

Experience and Its Rational Significance II: Replies to Brewer, McDowell, and Siegel

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I am grateful to Bill Brewer, John McDowell, and Susanna Siegel for their stimulating objections and questions, which concern some of the central topics on which we disagree. Brewer's objections and questions concern phenomenology; McDowell's concern the Equivalence Principle; and Siegel's, the structure of experience. It would be too much to hope for convergence in a philosophical debate such as this one, but I do hope that the replies below help put the ideas that separate us in a clearer light and bring out some of my motivations for disagreeing with my distinguished colleagues.

I. Brewer on Phenomenology

1. It is interesting, though not altogether unsurprising, that the element in my position Brewer finds problematic is the very one that corresponds to the element I objected to in my discussion of his position. I objected to Brewer's treatment of visual similarities. Brewer, in turn, objects to my treatment of phenomenology.

Brewer takes me to affirm an "absolute" independence of phenomenology from presentation, and he thinks this entails (in light of the other things I accept) "objectionable consequences." One such consequence, according to Brewer, is that there is no determinate given for experience. Another consequence is what Brewer calls "the neutrality of perceptual rationality."

2. Now, I certainly do not accept the dependence Brewer affirms between phenomenology and presentation. Brewer thinks that, in "good" cases, phenomenology is constituted by objects and

perceptible features presented in experience. And he thinks that this conception is required if phenomenology is to play a determinate rationalizing role (Brewer 2019: 315). I, however, am unable to accept either of these theses.

Let us think through the disagreement here with the aid of a simplified version of an example Brewer uses in framing his objections. Imagine that two subjects, X and X^* , are shown a yellow cube, o , and thereby undergo visual experiences e_y and e_{y^*} respectively. Let us suppose that because of the differences in their perceptual situations, or perhaps because of the differences in their sensory constitutions, the presentations of o to X and X^* are not subjectively identical in the color dimension. Let ϕ be the color phenomenology of e_y , and let ϕ^* ($\neq \phi$) be the color phenomenology of e_{y^*} . Let us suppose, finally, that the color phenomenology of e_{y^*} is identical to the color phenomenology of X 's perception e_r , in good viewing conditions, of a red object. Now, Brewer accepts the transparency of "good" experiences, and he takes the color phenomenology of e_r to be constituted by the color quality red.¹ He thinks, therefore, that ϕ^* is constituted by the quality red, and he thinks that this constitutional dependence is required if phenomenology is to play a determinate rational role. I, for my part, deny both theses. I do not think that there is any *constitutional* dependence of phenomenology on presentation, and I do not think that the lack of such dependence deprives phenomenology of a rational role in cognition. Unsurprisingly, I also reject the transparency idea that founds Brewer's theses.

3. Brewer and I agree, nonetheless, that there are "visual similarities" (in the color dimension) between X 's experience e_r and X^* 's experience e_{y^*} . Also, we both use the notion of phenomenology to capture the "visual similarities": the two experiences possess the same (color) phenomenology. Furthermore, neither of us wishes to understand phenomenology in the manner of sense-datum theorists: neither of us wishes to explain the possession of color phenomenology in terms of the presence of an appropriately colored item. And neither of us wishes to accept a representationalist account of color phenomenology: the possession of color phenomenology is not the representing of a color quality. Given all this, what does Brewer take the relation of color phenomenology to experience to be? More specifically, the quality red is neither presented nor

¹Here and below, I assume, for illustration purposes only, a naive view of color.

represented in e_y^* . What, then, is the relationship of e_y^* to the quality red, which supposedly constitutes the phenomenology of e_y^* ? The phenomenology of an experience is intimately connected with it; it is not (e.g.) at a spatio-temporal distance from it. The quality red seems, however, to be altogether removed from e_y^* .

