

What does Haack's double-aspect experientialism give us?
Konrad Talmont-Kaminski
Marie Curie-Sklodowska University

Published in: Winfried Löffler & Paul Weingartner (ed.) *Contributions of the Austrian Ludwig Wittgenstein Society XI* (Austrian L. Wittgenstein Society, Kirchberg, 2003) pp. 342-344

Abstract: Sellars' argument against The Given has set the scene for much of the discussion of the role of experience in justification. Susan Haack tries to avoid the objection presented by Sellars and to give experience a role in the justification of beliefs. Her approach is to put forward a double aspect theory of justification consisting of a logical/evaluative aspect and a causal aspect. Like other double aspect theories, her approach is led astray by the possibility of deviant causal chains. Her argument's shortcomings, however, only help to underscore the false assumption behind Sellars' original argument – that justification is purely logical in character. But, rather than arguing that justification is logical and causal, we are led toward to a view that the character of justification, while essentially normative, is much richer than can be modelled by logic.

1. Introduction

Twentieth century analytical epistemology concerned itself mainly with various attempts to work out two basic issues. The issue most often engaged was the relationship between beliefs, propositions, theories and such other elements of a world view that had been thought of as deserving of being called 'knowledge'. The other issue that was often considered was the relationship between the abovementioned elements and experiences. This issue was of manifest significance given the empiricist roots of most of the analytic tradition and became even more vital once Quine's critique seemed to rule out a priori knowledge and gave rise to the naturalist tradition (Quine 1953).

The middle of the century didn't just witness Quine's undermining of the a priori. At much the same time, Sellars attacked the idea of The Given and seemed to remove the possibility of experience being involved in the justification of our beliefs (Sellars 1963). The two arguments taken together have given rise to a number of epistemologically nihilist positions – most clearly to Rorty's anti-realist neo-pragmatism (Rorty 1979).

Writing in the Peircean pragmatist tradition, Susan Haack, in *Evidence and Inquiry*, has attempted to defend what she terms 'experientialism'. This is the view:

- 1 that knowing subjects have (sensory, memorial, etc.) experiences,
- 2 that unless they had such experiences none of their empirical beliefs would be justified to any degree and,
- 3 that the justification of all of a subject's justified empirical beliefs depends ultimately at least in part on those experiences. (Haack 1993, 50-51)

Haack's approach is to argue for a double aspect theory of justification in which the logical or evaluative aspect of justification is supplemented by a causal aspect. By turning to the causal relationship between experiences and belief states she hopes to avoid Sellars' objection while showing how experiences can play a role in the justification of beliefs.

Double aspect theories, however, are notoriously susceptible to 'deviant causal chains' objections. This, certainly, is the case with Haack's theory. The possibility of deviant causal chains shows up what is the essential mismatch between the normative nature of justification and the purely descriptive nature of causation.

Interestingly, however, the failure of Haack's double aspect experientialism does not drive us back towards the kind of purely doxastic theories like that put forward by Davidson (Davidson 1972-73, 5-20) and criticised by Haack. Instead, what becomes glaringly obvious is the significance of the problematic assumption which lies at the core of Sellars' argument – the assumption that justification is purely logical in character. Haack's error is that she fails to go far enough in her criticism of Sellars. Not only should we reject his assumption that justification is purely logical but we must allow for a *normative* aspect of justification which isn't logical in nature.

The challenge, therefore, must be to provide a normative characterisation of justification which isn't only based upon logical relations.

