deny that I could generate a robust doubt under some conditions, e.g., after taking psychedelic drugs, when extremely fatigued, etc. But, as is true for most people most of the time, no such conditions hold as I write this.

Duncan's argument is not merely robust doubt. The 'cannot doubt' includes not being able to generate even rarefied philosophical doubt.[3]

To evaluate this argument, we need to recognize that there are two ways of reading its first premise. It could be read (A) as a definition of 'acquaintance'; in effect, a stipulation that if you cannot have even a philosophical doubt about an *x* you seem to be aware of, then you may abbreviate the reporting of that fact by saying 'I am acquainted with *x*'.

On this way of reading (1), the argument fails to establish that there is acquaintance in the sense explained in section 1. Acquaintance with an experience, as explained there, is a relation between a person and an experience that is *additional to* simply having that experience. Passing the Doubt Test may be a reason for holding that one's experience actually exists, and that one is having an experience (and having an experience of a certain kind). But stipulating that one is entitled to claim 'acquaintance with experience' whenever one cannot doubt that one is having an experience would plainly fail to establish any claim as to the explanation of one's inability to doubt, and *a fortiori* would fail to establish that there is a relation of acquaintance in such cases. The only 'addition' here would be a bit of language: 'S is acquainted with an *F* experience' and 'S cannot doubt that S is having an *F* experience' would be merely two ways of saying the same thing.

An alternative reading, (B) of premise (1), applied to the case of experiences, takes it to say that whenever it seems one is having an experience and finds that one cannot doubt that one is having it (or, that it is of a certain kind), then there is also a relation between the

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[3] A possible exception is doubt due to illusionist arguments, which Duncan does not discuss. (For illusionism see e.g., Frankish, 2016, Kammerer, 2019.)

experiencer and the experience that is additional to the having of the experience. On this reading, however, (1) would be question-begging. If we need to be convinced that we are acquainted with our experiences (i.e., the conclusion, (3)), we would need just as much convincing that whenever we have an experience, we also stand in some additional relation to it.

One might respond that on reading (B), (1) is self evidently true. Indubitability, however, is a propositional attitude, and it is not *prima facie* plausible that any account of how our propositional attitudes are related to our experiences could be self evident. If there is an alternative account of indubitability that does not make use of a relation of acquaintance, and is at least not self evidently false, then (1), on the present reading, cannot be self evident; and such an account will be offered in §5 below. One might also respond that supposing there to be a relation of acquaintance that holds between ourselves and our experiences, but not between ourselves and external things, is the best explanation of why there is indubitability in the former case but not in the latter. This response will also be undercut if the account in §5 is successful. Thus, contingent on acceptance of that account, I conclude that Duncan's argument does not give us good reason to think we are acquainted with our experiences, if 'acquaintance' is used in the way that is explained in §1.

This conclusion may be resisted in the following way. Duncan's second premise says that 'some' of our experiences pass the (conditional) Doubt Test. He gives no examples of experiences that would not pass that test, but it may be suggested that fleeting or peripheral experiences are such examples. In that case, it might be thought that passing the Doubt Test adds something significant to merely having an experience, and that recognising acquaintance is justified because it is required for passing the Doubt Test.

In response to this suggestion we may note that it is almost as difficult to doubt that one has just had a fleeting experience as it is to doubt that one is having a continuing experience. Further description of one's fleeting experience, however, may not seem to be indubitably correct. The reason is that such further descriptions must rely on one's memory of the experience, and one can always doubt that memory is reliable. When experiences are continuing, this ground of doubt is removed; but that removal does not depend on supposing that there is a relation between the experiencer and the experience that is additional to the continuing of having the experience.

4. Chalmers's Argument

Chalmers (2010) introduces acquaintance as needed to explain his conclusion that 'only phenomenal properties can support direct concepts' (p, 285; I will call this claim 'SUPPORT'). A direct concept is a concept 'whose epistemic content depends constitutively on a demonstrated property instance' (p. 284). If one applies a direct concept to an experience to which one is attending, the identity of the concept is inseparable from that property.

In explaining why SUPPORT is the case, Chalmers says the following. (The 'other instantiated properties' indicated in the following quotation are height, chemical properties, age, and external colour.)