4. On the account I have offered, phenomenology is not constituted of qualities but of *appearances*, and appearances belong to an entirely different logical category than qualities.² Whereas qualities capture similarities among things, appearances capture similarities among *presentations* of things. Qualities are *instantiated in* things; appearances are *manifested by* things *to* subjects. Instantiation of qualities requires only the object, not any perceiving subject; manifestation of appearances is impossible, however, without both the object and the perceiving subject. Appearances, thus, have being only in the perceptual nexus between the subject and the object presented to consciousness in a perceptual situation. So, as I see it, in X 's experience e_r and X^* 's experience e_y^* differently colored objects are presented to X and X^* , but these objects manifest the same color appearance to them. This color appearance is intimately connected to both experiences: it is not as if the connection of e_r to color appearance is direct, and that of e_y^* is by proxy. So, on the account I have offered, appearances help make sense of subjectively identical experiences without importing into them alien objects (e.g., sense-data) or alien relations (e.g., representational relations) while at the same time preserving the intimate connection of an experience to its phenomenology.³

5. I deny, then, that qualities (and objects and relations) constitute phenomenology. Hence, I hold that phenomenology is constitutionally independent of presentation. This does not amount to “absolute” independence of phenomenology from presentation, however. What the phenomenology of an experience is depends on the presented elements. If you were to look up from the text you are reading, the phenomenology of your visual experience would be different

²The same holds of relations: relations belong to a different logical category than appearances and do not constitute phenomenology. And, again, the same holds of objects.

³I argue in *Conscious Experience* (Gupta 2019a; henceforth *CE*), ch. 6, that appearances help make sense of illusions and hallucinations without invoking representational or intentional

because different things would be presented to your visual consciousness. The causal action of the newly presented items on your sensory system would result in some different appearances being manifested to you. So, there is a clear sense in which phenomenology depends on presentation: phenomenology is influenced by the presented items. It is also true, though, that presentation does not, by itself, *fix* phenomenology, for phenomenology depends also on the perceptual environment, the state of the subject's sense-organs, and other factors as well. Furthermore, this dependence is universal: it occurs not only in illusions and hallucinations but also in the so-called "good" cases. My rejection of transparency is simply a recognition of this basic fact. In "good" cases, too, presented objects and qualities manifest appearances. Here, too, nothing erases the categorial distinction between appearances and qualities; and here, too, qualities fail to constitute appearances. It is not as if in "good" cases an object or quality shines through to consciousness without the mediation or influence of (e.g.) the sense-organs.⁴

6. An analogy may help make the point about dependence a little clearer. Consider the ratio of the lengths of two rods. There is a dependence relation here between the ratio and the length of each rod: what the ratio is depends on the length. Nonetheless, the ratio is not constituted by the length of either rod, for one and the same ratio can be found in other pairs of rods, rods with quite different lengths. Similarly, phenomenology depends both on the subject and the object: which appearances are manifested in an experience depends both on the features of the subject and of the object. Nonetheless, the phenomenology is not constituted of either the subject or the object or their features. For the same phenomenology can be manifested in pairs of subjects and objects with quite different features. The idea that phenomenology is constituted of objects and

relations.

⁴Which things are presented to a subject's consciousness in a perceptual situation depends on a complex of factors, including the real things making up the subject's environment and their actions on the subject's sensory system. One does not need to see phenomenology as constituted of objects and qualities to explain why certain objects and qualities are presented in a given experience. Furthermore, one cannot lay down, as Naive Realists and Sense-Datum theorists are wont to do, an inventory of the kinds of things that are presented to consciousness in experience. The question which kinds of things are presented is a complex empirical one. It is not settled by general epistemological considerations, nor by an introspection of particular experiences.

their features is, in my judgment, as untenable as the idea that ratios are constituted of lengths of rods.

7. The reason Brewer holds that phenomenology constitutionally depends on presentation is, I think, that he subscribes to a particular conception of its rational role. He thinks that, in “good” cases, experience acquaints the subject with objects and qualities. In such cases, phenomenology is simply the presentation of objects and qualities, and presentation is acquaintance. I, for my part, reject the equation of presentation with acquaintance even in the “good” cases. The fact that an object or a quality is presented to a subject’s consciousness does not imply that the subject *knows* the object or the quality.⁵ All perceptual knowledge—of things as well as of facts—requires a suitable view. So, as I see things, phenomenology, by itself, never provides knowledge of things. Still, it plays a vital role in cognition: it underwrites rational transitions that comprise the hypothetical given. Brewer raises two objections against this idea: (i) it implies, in conjunction with the Equivalence Principle, that there is no determinate given, and (ii) it renders the contribution of experience topic-neutral. I will take up these objections in turn.

