

Response to Costas Pagondiotis

1. As Pagondiotis notes, I follow Sellars in urging that there is a dependence of experience on world view, in the opposite direction to the dependence of world view on experience that traditional empiricism focuses on.

Sellars's point is that in order so much as to possess the concepts that are exploited in reports of immediate observation, one must have knowledge of general matters of fact. He exemplifies this with colour concepts. Having colour concepts, at least the usual ones (as opposed, for instance, to those that can be possessed by blind people), includes the ability to tell by looking, in suitable circumstances, what colours things have. And that ability depends on, for instance, sufficient knowledge about the effects of different kinds of illumination on colour appearances. Suppose someone has a propensity to predicate "red" of just any object that looks the way red things look in what we recognize as a good light for telling the colours of things. Suppose, that is, that something's presenting that look tends to elicit "red" from her no matter what the lighting conditions are. Such a person cannot count as knowing what it is for something to be red. That is, she does not have the concept of being red as a property of visible things.

Unlike the dependence that traditional empiricism focuses on, this dependence in the opposite direction is not inferential. Suppose one knows by looking that some object is green. That the lighting conditions are appropriate for telling what colours things have is not a premise in an inferential justification one could appropriately give for one's claim that the thing is green. On the contrary, one's justification for the claim is simply that one sees that the thing is green. But it is a way of putting what Sellars urges in introducing the second dimension of dependence, as exemplified in the case of colour experience, to say that the very possibility of one's having that justification — a justification consisting in the fact that one sees that the thing is green — depends on one's having suitable knowledge about the effects of lighting conditions on colour appearances. And though it is not inferential, this dependence is rational. Facts about the lighting conditions are connected to claims about the colours of things, made on the basis of looking and seeing, by relations that belong in Sellars's "logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says". If one claims that something is green, on the ground that one sees that it is green, and someone challenges one's credentials for making the

claim, it can be an appropriate response to say “This is a good light for telling what colours things have”.

It is only part of a world view, the part that concerns the effects of lighting conditions on colour appearances, on which this argument aims to display the possession of colour concepts, and hence the possibility of experience in which things are seen to instantiate those concepts, as depending. Clearly the argument does not recommend supposing that every experience, no matter what its content is, depends in that way on the whole of a world view. Here we are in the area of Pagondiotis’s thought about what he calls “embodied world view”.

But which bit of a world view is embodied, rationally alive, in a particular experience, in the way exemplified by those reflections about colour experience, obviously depends on the specific content of the experience. And it is not plausible that we could say in advance, about some bit of our world view, that there is no possible experience to which it could be rationally relevant, in the way in which our knowledge of the effects of different lighting conditions on colour appearances is rationally relevant to experiences in which we see that things have certain colours. Different parts of our world view are embodied in different experiences, and of any part of our world view we cannot rule out that it might be embodied in some experiences. Pagondiotis implies that his label “embodied world view” singles out a part of our world view that stands in that kind of rational relation to experience in general, in contrast with another part of our world view that does not stand in that kind of rational relation to any experience at all. But this implication is unwarranted.

2. When Pagondiotis discusses my attempt to distinguish experience from perceptually acquired belief, his purpose is, at least in part, to begin on motivating his proposal that the content of experience includes the bodily presence of things and their availability for exploration. I applaud the proposal. But I want to take issue with this part of the way he motivates it.

I offered a counterexample, which Pagondiotis discusses, to the equation of experience with perceptually acquired belief. The counterexample is a case in which one realizes that on some past occasion one was seeing that a sweater was brown, though at the time one thought it merely looked to one as if it was brown, because one thought, falsely as one now realizes, that the lighting conditions were unsuitable for telling colours by looking. The point is that the seeing was an entitlement that one had at the time to believe that the sweater was brown, although, because one did not realize one had the entitlement, one did not form the belief it would have entitled one to. The bearing on one’s *present* belief of the entitlement that one subsequently recognizes one had is irrelevant, as Pagondiotis acknowledges.

He gives more credence to the second of the two objections he considers, which turns on the idea that the availability of a fact to a subject in ex-

perience must involve some kind of awareness. He says I respond by denying that the availability of a fact in experience is a case of *actual* awareness. But that is a misreading. In a passage he quotes, I write of “the awareness that experience involves”. There is no ground for reading this as meaning anything but actual awareness. The thought that the experiential availability of a fact involves (actual) awareness of it is not a problem for my separation of experience from perceptually acquired belief. It seems a problem only if one supposes that the awareness that is admittedly implied by the availability of a fact in experience would have to imply an attitude of acceptance. But that is just what I deny. The counterexample shows that there is no such implication.