2. Sellars' argument against The Given

In his classic attack upon what he calls 'The Myth of the Given', Sellars argues that C. I. Lewis or anyone else who puts forward what Haack would call an experientialist theory faces a dilemma. Either:

- a) It is *particulars* which are sensed. Sensing is not knowing. The existence of sense data does not *logically* imply the existence of knowledge,
or
- b) Sensing *is* a form of knowing. It is *facts* rather than *particulars* which are sensed. (Sellars 1963, 129)

Sellars argues each of these alternatives is unacceptable. In the first alternative, the claim leaves experiences incapable of justifying beliefs. All that they can do is cause beliefs. In the second alternative, Sellars argues that the account is unacceptable since we do sense particulars and not facts. In other words, experiences are events and to have experiences is not to have knowledge. It is only beliefs (in Sellars' formulation 'facts') that somehow constitute knowledge and that can justify other beliefs.

Haack points out, however, that Sellars' argument is based on an assumption. The assumption is that justification is a matter of logical relations. Given that knowledge is generally thought to require justification, and logical relations apparently can not obtain between beliefs and experiences, it follows that experiences can not justify our beliefs.

Without this assumption the argument isn't justified. If we do not assume that all justification is a matter of logical relations we are left without the main reason for thinking that experiences can only cause – and not justify – beliefs.

3. Haack's position

Susan Haack's approach is to deny Sellars' assumption and to argue that justification has two aspects. It has the logical aspect that Sellars recognised but, also, it possesses a causal aspect which gives Haack a way for experiences to justify beliefs. Haack's double aspect theory of justification consists in providing "an account of how [causation] is relevant, of the relations between the causal and the logical aspects of the concept of justification." (Haack 1993, 29)

Without going into Haack's account in detail it is possible to see that it faces two fundamental, and closely related, problems. The first of these is that, having pointed out Sellars false assumption she falls for one, herself. Just because justification is not just a matter of logical relations does not automatically mean that it is a matter of logical relations and causal relations.

The second problem is the problem of deviant causal chains that troubles double aspect theories in general. In Haack's case the problem affects her claim that "how justified A is in believing that p depends in some fashion on what it is that causes him to have that [belief state]." (Haack 1993, 75) She argues that belief contents are justified in part by their

respective belief states being caused by perceptual states. A possibility she does not consider is that the perceptual states might cause the belief states in a non-kosher way. For example, an error in our neural pathways might mean that the belief state of thinking we are in the company of a cat might be caused by the smell of jasmine. Or, to consider an even more inconvenient case, *all* smells, including that of a cat, might cause the 'cat is near' belief state.

It might seem that Haack can bite the bullet and say that such deviant chains are still cases of justification; cases in which we are justified in believing something but, unfortunately, turn out to be wrong. Such a response sits well with Haack's overall strategy of relating justification to the evidence available to us rather than to extrinsic considerations. However, the attractiveness of this response actually relies upon a hidden equivocation. Haack sees herself as presenting an evidentialist account of justification "in the sense that the account of justification proposed is couched in terms of the subject's evidence for a belief." (Haack 1993, 139) However, this suggests that, if perceptual states are not evidence for beliefs then, while deviant chains aren't a problem, causation is not an aspect of justification. On the other hand, if perceptual states are evidence for beliefs then causation is an aspect of justification but the degree to which perceptual states are evidence for beliefs can be evaluated. Since she does want to consider causation to be an aspect of justification Haack has to reject deviant chains and give an account of kosher ones. As we will see, however, a normative account of this sort leads Haack away from a double aspect theory of justification.

At a point in her presentation of double aspect experientialism Haack stops talking about the logical aspect of justification and starts to talk about an evaluative aspect. Her reason for this is that she later comes to examine Popper's and Watkins' deductivist account of the role of evidence and to reject it. In its place Haack argues for what she calls a moderate psychologism, "according to which psychological factors do not exhaust, but have contributory relevance to, questions of justification/rational acceptability." (Haack 1993, 103) While her attack on deductivism is on target, she fails to properly integrate the conclusion into her account. The original need for a double aspect theory was caused by the limited ability of logic to justify our knowledge. Having replaced the logical aspect of justification with a more broadly evaluative one this rationale disappears. Logic can not take into account events but there is no reason why evaluation can't. There aren't even grounds to revivify the logical/causal distinction in terms of normative and descriptive aspects of justification. As we have seen, if causation is to play a role in justification it will have to be 'the right sort' of causation, thus giving it a normative quality, as well. It turns out that rather than two aspects, justification has only one – evaluative.