8. First, the no-determinate-given objection. Brewer’s objection is built around an example in which color phenomenology is switched. Let us enrich the example of §2 and assume that X and X^* are inverses of one another with respect to the color phenomenology of yellow and red. So, in normal perceptual conditions, the color phenomenology of X ’s experience e_y of a yellow cube is identical to the color phenomenology of X^* ’s experience of a red cube. Let us take it that one such experience, e_{r^*} , of X^* is subjectively identical to X ’s experience e_y . Letting ‘ \approx ’ stand for subjective identity, we can express this stipulation thus:

$$(1) \quad e_y \approx e_{r^*}.$$

⁵Brewer reads my denial that presentation is acquaintance weakly, as the thesis that presentation does not imply “possession of propositional knowledge” about the presented item (p. 313). I intend the denial in a stronger sense: I reject that presentation implies even Russellian acquaintance. Presentation of x does not imply that the subject can think about x or introduce a

Similarly, let us stipulate that

$$(2) \quad e_r \approx e_y^*,$$

where e_r is, as before, X 's perception of a red cube, and e_y^* is X^* 's perception of a yellow cube. Suppose, finally, that X and X^* take the perceptual conditions to be normal. Now, in this setup, the phenomenology of e_r rationalizes transitions to X 's judgment (e.g.) "something is red" and X^* 's judgment "something is yellow." Similarly, the phenomenology of e_y rationalizes transitions to X 's judgment "something is yellow" and X^* 's judgment "something is red." Brewer takes the Equivalence Principle to imply that, in such a situation, there is no determinate given; for, when perceptual conditions are taken to be normal, the Principle renders rational, Brewer thinks, transitions from the same view to contrary color judgments.

I believe a misapplication of the Equivalence Principle is propelling Brewer's objection here. The Principle says that experiences with the same phenomenology render rational *counterpart* transitions. The conclusion Brewer derives would follow only if the views of X and X^* were counterparts of one another, but they are not. The very fact that X and X^* 's color concepts are linked differently to phenomenology means that the views are not counterparts of one another. Hence, the transition from X 's view to "something is red" is not a counterpart of the transition from X^* 's view to "something is red." That experience e_r renders the first transition rational does not mean that the subjectively identical experience e_y^* renders the second transition rational.

The hypothetical given, far from falling into incoherence, provides, it seems to me, an intuitively satisfying picture of the switching cases: different subjects may be equally rational to transition to different color judgments on the basis of the same color phenomenology. If color phenomenology were constituted of color qualities, there would be reason to select some of these transitions as better or more rational. But no such constitutional relations obtain, and all the transitions may be recognized as equally rational.⁶

name for x .

⁶In the perception of shades of color, there is empirical evidence of significant interpersonal variations in phenomenology. Here it is essential to recognize that transitions from

9. Second, the topic-neutrality objection. This objection is motivated by the observation that, on the hypothetical given, the transitions from views to (e.g.) judgments are rendered rational irrespective of the correctness of the antecedent view. A view may be totally incorrect about things presented in experience—it may incorrectly take things presented to be sense-data, for example, or even ghosts. Still, according to the hypothetical given, the transitions to the corresponding perceptual judgments (e.g. “that sense-datum is yellow” and “that ghost is yellow”) from the respective views are equally rational. What the subject term of the perceptual judgment is and whether it picks out the presented item are irrelevant to the rationality of the transition. So, the hypothetical given is neutral, in this way, with respect to the subject matter of perceptual judgments, and we may agree that, in this sense, it is topic-neutral. But what is objectionable about any of this? The verdicts of the hypothetical given concern the rationality of transitions, not of judgments, and these verdicts seems perfectly natural and intuitive. Brewer spells out what is objectionable thus:

the conscious presentation of those specific things rather than any others . . . cannot be ignored in accounting for the rational contribution of perceptual experience. Yet this seems to me to be a consequence of Gupta’s neutral hypothetical conception of perceptual rationality (Brewer 2019: 312).

I agree that no account of the given is acceptable that denies presentation a rational role. However, the hypothetical given cannot be faulted on this score. On the hypothetical given, presentation helps determine the contents of perceptual judgments. The content, and hence the identity, of a perceptual judgment such as “that book is blue” and “that sense-datum is blue” depends, in part, on the denotations of the subject terms in them. And these denotations, in turn, depend (in part) on the presentational complexes of the experiences on which the judgments are based. (For an account of this dependence, see *CE*, part 8B.) Hence, whether a transition from a

different color appearances to the same color judgments can, for different subjects, be equally rational; and similarly for transitions from the same color appearances to different color judgments.

view to a judgment is rendered rational in a perceptual situation depends, in general, on the items presented in experience.⁷ So, while Brewer is right that there is a certain topic-neutrality in the hypothetical given, this neutrality does not deprive presentation of a vital rational role.