> It is natural to suggest that this conclusion [i.e., SUPPORT] holds because we bear a special relation to the phenomenal properties instantiated in our experience: a relation that we do not bear to the other instantiated properties in question and a relation that is required to form a direct concept of a property in the manner

> described. This relation would seem to be a peculiarly intimate one that is made possible by the fact that experiences lie at the heart of the mind rather than standing at a distance from it, and it seems to be a relation that carries the potential for conceptual and epistemic consequences. We might call this relation *acquaintance*. (Chalmers, 2010, p. 285, emphasis in original.)

Chalmers then puts this newly introduced relation to work:

> As characterized, acquaintance is a relation that makes possible the formation of pure phenomenal concepts, and we have seen that pure phenomenal concepts embody a certain sort of lucid understanding of phenomenal properties. So, acquaintance is a relation that makes this sort of lucid understanding possible. (*Ibid*.)

A pure phenomenal concept is a concept that rigidly applies to the property of which it is a concept and whose application has no implications about the relations of that property or its instances to anything else. A direct phenomenal concept is a pure phenomenal concept that is applied when we actually have an experience, and make a judgment to the effect that *this* experience is *F* (where *F* is a pure phenomenal concept). (See Chalmers, 2010, p. 271 and p. 277).

However, we do not need acquaintance to explain why we can form direct concepts only of phenomenal properties (and not of the four contrasting properties Chalmers identifies). By definition of 'direct concept', forming a direct concept of a property, F, requires one to have an experience in which *F* is instantiated. Phenomenal properties are properties such that it is like something to have an instance of them, and experiences are just those occurrences that are instances of phenomenal properties. It follows from these understandings alone that direct concepts can be formed only of

phenomenal properties; no invocation of acquaintance has been or needs to be made.[4] The reason we cannot form direct concepts of Chalmers's four contrasting properties is simply that they are not phenomenal properties (there is nothing it is like to have an instance of them).

This last claim will be readily admitted for chemical properties and age, but the other two require brief comment. If one is looking at items of different sizes, one will normally have experiences that instantiate spatial relations of larger than, or wider than, and so on. So, there is no obstacle to formation of direct concepts of relative sizes. However, Chalmers's example of a height of which we cannot form a direct concept is 'two meters'; and this, indeed, is not instantiated in experiences. Spatial relations in experiences do not come with units of measurement.[5]

Chalmers does not elaborate on what he means by 'external color concepts', but possible candidates are concepts of properties that are instantiated in external physical objects, e.g., concepts of dispositions to reflect certain percentages of light of various wavelengths, or of molecular surface structures that determine such reflectance profiles.

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[4] It has been suggested to me that Chalmers can be read as merely introducing a special term for whatever relation we have to properties instantiated in our experiences, which might be nothing additional to simply having those properties instantiated in our experiences. (i) If so, it would be clear that Chalmers's text offers no support for an acquaintance relation in the sense explained in §1 above. But (ii) such a reading is implausible; writing of a 'special relation to the phenomenal properties instantiated in our experience' strongly suggests that that relation is not just instantiation of phenomenal properties in our experience. Further, it is not plausible that Chalmers would court a Bradleyan regress by regarding instantiation as a relation.

[5] If one is looking at a white golf ball and a yellow tennis ball at the same distance, one could, of course, take the size of the instance of white and spherical in the experience as a 'unit' and say that the size of the instance of yellow and spherical in the experience is about 4 such units.

It seems that all should agree that these properties are not instantiated in experiences. An alternative interpretation is suggested in a passage that will be quoted in §5 below. According to this interpretation, an 'external color concept' is a compound concept such as *red and instantiated in a physical object*. On this interpretation, however, it is again evident that such properties cannot be instantiated in experiences.

One may concede that acquaintance is not needed to explain why we cannot have direct concepts of the four contrasting properties, but still feel we need it to explain why we *can* have direct concepts of phenomenal properties. The first of the passages quoted at the beginning of this section, however, offers no argument for that claim, which is put forward only as what 'it is natural to suggest'. The second of the quoted passages may appear to offer more: it claims that acquaintance 'makes [a certain sort] of lucid understanding possible'. However, there is no explanation given of how acquaintance is supposed to do that. Indeed, we shall see, in §5, that Chalmers provides an important part of a positive, acquaintance-free account of formation of phenomenal concepts.

