

## Markie, Speckles, and Classical Foundationalism

In “Classical Foundationalism and Speckled Hens” Peter Markie presents a thoughtful and important criticism of my attempts to defend a traditional version of foundationalism. That foundationalism claims that there is noninferential justification for S to believe P when S is directly acquainted with the truthmaker for P (the fact that P), the thought that P, and the thought’s corresponding to the fact that P. As Paul Moser once reminded me, for that justification to render S’s belief justified, S would also have to *base* his belief that P on the justification he has for believing P.

Sosa (2003a and 2003b) appeals to the old example of the way a many speckled hen looks to cast doubt on the kind of traditional foundationalism I put forth. It seems plausible to claim that the surface of a hen with forty-eight speckles can present to me a forty-eight speckled appearance. When it does, I can be directly acquainted with the relevant experience but have no justification for believing that I am appeared to forty-eight-speckled-ly. As Markie points out, even if in such a situation I whimsically believe that the experience is one of forty-eight speckles and through sheer *luck* arrive at the truth, the belief won’t be noninferentially justified. More generally, it seems plausible to claim that when I am acquainted with an experience, that experience might have any number of properties of which I am ignorant. And if this is true, the argument goes, we need more to explain noninferential justification than is offered by the radical foundationalist trying to identify the source of noninferential justification with direct awareness of experience.

Now the claim that conscious experience has properties of which I am ignorant is not *in itself* particularly controversial. No classical foundationalist thinks that in becoming directly aware of an experience one becomes directly aware of *all* of the properties exemplified by that experience. The experience, for example, has infinitely many *relational* properties many of which one couldn’t discover even through exhaustive empirical investigation. So any defensible form of radical foundationalism claims only that we are sometimes directly acquainted with *some* of the properties of an experience. The relevant properties are, presumably, non-relational properties characterizing the intrinsic nature of the experience. And even here one must be careful. If one is liberal with one’s ontological commitments and one posits a property for every meaningful predicate expression that can be formed, one can come up with complex truth-functional properties (e.g. being blue if not red and orange when it is not either square or not square...) that characterize (in a sense) the intrinsic nature of the experience but which are far too complex for many to “grasp” in an act of acquaintance. Similarly, the forty-eight speckled appearance is also an experience having the number of speckles equal to the square root of 1104, and relatively few philosophers want to claim that one has direct acquaintance with that property. So all that the classical foundationalist is going to claim is that when one is directly acquainted with an experience, one is often directly acquainted with *some* of the non-relational properties of that experience.

In “Speckled Hens and Objects of Acquaintance” I presented a “menu” of responses to Sosa’s objection. I proceeded this way because the plausibility of various responses depends on controversial metaphysical presuppositions, about some of which I am agnostic. I suggested, for example, that the appearing theorist might have a response that is not as obviously available to the sense-datum theorist. I argued that there is

nothing to prevent an appearing theorist from claiming that it is simply false that when visually experiencing the speckled hen, one is appeared to forty-eight-speckled-ly. Rather, one is appeared to only *many*-speckled-ly, and when one is directly acquainted with the exemplification of that property as one has the relevant thought and awareness of the relevant correspondence, one has only noninferential justification for believing that one is appeared to many-speckled-ly.

Markie claims that such a view is obviously false. He argues in effect that one can “count” the number of speckles “present” in the experience and get an *inferentially* justified belief that there are in fact forty-eight. This claim is tricky, however, in part because it is not clear how the adverbialist even conceives of the presence of speckles “in” the visual field. In rejecting the sense-datum theory, the adverbialist is rejecting the claim that there is some *object* that exemplifies phenomenal properties like being blue, being square, having eight sides, or having a surface containing forty-eight speckles. All of these descriptions get converted to adverbs describing the way in which one is experiencing an object. The adverbial theorist denies that my visual field is red or contains forty-eight speckles, and claims instead that I have the non-relational property of being appeared to red-ly or being appeared to forty-eight speckled-ly. Of course, Markie might well respond that any view that implies that we can’t count speckles in our visual field is for that reason false, since we obviously *can* do just that. And although I am sympathetic to an adverbial theory, I am also sympathetic to the idea that the non-relational properties that constitute having experiences are often complex in a way that allows for necessary connections between, say, being appeared to three-speckled-ly and being appeared to at-least-one-speckled-ly. And I am sympathetic to the claim that one cannot be appeared to many-speckled-ly, in the example at hand, without being appeared to more determinately. Still, as one focuses one’s attention on one’s experience, the total experience obviously does change--the way in which one is experiencing the world does change. It may be that the only change is a second order relation one bears to features of the experience, but it may also be the case that the first order property of being appeared to a certain way itself changes.

It what follows, however, let’s consider the view that it is sense data with which we are directly acquainted in experience. (The hyphenated expressions invented by the adverbial theorist are difficult to work with and if we admit that ways of being appeared to have the relevant complexity, we can translate *mutatis mutandis* the points made below into the adverbial theory). Presupposing that there is some determinate number of speckles “present” in the visual field, I want to examine more closely Markie’s objections to two alternative responses I propose to Sosa’s objection. I suggest, in effect, that as one has an experience, one might sometimes be acquainted with certain determinable properties without being acquainted with the determinate properties upon which they supervene. Alternatively, one might argue that while the experience is perfectly determinate in its character, one can only discover a relation of correspondence between the abstract thought of being many-speckled and the determinate state of affairs which involves (as it turns out) having forty-eight speckles. It’s not that we can’t have the thought of containing forty-eight speckles—it’s just that we can’t discover introspectively the correspondence relation holding between *that* thought and the fact with which we are acquainted.