II. McDowell on the Equivalence Principle

10. One central point on which McDowell and I disagree is the Equivalence Principle. This Principle together with the epistemic given forces one into a Cartesian conception of experience.⁸ McDowell and I agree that Cartesian conceptions are untenable, but we move in opposite directions from this point of agreement. McDowell preserves the epistemic given and abandons the Equivalence Principle; I, on the other hand, preserve the latter and abandon the former. In my first contribution to the current debate, I raised some doubts about McDowell's development of the epistemic given.⁹ McDowell, in turn, challenges the Equivalence Principle. He takes issue with my motivation for the Principle: the desire to respect the subject's viewpoint in assessments of rationality. McDowell argues that the Principle does not really respect the subject's viewpoint; it is only a "tendentious conception" of the subject's viewpoint, he thinks, that motivates the Equivalence Principle. McDowell thinks, furthermore, that the conception of experience I put forward is unacceptably Cartesian. The general thought here is that it is the Equivalence Principle on its own that forces a Cartesian conception;¹⁰ the epistemic given is innocent.

11. McDowell argues that the Equivalence Principle does not respect the subject's viewpoint by

⁷Since phenomenology depends on presentation, there is a yet further way in which rational transitions depend on presentation.

⁸I have argued that one is forced into a Cartesian conception even when the Equivalence Principle is conjoined with a thesis much weaker in some respects than the epistemic given—the thesis, namely, that the given in experience is propositional. See *CE*, §§182–183.

⁹See part III of "Experience and Its Rational Significance I."

¹⁰For an explicit argument to this effect, see Demircioğlu 2015. See Yoon 2015 for a different assessment of the situation. I offer a brief response to Demircioğlu's argument in *CE*, §183, fn. 10.

citing his own case. When he looks out at the world, McDowell reports, it seems to him that his experience makes available to him knowledge about some space-occupying objects around him. But this, McDowell claims, is incompatible with the Equivalence Principle. Hence, if the Equivalence Principle is supposed to respect the subject's viewpoint, then the description McDowell gives of his experience "must have been given from outside [his] viewpoint as the subject of the experience" (McDowell 2019: 342). "How can it be right to say," McDowell asks, "that in describing how things seem to me I have moved to a viewpoint other than my own?"

In response, I want to agree with McDowell that his description of how things seem to him is from his own viewpoint, not from a viewpoint external to him. But I want to insist that his description (which is of the form "things seem to him thus and so") is fully compatible with the Equivalence Principle.¹¹ The Principle imposes a constraint on the given in experience, not on stances people take on the given. It no more rules out McDowell accepting his particular disjunctivist conception of the given than it rules out Brewer accepting his Object View or Russell his sense-datum theory. It is true that the Principle provides a basis for a plausible (indeed, in my view, compelling) argument that McDowell's stance has false elements in it. But this is not to rule out the stance as a possible one, nor does it entail that there is failure to respect McDowell's viewpoint in assessments of rationality. To respect a subject's viewpoint in assessments of rationality does not require that the viewpoint be judged correct. For instance, McDowell is just as rational to transition from his view to judgments such as

- (3) This experience of mine, being a self-conscious act of a capacity of knowledge that I possess, makes available to me the knowledge that a pink cube is before me

as he is to transition to the judgment

A pink cube is before me.

¹¹Even the "thus and so" part of the description is, strictly speaking, fully compatible with the Equivalence Principle. Unless some further substantive theses are brought into play, no inconsistency can be derived from the "thus and so" part and the Equivalence Principle.

Furthermore, McDowell's transitions are no less rational than the corresponding transitions of the believer in the hypothetical given. And they are no more rational than Russell's transitions to judgments such as

(4) I am sensing a pink sense-datum.

Whether judgments such as (3) and (4) are rational depends on the rationality of the antecedent philosophical views about the given, and this in turn depends on the reasons that lead their proponents to their respective positions. Even if the Equivalence Principle were incompatible with judgments such as (3), which it is not, McDowell's viewpoint would receive, in assessments of rationality, the same respect as that accorded to other theorists (including those with correct views). The rationality of a judgment such as (3) would depend on the reasons that move McDowell to his philosophical view.