It may be objected that instantiation of phenomenal properties in experiences cannot be enough to explain the possibility of direct concept formation because, after all, one can instantiate many properties, e.g., one's weight, without being able to form direct concepts of them. This objection, however, simply ignores the key difference between being instantiated in an experience and being instantiated in what is not an experience. We do indeed need a difference between, e.g., properties like blue, or itchiness, and properties like weight, but we already have it in the difference between experiences and nonexperiences. Adding a relation of acquaintance is not needed in order to provide a relevant difference. Nor could it explain the difference just by itself, because if we did

not already have the experience/nonexperience distinction, we would have to wonder why we are acquainted with blue, but not with our weight. Nor, as we shall now see, do we need acquaintance to explain our possession of phenomenal concepts or knowledge of our experiences.

5. Foundationalism

A key argument for acquaintance has been based on its alleged role in providing justification for reports of what we experience. We accept many propositions because we think we can infer them from other propositions that we accept. Infinite or circular chains of support cannot not provide justification, but if we bar them, there must be some propositions that we accept without inference. The question then arises as to why we should accept these 'foundational' propositions.

A natural answer is that they are justified by experience. Sellars (1956, §6), however, famously argued that this answer will not do. The problem, in brief, is that experiences are supposed to be able to occur in nonhuman animals and human infants who do not have concepts of what their experiences are of. Propositional judgments require possession of concepts of properties involved in the propositions; so experiences cannot be propositional. Justification of nonfoundational claims, however, seems to require that they be inferred from the foundation; and inference is a relation among propositions. So, we face a dilemma: either experiences are, after all, propositional, or else they cannot be justifiers of the apparently required foundational propositions. Against this background, acquaintance can be thought of as enabling a kind of

justification by bringing our experiences directly before the mind (without bringing anything under concepts) while we are thinking about them (which does involve use of concepts), and thus permitting a direct comparison of the thought with the ground of its truth. (See, e.g., Fumerton, 1995[6]).

These reflections are related to a host of issues in epistemology that go far beyond the scope of this paper. I will be concerned here only to show that acquaintance is not needed in order for a version of internalist foundationalism to respond to the Sellarsian dilemma. The version of foundationalism to be described in this section satisfies many of the demands that acquaintance-based internalism imposes on theories of knowledge, and gives independent reasons why demands that it does not satisfy are not reasonable demands. If successful, the following discussion will undermine the view that acquaintance is needed in order to provide for an internalist account of the possibility of knowledge of contingent facts. I do not consider here the question of whether an internalist response is the only, or the best, theory of the possibility of knowledge of contingent facts.

Let us take 'I am experiencing red now' as an example of the kind of report that can express a foundational belief, if anything can do so. A key observation is that, in order to be such a report, the reporter must have learned the words used in making that report. We can turn, positively this time, to Chalmers (2003/2010, p. 255) for some of what this learning involves.

[6] BonJour (2003, p. 70) uses very similar language in his discussion of 'non-apperceptive awareness' and 'sensory content'.

> We can first consider the concept expressed by ‘red’ in the public-language expression ‘red experience’ or the concept expressed by the public-language expression ‘phenomenal redness’. The reference of these expressions is fixed via a relation to red things in the external world and ultimately via a relation to certain paradigmatic red objects that are ostended in learning the public-language term ‘red’. A language learner learns to call the experiences typically brought about by these objects ‘red’ (in the phenomenal sense) and to call the objects that typically bring about those experiences ‘red’ (in the external sense).

I accept this as a correct account. Since, according to it, language learners will normally experience red when they see red objects in normal conditions, the association between the predicate ‘red’ and red experiences will be as strong as the association between that predicate and red objects. Thus, an acquaintance relation is not needed to explain that association.

We can also explain acquisition of talk about experiences of red, or of terms like ‘phenomenal redness’, without relying on an acquaintance relation. Such an account can begin with the learning of such public-language words as ‘looks’ and ‘seems’. Application of these words can be learned from cases where there is a discrepancy. For example, a white object in a strong red light may be mistaken for a red object and seem suddenly to turn white when the light is switched off. Background beliefs about the necessity of paints, dyes, heat and so on for bringing about changes in colour make such an event puzzling, and we learn to resolve the puzzle by saying that the object ‘only

seemed to be red', or 'only looked red' while the light was on. Those phrases and their application are the common possession of philosophers and nonphilosophers.