What role is left for logic in justification? Haack thinks (Haack 1993, 105) that valid deductive derivations do constitute reasons for accepting statements, just not the only ones. However, even this claim ought to be understood in the context of what is essentially a psychological picture of justification. Once we opt for an epistemology *with* a knowing subject the role of logical arguments must be understood within the broader evaluative context. Harman illustrates this point when he shows that there exist no deductive psychological inferences (Harman 1986). Thus, for example, Mary – who believes that there are corn flakes in the cupboard, that she will see them when she opens it and that she has opened it – doesn't automatically believe she is seeing corn flakes even though her other beliefs imply this. In fact, realising that she can't see any corn flakes she reaches the reasonable conclusion that someone else has eaten them. Experiences and beliefs interact in various ways to justify other beliefs. Logic helps us to relate different beliefs but doesn't tell us what to do once we know how they are related. To understand what we should do we would have to look at a broader account of evaluation. This means that, rather than accepting moderate psychologism we ought to go for the full-blooded version in which the logical

connections between beliefs play a role by influencing psychological inferences rather than constituting reasons, themselves.

4. Normative naturalism

Not much remains of Sellars' original argument against The Given. The accounts of experience which took it for granted – such as those of Davidson, Popper and Watkins – have turned out to be inadequate. In fact, they could well be deemed to be a *reductio* of Sellars' position.

We have seen that the argument rested upon the false assumption that justification is logical in character. It has turned out that justification is primarily psychological in character. Given this, there appears to be no good reason why experience can not have a role in justifying beliefs – which is as empiricists would expect. What is the character of experience, however?

Haack argues (Haack 1993, 108-117) that experiences are experiences of objects rather than of sense data. She means this in the sense that, when we look, what we are aware of are objects and not sense data. In arguing in this way, however she is still holding on to assumptions which are an artefact of accepting Sellars' argument. In particular, she is showing a preference for conscious inferences over the unconscious processing that is done on the information which reaches our senses. Such a preference was natural if what we were concerned with was logic. However, given the profoundly naturalist view of justification which has resulted from a rejection of Sellars, there is no reason for such a valuation. The Given, far from being a myth, ought to be reconsidered as a possibly viable element of a naturalist account of experience.

From what has been said it might seem that any normative notion of justification might have to be given up. This isn't the conclusion that Haack reaches; nor is it one that I would see as justified. Frege railed against psychological justifications of mathematics and logic (Frege 1980). In a sense, much the same error has been made by his followers when they insist that psychological inferences must be related to logic to be justified. The problems caused by Sellars' account are symptomatic of this error. Giving up on normativity because of taking up a psychologically based view of justification would be another example of it. As it is, the existence of deviant chains forces us to conclude that we must work out an account of the relationship between experiences and beliefs which is normative.

Literature

Davidson, D. 1972-73 "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme", *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association* XLVII, 5-20.

Frege, G. 1980 *The Foundations of Arithmetic*, 2nd ed rev. J. L. Austin (trans) Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Haack, S. 1993 *Evidence and Inquiry*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Harman, G. 1986 *Change in View*, Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press.

Lewis, C.I. 1952 "The Given Element in Empirical Knowledge", *Philosophical Review* 61, 168-75.

Quine, W.V.O. 1953 "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" in *From a Logical Point of View*, 2nd ed rev. Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Popper, K. R. 1972 "Epistemology Without a Knowing Subject" in *Objective Knowledge* Oxford: Clarendon, 106-52.

Rorty, R. 1979 *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Sellars, W. 1963 *Science, Perception and Reality*, London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 127-96.

Watkins, J. W. N. 1984 *Science and Scepticism*, London: Hutchinson.