12. McDowell says that it is only a "tendentious conception" of the subject's viewpoint that motivates the Equivalence Principle (and my picture, more generally). He characterizes his favored alternative conception thus:

how things are from my subjective viewpoint . . . includes what my experience enables me to know about my environment and the prior knowledge that makes it possible for my experience to enable me to know about my environment (McDowell 2019: 342–343).

Since an ordinary perception and a subjectively identical illusion (or hallucination) do not enable a subject to know the same things about the environment, it follows that, on McDowell's conception, the subject can occupy different subjective viewpoints when undergoing subjectively identical experiences. In contrast, on the conception I favor, the subjective viewpoint would be the same in the two cases (assuming the same antecedent view). I wish to make several remarks here, and then I will leave it to the reader to decide which conception of "subjective viewpoint" is tendentious.

First, McDowell's conception of "subjective viewpoint" seems to me relatively new. I

first encountered it in defenses of disjunctivism, not in the course of my reading of ancient and modern authors on perception. I hasten to add that my acquaintance with these authors is limited. So, let me leave this point as a question: is anything like McDowell's conception to be found in ancient and modern authors?

Second, ideas in the vicinity of the Equivalence Principle can be found in earlier writings on perception. Cicero, in his exposition of the Academic argument against Stoic theories of perception, gives as the third of four premisses the following: "impressions between which there is no difference cannot be such that some are cognitive and others not."¹² This premiss is not as general as the Equivalence Principle, but it is motivated by the same core idea. To give an example from more recent history, a version of the Equivalence Principle is in play in the much discussed Argument from Illusion. Here one argues that in hallucinations, say, the immediate objects of experience are sense-data, and one then generalizes the conclusion to all perceptions by relying on the equivalence of subjectively identical experiences. This version of the Principle is defective, I think, for subjectively identical experiences need not be directed to the same kinds of objects. Still, it can be seen as arising from combining the Equivalence Principle with the epistemic given, which is a tacit assumption of the Argument. In short, the Equivalence Principle is not my invention. The best I can claim for myself here is that I have clarified a little an ancient idea.

Third, the Equivalence Principle is accepted by many theories of experience, representational as well as non-representational; the Principle can be accepted even by many kinds of disjunctivist theories. I myself accepted the Principle as an important constraint on theories of perception long before I arrived at my account. It was the recognition many years ago that the hypothetical given enables one to preserve the Equivalence Principle and yet evade Cartesian conceptions that propelled me to investigate whether this conception of the given can help us understand empirical rationality. The Principle was not for me an afterthought brought into play in defense of a view to which I was already committed.

13. McDowell, too, recognizes the validity of a core idea that motivates the Equivalence

¹²A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol. I, p. 245. Cicero

Principle, which is this: Suppose that our subject X undergoes an illusory experience subjectively identical to seeing a yellow cube, though there is no yellow cube before X . Suppose also that, not knowing the illusory character of the experience, X issues the perceptual judgment that there is a yellow cube before him (Q). Now, the core idea is that X 's perceptual judgment is just as rational as it would have been had X undergone a veridical experience instead. McDowell, as I said, accepts the core idea, but he also subscribes to the epistemic given. This generates a puzzle: The illusory experience does not provide X with knowledge that Q . So, how is it that X 's judgment that Q is rational? What is the relationship between X 's experience and his judgment? What is it about this relationship that renders the judgment that there is a *yellow* cube rational, but not the judgment that there a *pink* cube? McDowell addresses this puzzle by distinguishing two kinds of rationality:

the rationality of judging that things are as one knows oneself to be in a position to know that they are, and the derivative rationality of judging that things are as one seems to be in a position to know that they are (McDowell 2019: 346).

For McDowell, the “good” case, the case in which the subject’s experience provides him with knowledge, is primary, and the rationality of judgment in the illusory case is derivative. In the above example, it seems to X that he is in a position to know that there is a yellow cube before him, and this, McDowell thinks, renders X 's perceptual judgment rational:

If it seems that one’s judgment has rational credentials that mark it as knowledgeable, that gives the judgment a rationality that can be understood in a way that is derivative from the rational status that marks a judgment as knowledgeable (McDowell 2019: 343).¹³

I wish to make two points about McDowell’s explanation.

reports that everyone involved in the debate accepts this premiss.

¹³McDowell (2019: 11) invokes the same thought in responding to a difficulty I raised in an earlier exchange; see Gupta 2009, which is a response to McDowell 2009.