We do not have discrepancies concerning bodily sensations; e.g., we do not have cases where we take ourselves to have pain but it turns out we don't have pain.[7] So, the account for bodily sensation terms is not the same as the account for 'looks' or 'seems'. There is, however, an analogous account. Causes (e.g., injuries, insect bites, overconsumption) and behaviour (e.g., favouring, scratching, regurgitation) are essential for learning public-language terms like 'pain', 'itch', and 'nausea'. But those sensations start before the initiation of behaviours that are essential for learning words for them and often last after those behaviours are no longer visible. It is thus easy to distinguish between bodily sensations and the characteristic circumstantial and behavioural associations; and thus to learn public-language terms like 'feel' (e.g., 'I look fine, but I feel terrible', 'I feel like I'm going to be sick').

Public-language terms for how things seem or how one feels provide a basis for philosophers' introduction of special terms (or special uses of some common terms). 'Experiences' (*chez* philosophers) can begin to be understood as a certain part of what is happening when there is a discrepancy or a bodily sensation – roughly, e.g., when one seems to see a red object but, as it turns out, no red object is before one, or when one is becoming motivated to, but has not yet begun to, scratch. Of course, there are many

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[7] It may be suggested that there is an exception, namely mistaking the feel of an ice cube on one's bare skin for a pain. However, (i) such a case may involve actual pain for a short time, soon replaced by a different experience. (ii) If that understanding is rejected, then those pains are discrepancy cases and can be treated like discrepant sensations. The point will remain that such cases require very unusual circumstances, and that the normal learning of bodily sensation talk is well accounted for by the explanation in the text.

colours that can occur in discrepancy cases, and many sensory qualities in other sense modalities, and many kinds of bodily sensation. 'Phenomenal *F*ness' can be understood as a phrase by which we can indicate the kind of experience that occurs when something seems *F* but no *F* is present, or feels *F* when neither an apparent cause nor a characteristic behaviour is present.

A final step in understanding 'experience of *F*' can be motivated by the sceptical question, 'How can I know that what I am seeing (tasting, smelling, etc.) right now isn't going to turn out to be a case where there is a discrepancy?' Once the general term for actual cases of discrepancy is established, it is easy to generalize it further: If my present case turns out to involve a discrepancy, then what I'm having now is only an experience of *F* without an *F*. So, in every case, I at least have an experience of *F* when it seems to me that I'm seeing an *F*.[8] Similar points hold for other sense modalities.

The material in the last five paragraphs is exceedingly familiar. The point of rehearsing it is to exhibit the fact that we do not need an acquaintance relation to explain how we can acquire the ability to make correct reports of the form "I am experiencing *F* now'. It is clear that we have to learn the words in that report (whether we are overtly reporting or declaring how things are with us to ourselves in inner speech). That learning requires a training period in which associations and abilities to report are established. It is that background, and not a special relation additional to simply having the reported

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[8] This formulation may not be accepted by disjunctivists. They can, however, accept the present account of concept formation, since what I call '*F* experiences without an *F*', they can describe as episodes that are subjectively indistinguishable from *F* experiences.

experiences, that enables our experiential reports to be foundational (i.e., justified, but not by inference from a supporting proposition).[9]

There is, however, a reason why this account may seem objectionable. I have outlined a fairly complex background, but our knowledge of our experiences seems both immediate and certain. Perhaps we need acquaintance to explain this certainty (or, indubitability). Perhaps we need acquaintance to explain how people who have never thought of how language is acquired can still have a sense of confident immediacy about how things seem to them.

However, once it is clear that we are talking about experiences, it will also be clear that a major source of error has been excluded from consideration: errors about what is in the external world cannot be errors about what seems to be there. Brain in a vat, hallucination, and illusion scenarios presuppose that subjects have experiences that are subjectively indistinguishable from those we ordinarily think are produced by material objects. Their possibility, therefore, does not show the possibility of error about what kind of experiences we are having (for kinds, that is, that would be subjectively indistinguishable between veridical and nonveridical experiences). Plausibly, the only error possibility remaining is that one is using the wrong predicate for the kind of experience one is having. Now, this can indeed happen. We cannot rule out the

[9] The account given here has some affinities with that of Smithies (2019, esp. Ch. 5), who does not rely on acquaintance, and writes in his §5.3 that 'The mere fact that you feel pain is enough to give you a reason to believe that you feel pain'. However, in the same section, he also writes that 'When you have an experience, you're in a position to know by introspection that you have the experience', and holds that 'introspective processes' give rise to 'introspective reasons'. It is not clear to me how these introspective processes are supposed to work. The present account does not rely on them and, I believe, provides a better explanation for internalist justification of foundational claims.

possibility that momentary confusion, stroke, or sorcerer's intervention has altered the connections between our sensory systems and our lexicon, so that we bring out 'blue' when in fact we are having a red experience while looking at a red object.[10] However, if we are cognitively undamaged and not interfered with, we apply our 'phenomenal *F*' terms without hesitation or reflection. Their correct applicability follows from our having learned what '*F*' means together with our linguistic systems being in their normal state. No appeal to an acquaintance relation is required.