It is not the awareness implicit in the idea of experience that I claim need not be actual. It is at another point in the picture that I exploit the contrast between potential and actual: I deny that being perceptually aware of a fact can be identified with actual acceptance of a proposition. Again, consider the counterexample.

This means that I do not have a problem where Pagondiotis thinks I do, in marking off facts available to a subject in experience from facts that merely obtain, perhaps outside the subject’s field of view. I can make the distinction in a common-sense way, by invoking the idea that facts available to a subject in experience are facts of which she has experiential awareness.

Of course Pagondiotis is right that there cannot be an impression that *x* is red without *x* looking red to the perceiver. But that would be a problem for me only if *x*’s looking red to a perceiver had to be identified with acceptance of some proposition — if not that *x* is red, then at least that *x* looks red. And that is exactly the equation I reject.

3. Another way Pagondiotis seeks to motivate his proposal about the content of experience is by arguing that having impressions is not a sufficient condition for having experiences. He undertakes to fill the gap that this supposedly opens by adding more conditions, one of which is that *bodily presence* enters into the content of experience.

Here again, I do not want to dissent from that idea. But there is something peculiar about the motivating argument. Pagondiotis seems to assume that impressions can be defined as states or episodes in whose content concepts like that of looking white figure. On that basis imagining something looking white would count as an impression. But so much the worse, surely, for that conception of impressions. In fact Pagondiotis’s proposal about the content of experience might be equally put as a proposal about the content of impressions. Taking it that way, we can say he shows how having impressions *can* be a sufficient condition for having experiences.

Pagondiotis connects the idea that experience presents things as bodily present to the experiencer with the idea that experience presents things as affording possibilities of exploration. I think this is a very helpful way of ap-

proaching what is special about perceptual experience. But I doubt that the thought is well put by saying, as Pagondiotis does, that the content of experience is not exhausted by the way things look but also involves their availability for exploration. That implies that appearances of availability for exploration cannot be part of how things look. And this seems needlessly restrictive about ways things can look. Surely it can look as if there are such-and-such possibilities for exploration.

4. Once we see that the dependence of experience on world view is a dependence not on world view in general but on embodied world view, Pagondiotis suggests, we shall not be inclined to think the dependence of experience on world view implies that experience is theory-laden. It seems right that there is no such implication. But Pagondiotis suggests we should conclude that experience is not theory-laden at all, and I am doubtful about that.

It would be infelicitous to describe the bit of our world view that is embodied in colour experience, according to the Sellarsian argument I considered in §1 above, as a theory. The general knowledge (so called) that Sellars invokes need not be acceptance of a body of propositions at all, inferentially articulated or not. It might be simply a responsiveness in practice to differences in lighting conditions, a practical rather than theoretical grasp of their significance for the possibility of telling what colours things have by looking. So the dependence of colour experience on background knowledge need not be a case of experience being theory-laden.

But why should we suppose we can draw general conclusions from this case? In a different kind of case, command of a theory — in the sense Pagondiotis stipulates: an inferentially articulated body of knowledge — can make it possible for concepts that belong in the theory to figure in the content of someone's perceptual experience. A favourite example of Brandom's is the physicist who can observe mu-mesons. Experience of mu-mesons is surely theory-laden. Whether the embodiment of a bit of world view in experience of a particular kind reveals the experience as theory-laden depends on the character of the bit of world view that is embodied in the experience. There is no evident reason to expect that one answer will fit all cases.

What does seem plausible is that experience that is, though knowledge-dependent, not theory-laden, like colour experience, is in a certain sense more basic than theory-laden experience, as in the case of the physicist's experience of mu-mesons. If the physicist is challenged, she can retreat to a less committal account of what is available in her experience, exploiting the theory in which mu-mesons figure to justify the claim that, given that her experience yields that lesser information, she is in the presence of mu-mesons. When background knowledge operates in the way exemplified with colour experience, there is no such scope for retreat. So perhaps we can say, in partial agreement with Pagondiotis, that fundamental experience of the world is

not in any good sense theory-laden, even if there can be experience of the world that is theory-laden.

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