First, the explanation leaves us with a residual puzzle: how is it that the illusory experience makes it seem to X that he is in a position to know that there is a yellow cube before him, as opposed to making it seem to him that he is in a position to know that there is (e.g.) a pink cube before him? X 's experience presents him with neither color. So, how is it that the specific color yellow enters X 's seeming?¹⁴

Second, the notion of rationality brought into play by McDowell is very weak. On McDowell's notion, if it seems to a subject that he is in a position to know that P then the subject's judgment that P is rational. To see the weakness, consider a subject that begins with some arithmetical axioms she knows and then reasons to a particular arithmetical claim, say, R . Suppose that all the steps in her reasoning are valid except for one that is fallacious, though she does not realize this. It seems to our subject that she is in a position to know that R and, indeed, that she does know R . By McDowell's lights, the subject is rational in her acceptance of R . So, judgments reached through fallacious reasoning can possess McDowellian rationality. This is a weak notion of rationality if it is a notion of rationality at all. It is not adequate to capture the sense of rationality applicable to judgments a subject issues when suffering unknown illusions. These judgments are rational in a much more robust sense.¹⁵

14. McDowell thinks that the account of experience I offer is unacceptably Cartesian. He writes:

Gupta assumes that experiences are subjective items whose essential character is what it is independently of anything their subject already knows when she undergoes them, and that is exactly how Descartes conceives of *cogitationes* (McDowell 2019: 343).

I deny the charge. I do not take experiences to be subjective items. Experiences, as I conceive them, are presentations of the world, and they are often directed to external objects. And while I hold that presentation is radically different from intentionality, I allow that a subject's knowledge

¹⁴McDowell has not provided a systematic account of illusory experiences, and in the absence of such an account, the bearing of such experiences on judgments remains puzzling.

¹⁵In my view, neither the rationality of judgments nor that of transitions should be (or can be) explained in terms of knowledge. See my reply to Alex Byrne in Byrne et al. 2018.

can affect both the presentational complex of an experience as well as its phenomenology. Given all this, I would have thought that my conception of experience is not at all Cartesian. Still, it is true that, unlike McDowell, I do not think of experience as *made possible* by the subject's prior knowledge. And on this point I may be more on Descartes's side than McDowell's. Still, 'Cartesian' is not an apt label for my position. For I think the dependence between experience and prior knowledge goes the other way around. It is experience that makes possible the subject's prior knowledge. The label that is apt for my position is not 'Cartesian', but 'empiricist'.

III. Siegel and the Structure of Experience

15. Siegel subscribes to a view on which experience possesses content. She thinks that an experience sometimes attributes properties to an object of perception. In the example she gives, a subject—I will call her *Z*—sees something grey, crinkly, and elongated under a row of shrubs. The thing looks like an elephant's trunk to her, and she thinks "Wow, an elephant!" In such a situation, we can agree that *Z*, the individual person, attributes a property to a perceived object and that she entertains a thought with a particular content. Siegel thinks that *Z*'s experience, too, is usefully thought of as attributing a property to the perceived object and as possessing a content (e.g., "it's an elephant"). Siegel finds the notions of experiential attribution of property and experiential content useful—indeed, essential—for making sense of the rational role of experience. I, for my part, am skeptical of their usefulness. The specific proposals in the literature that aim to establish usefulness are, in my judgment, either too sketchy or downright untenable (see *CE*, §§55–72 and 223). This is why I asked Siegel to spell out how we should think of the rational significance of ordinary experiences. I feel we need a better account than any offered so far of the bearing of experiential content and experiential property-attribution on the rational significance of experience. Siegel, in turn, challenges me to explain how one can deal with certain phenomena while dispensing with experiential content and experiential attribution. One challenge she raises concerns appearances; another concerns resilience; and yet another, salience. I will take up these challenges in turn.