This point can be reinforced by noting that we have the same degree of confidence in our reports about external objects, once we assume we are not having an hallucination or suffering an illusion. Perhaps we see something red, think we are looking at a Delicious apple, and say so. We do not entertain a worry that 'red' or 'apple' is not the right word for what we see. Indeed, we could not have a language if we always thought we first had to establish that we were using our words correctly before using them. Our using the word correctly depends on a complex history of language learning, but our application of basic words seems immediate and certain.[11] Another way of reinforcing the point is to ask oneself whether, e.g., 'red' is the right word for the colour of the Delicious apple one is observing. Since our linguistic abilities depend on our brains, and the stability of our brains is a contingent matter, it is a contingent fact that we

[10] I am thinking here of possible failures of speakers who have mastered their language. Those just learning a language may, of course, use wrong words for their experiences, as well as for anything else.

[11] This is, of course, not to say that correct use is uncheckable. The conditions for success in learning experiential predicates, including 'feels', 'seems', etc., contain the conditions for checking the continued correct use (or lack thereof). The point is only that doing such checking is not a requirement for correct use or for being justified in one's report.

are not misusing our words. Nonetheless, while we likely agree that we cannot prove to ourselves that 'red' is the right word, we will have no doubt that it is.

Does the possibility of contingent error in our linguistic systems show that we can, after all, have rarefied philosophical doubt about our experiences? No; because we regard such cases as only errors about what to call what we're having. This stance is justified, because if we apply the wrong predicate, we are using the word in violation of the conditions required for learning the word (which, recall, involved presence of experiences of the property that the word means). Does the possibility of linguistic error creeping into reports undermine internalist foundationalism? No; first, because no theory of knowledge could eliminate the possibility of error due to our dependence on brains that are only contingently stable, and second, because to have a language of reports at all, there must be general stability in our linguistic systems.

There are, of course, *some* words on which we do not feel we have a firm purchase. We may, e.g., be hesitant whether 'crimson' is the right word for some shade. Such cases are not counterexamples to the point just made because such words would not occur in reports – even experiential reports – of which we felt certain.[12]

It has been suggested to me that the foregoing account cannot explain the certainty we feel about our experiential reports because it makes our attitude toward such reports too much like the following case. I count people at a crowded party and come up with a result of 27. Then I tell myself that 'If I've made no mistake in counting, there are 27 people here'. That judgment seems certainly true, but, of course, it provides no

[12] We also lack firm purchase on some abstract terms (e.g., whether something is a case of sympathy or empathy) and on technical terms outside our field of expertise. These, however, are unlikely to occur in reports that anyone would regard as foundational.

certainty about the count itself. In contrast, what I'm certain about if I think I am experiencing blue, or have an itch, is not a conditional, but the categorical 'I am experiencing blue, or 'I have an itch'.

The suggested comparison, however, is illegitimate. The proper comparison would be 'If my words mean what I think they mean, there are 27 people here'. There is, evidently, no logical connection between the integrity of my linguistic system and the accuracy of my counting ability, nor is there any appearance of certainty in either the conditional judgment or its consequent. In contrast, given the meanings of the words in the judgment 'If my words mean what I think they mean, I am having a blue experience' the conditional judgment can be certain, because it makes no claim on the external world, and, if the antecedent is true, the judgment is being made in conditions in which I am having a blue experience, and so the consequent by itself is also true. (Equivalently, if I were not having a blue experience, but said I was, there would have been a breakdown in my linguistic system.)

Near the beginning of this section, I said I would argue that we can have an internalist foundationalism that does not need an acquaintance relation. So far, I have been arguing that we do not need acquaintance with our experiences. Fumerton (1995), however, argues that acquaintance with more than experiences is required for a foundation for knowledge.