It seems to me almost a datum that we sometimes know only truths about the determinable character of experience. As I see someone flee the scene of an accident, and I try to reconstruct the experience for the police investigating the incident, I might seem to remember only that the clothing looked a dark color. Now perhaps the relevant visual experience had a perfectly determinate phenomenological character—it was either a dark blue datum, dark purple datum, a black datum, and so on. But if we can trust memory, it often doesn't seem to us that we had knowledge of any such determinate property—it seems only that we know that our thought was of a dark colored visual datum, a thought we introspectively discovered corresponding to the reality of our experience. Again, there are two alternative accounts of this phenomenon available to the direct acquaintance theorist. On the one account, the explanation is that we had direct acquaintance only with the determinable property of being dark. On the other, we were directly acquainted only with a *correspondence* between an abstract thought and the determinate character of the experience.

As I understand Mackie, he rejects both these views on the grounds that they can't provide a plausible explanation of the fact that through learning one can increase the kinds of empirical truths one can noninferentially know. The idea is that one can get better at discovering (noninferentially) properties of experience. Consider the way in which the character of one's experience of music can change as a result of studying closely the score. Again, one of two things happens. Either the auditory experience itself changes, or one becomes aware of features of the musical experience that were previously "hidden." I'm inclined to think it is the latter and, therefore, that Mackie is right in claiming that one can, through a learning process, get oneself in a position to know (noninferentially) features of musical experience that were previously epistemically hidden.

Now I suggested above that the classical foundationalist can accommodate this phenomenon. You will recall that the direct acquaintance theorist holds only that *some* properties of experiences can be discovered noninferentially. If there are both determinate and determinable properties, I don't see why one can't be acquainted initially only with determinable properties and later, perhaps as a result of learning, become acquainted with more determinate properties. Markie's complaint is that this foundationalist has no answer to the question of precisely how a learning process results in this expansion of the properties with which one can be acquainted:

Given the mysterious, sui generis nature of direct acquaintance, the classical foundationalist has no reply. Our ability to extend the range of our foundationally justified beliefs cannot be fully explained.

Markie (correctly) speculates that "some classical foundationalist may complain that this criticism demands too much of their view." *This* foundationalist certainly does. I don't have a causal explanation of why we are (causally) capable of having some thoughts and not others. Nor do I have a causal explanation of why we notice some properties and not others. Markie suggests, however, that there is an important difference between certain forms of externalism (e.g. virtue theory or reliabilism) and acquaintance theories when it comes to explaining how we increase our capacity to form noninferentially justified beliefs. The reliabilist, or

the virtue theorist can, in principle, explain how, through learning, one's belief producing processes can evolve in such a way that they increase the kinds of reliably produced beliefs we can form. We can empirically study how people become more responsive (noninferentially) to aspects of their experience. By contrast, we can't empirically study how one can increase the range of properties with which one is acquainted, nor can we study how one can increase direct acquaintance with various thoughts and their correspondence with reality.

Now I'm not sure I see why one can't empirically study how the range of properties with which we can be directly acquainted is increased. As Markie notes, I have argued that although one cannot define direct acquaintance, one can construct definite descriptions that denote it, and in that way provide a kind of ostensive definition of the concept. I suggested, for example, that we can discover acquaintance when one thinks of situations in which one is in pain, gets distracted for awhile and doesn't notice it, and then becomes aware again of the pain. Direct acquaintance is that relation we had to our pain before and after the distraction. There is a world of difference between merely believing that one is in pain (however reliably produced that belief is) and being aware of pain. A Freudian might become convinced that she has anger of which she is unaware. Believing on theoretical grounds that one has such anger is quite different from actually being aware of the anger felt. Even if as a result of Freudian therapy one somehow comes to be noninferentially responsive to "hidden" anger with a reliably produced noninferential belief, *that* isn't the same thing as being directly aware of the anger.

Now Markie might argue, of course, that attempts to "point" at direct awareness fail to pick out the alleged relation. But *if* I have successfully directed attention to awareness, then I don't see why we can't study the way in which awareness of properties increases under various conditions. To be sure, one will need to rely on subjects' reports of their internal states to ascertain that the change in question occurs—to ascertain that the explanandum is present. But that presents no special difficulty for the classical foundationalist. The epistemological fact is that even hard core physicalists rely on first-person reports of mental states in their attempt to explain why a person is in one psychological state rather than another (see Fumerton, 2007). But when a person moves from awareness of one sort of property exemplified by experience to awareness of another sort of property exemplified by experience, that change is something of which the person can be introspectively aware. And relying on their first-person reports to conclude that the explanandum is present, we can study the surrounding conditions in an attempt to get the relevant explanation for the change. I certainly don't know what the explanation is, but then it isn't my job, *qua* philosopher, to explain such things. I'm also not sure what the mechanism is that produces belief when one has direct acquaintance with property exemplification. I suspect, however, that if one wants an explanation of how belief-independent, unconditional reliability comes about, one should often turn to acquaintance with properties as at least part of the explanans.

*References:*

Fumerton, Richard. 2005. "Speckled Hens and Objects of Acquaintance," *Philosophical Perspectives* 19, 121-39.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2007. "Render Unto Philosophy that which is Philosophy's." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, XXXI, 56-67.

Sosa, Ernest. Sosa, Ernest. 2003a. "Privileged Access." In *Consciousness: New Philosophical Essays*, ed. Quentin Smith, 273-92. Oxford University Press.

Sosa, Ernest, and Bonjour Laurence. 2003b. *Foundations vs Virtues*. Blackwell.