> My suggestion is that one has a noninferentially justified belief that *P* when one has the thought that *P* and one is acquainted with the fact that *P*, the thought that *P* *and* the relation of correspondence holding between the thought that *P* and the fact that *P*. (p. 75)

Although I do not think we have any of these three instances of acquaintance, there is something plausible about this passage. It would strengthen the view of this paper if we could account for this plausibility without appeal to a relation of acquaintance. The last few paragraphs enable us to give such an account. For well-learned words, our linguistic training establishes a tight and unquestioned connection between the word and what it denotes. The impression of 'correspondence' between the thought that I am having a certain kind of experience and the fact of my having it is actually our tacit conviction that we are using the right word. That conviction does not spring from standing in a special relation to anything; it is a consequence of our history of linguistic training.

This conclusion may seem to introduce more 'externalism' than a foundationalist with Fumertonian inclinations could reasonably accept. It is, however, not plausible that we could glean, from either just having an experience or just having an experience and standing in an acquaintance relation to it, all the linguistic competence (or, concept possession) that is required for making a report (to others or to ourselves) that could be the basis for an inference to other propositions.

It is a feature of Fumerton's account that what is required to have a noninferentially justified belief is present all in one moment. The account I have been suggesting does not share this feature, and so it does not meet all the demands of Fumertonian internalist foundationalism. However, it does not seem that we are compelled to accept that the conditions that make a noninferential belief justified must all be accessible to a putative knower *at one moment*. It is not compelling that the conditions that are necessary for people to be using their words correctly (or, deploying their

concepts correctly) should have to be available to them at the same time as their correct use (deployment) of their words (or concepts) in order that those correct uses can be expressions of justified beliefs.

It should also be noted that the foregoing account does not conflict with the internalist commitment that knowledge should seem justified to those who possess it. Our unquestioning confidence that we are speaking correctly is rarely attended, but is palpable to us if it should be questioned when it is present, and is easily distinguished from our lack of confidence with words on which we lack a firm purchase.

Finally, the account I have been giving is not ruled out by Sellars's dilemma. It allows red to be in the experiences of nonlinguistic animals and human infants; it allows experiences of red to be nonpropositional. It allows reports that one is having an experience of red to be foundational, and justified. But what justifies the reports is not that one stands in a relation of acquaintance to one's experience. The justification is that the conditions for having learned the language in which such reports are made guarantee that, barring abnormal conditions in the reporter's linguistic system, one's reports will be correct.[13]

The points just stated concern the justification of reports of our experiences. The feeling of certainty (or, indubitability) about them does not derive from understanding

[13] An anonymous reviewer asks about the relation between my treatment of acquaintance and accessibilism. To the extent that accessibilism concerns access to our evidence for a proposition (as in Smithies, 2019) or involves memory (as in Egeland, 2021) we should say that the arguments for accessibilism do not apply to internalists' foundational propositions, which are not supposed to be based on evidence or memory. We can, of course, ask the question whether we are in a position to know that we have epistemic justification for foundational propositions. My answer is that this paper shows how an internalist foundationalist can explain (without an acquaintance relation) how we are in the required position.

those matters. It derives from a combination of having excluded errors involving relations between our experiences and other things, and our unquestioned conviction that we are using our words correctly. When, on philosophical reflection, we recognize the possibility of cognitive breakdown, we also recognize that we are not certain that we could not utter a report (overtly or in inner speech) that was mistaken. But if we ignore that possibility (as we almost always do) and know we are talking about experiences (which excludes questions about their relations to other things), there is simply no foothold for doubt left. We do not need to add a special relation to our experiences in order to account for our lack of doubt about them.

Sellars's dilemma can be given a formulation slightly different from the foregoing (see, e.g., Hasan, 2013). In this version, whatever the alleged foundation may be, it is either (i) propositional, in which case it needs a justification, or (ii) nonpropositional, in which case it cannot provide justification for anything else. In response to this version, the foregoing account can be rephrased as follows. Foundational claims (e.g., 'I am now having an experience of green') are propositional and justified. Of course, if one assumes that justification can arise only by inference from premises, then regress will be unavoidable. One need not and should not accept that assumption. Foundational claims are justified because if they are genuinely made (and not products of corruption of the linguistic system), they are true.

This way of putting the matter may invite a suspicion that for a putative foundational claim to be justified requires that one first establish that it is genuinely made – which, evidently, would reinstitute a regress. In response, let us first be clear that the proposed alternative to acquaintance-based internalism rejects this requirement: it says

that genuinely made foundational claims are justified, full stop, and does not say that only those foundational claims that have been established (by their maker) to be genuinely made can be justified. Let us note, second, that accounts that appeal to acquaintance are parallel in this respect. Thus, for example, as we see in the foregoing quotation from Fumerton, what is required is that the acquaintance relation holds between ourselves and some items, full stop. Justification is not held to require further that we have established that we stand in acquaintance relations to those items. Finally, acquaintance with a correspondence between the thought that I am experiencing, say, green and the experienced green would require acquaintance with a thought that is partly constituted by the concept 'green'. If we have a confused, damaged, or ensorcelled brain, it seems possible that such a thought would be incorrect, and that we would be mistaken in believing that our thought corresponded to our experience. We would, of course, not then be acquainted with the correspondence thought. But if we could have a mistaken belief about such a matter, it might appear that we have to establish that our belief that we are acquainted with a correspondence between our thought and our experience is correct before we could have justification for foundational claims; which would institute a regress.

Acquaintance-based internalist foundationalism thus must allow that acquaintance is sufficient for justification and reject the need to establish acquaintance. These stances are parallel to those of this paper's account, which holds that being genuinely made is sufficient for foundational claims about our experiences to be justified and rejects the need to first establish genuineness. Thus, in regard to the matter of needing or not needing to establish acquaintance or genuineness of claim, acquaintance-based internalist

foundationalism is no better off in its response to Sellars's dilemma than is the account of this paper.

Evidently, this parallelism is not an argument for either view. However, as noted, I am not attempting to argue for internalist foundationalism. My proposition is only that internalist foundationalists do not need acquaintance in order to secure the attractive features of their view, and therefore there is no good argument that would carry one from acceptance of internalist foundationalism to the conclusion that there is a relation of acquaintance (where 'acquaintance' is understood as explained in §1).

It has been suggested to me that the foregoing account makes the connection between beliefs about our experiences and our linguistic capacity too close. It seems evident to me, however, that while Fido, e.g., has experiences, and has beliefs about such matters as where its food is stored and whether its master is at home, it does not have beliefs (justified or not) about what kind of experiences it is having. That would require it to at least have the concept of an experience, which seems unlikely to be available to a nonlinguistic being. (One can imagine Fido being in a state of confusion when experiencing something highly unusual, but that is not the same as having a belief about how things seem.)

6. Conclusion

At least two sources contribute to a sense that direct awareness of experiences is a relation to them (a relation additional to simply having them as stretches of our conscious life). One is the fact that 'of' and 'being aware of' do, in many other cases, denote a

relation. Another source is Moore's argument, which encourages us to think of anything we call an awareness as an item that is related to something else.

In this paper, I have argued that these sources are to be resisted, when it comes to discussion of our experiences. It is open to us to hold that experiences are something we have, in the sense in which concertos have slow movements, diseases have stages, ocean currents have variations in temperature. On such a view, experiences are temporal parts of our conscious life. I have argued that there is no need for an additional relation of acquaintance between ourselves and our experiences, where 'acquaintance' is understood as in §1. I have considered some explicit arguments for a relation of acquaintance and explained why I do not find them convincing. Finally, I have argued that internalist foundationalists do not need a relation of acquaintance – not even in order to solve the problem raised by Sellars (1956). If we follow customary practice and refuse to admit into our philosophical theorizing entities that are unnecessary and for which we do not have strong reasons, we will dispense with experiential acquaintance.

There is a possible third source of attraction to experiential acquaintance. In general, we learn contingent facts by perception, and the fact that we are having an experience of a particular kind at a given time is contingent. To posit *perception* of our experiences would invite the objections that we have no organ for such a purpose, and that since perception involves having experiences, perception of experiences would threaten a regressive production of experiences of experiences. Yet it may still be felt that we need *something like* perception – a relation that does for experiences what perception does for external contingent facts, namely, bringing them before the mind (albeit without requiring another experience of them). If the arguments of this paper have been

successful, any attraction that such an idea may have had should be thoroughly dispelled. Experiences are already constituents of our minds, and their relation to concepts, justification and knowledge has an explanation that has and needs no reliance on a relation of acquaintance.

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