16. Siegel suggests that I am committed to regarding appearances as predicatively structured. If this were correct, I would readily admit that I should, like Siegel, accept the idea that experience possesses content and that it sometimes attributes properties to objects. So, let me clarify a little the notions of phenomenology and appearance, for that will make plain how and why I avoid attributing a predicative structure to appearances. I understand phenomenology to capture the subjective dimension of experience: subjectively identical experiences possess, by definition, the same phenomenology. And this subjective dimension pertains to the presentation of the world in experience. Two experiences may present the same portion of the world but may fail to be subjectively identical; such experiences would not possess the same phenomenology. Now, this reading of phenomenology should be distinguished from another, more popular one: phenomenology as “what-it’s-like” for the subject undergoing an experience. The what-it’s-like can be different for subjectively identical experiences. One basketball fan’s perception of the scoreboard may be subjectively identical to the perception of another who supports the rival team, but the what-it’s-like of their visual experiences may be vastly different for them. For another example, *Z*’s visual experience of the grey and crinkly thing under the bushes may be subjectively identical to an expert’s visual experience of the same scene. However, the what-it’s-like for *Z* may include such elements as “like seeing an elephant’s trunk” and even “being presented with an elephant’s trunk,” but these may well be no part of the what-it’s-like for the expert. Now, the what-it’s-like of an experience may well be constituted of elements with content as well as elements with predicative structure. This implies nothing, however, about phenomenology, as I understand the notion.

The presentation of the world in an experience has as its constituents presentations of various objects, properties, relations, facts, events, and so on. The presentations of these items may, in turn, be subjectively identical to the presentations of different items in different experiences. We saw a simple example in the discussion of Brewer above: the presentation of a yellow cube to *X* in experience e_y was subjectively identical to the presentation of a red cube to X^* in experience e_r^* . Now, appearances capture this subjective identity: when their presentations are subjectively identical, the items manifest the same appearance. The presentation of the world in experience, I just noted, has as its constituent parts presentations of the various items.

Correspondingly, the phenomenology of an experience has as its constituent parts the appearances manifested by the various items presented in the experience. Phenomenology and appearances can, therefore, be complex and can possess a structure. Their constituent elements, however, are invariably appearances. We saw above that appearances are not properties or relations. It follows that the structure of appearances or of phenomenology cannot be predicative.¹⁶

17. In the elephant example above, we can say truly that, to *Z*, the thing under the shrubs (say, *u*) “looks like an elephant” or “looks to be an elephant” even though *u* is not an elephant. When we say such things, we are not giving descriptions of the appearance *u* manifests to *Z*. We are not saying that the appearance resembles an elephant or seems to be an elephant, nor that the appearance represents something to be or to resemble an elephant. It is in virtue of the appearance that the presentation of *u* to *Z* is subjectively identical to various other presentations of objects to subjects. And, again, it is in virtue of the appearance that the transitions to judgments such as “that’s an elephant” and “that resembles an elephant” are rational for *Z*. None of these roles requires that the appearance resemble an elephant or represent anything to be or to resemble an elephant. There is as little reason to attribute content to appearances as there is to attribute content to ratios. The contents brought into play by “looks” talk may well be a part of the what-it’s-like accompanying an experience; they are not a part of appearances. The role appearances play in cognition does not require that they possess any content whatsoever.

18. The notion of what-it’s-like may be useful for some purposes—for example, to create trouble for physicalists. (This, indeed, seems to have been the original use of the notion and one that propelled it into contemporary philosophy.) In my judgment, though, this notion is not useful for understanding empirical reasoning and rationality. The notion that is useful here is

¹⁶There may be an isomorphism between the presentational complex and the phenomenology of an experience (though this is uncommon, I think). Furthermore, property instantiation may be one of the structural elements of a presentational complex. It does not follow, however, that property instantiation or property attribution must be a structural element of the phenomenology. The isomorphism can obtain even though the phenomenology is constituted solely of appearances.

“phenomenology” in the reading outlined above. Phenomenology of an experience, on this reading, possesses a structure, but no part of this structure is predicative. The elements making up phenomenology are appearances, and these possess no content.¹⁷

19. A further challenge Siegel raises concerns *resilience*, where Siegel understands “resilience” as how easy or hard it should be to adjust a belief in light of experience. Siegel thinks that a natural treatment of resilience requires that we see experience as attributing properties to things and, consequently, as possessing a predicative structure. Her thought is that the “weight” of experience, as she calls it, can vary as experience is combined with different elements of a view and that this combining requires that experience possess a predicative structure.

I can accept the first part of Siegel’s thought—indeed, the hypothetical given captures a generalized version of Siegel’s point here. It is the second part that I find problematic. I fail to see why the variation of the “weight” of experience with views (or elements of views) or the joining of experience with views (or elements of views) requires that experience possess a predicative structure. I fail to see even how experiential predicative structure is at all useful here. There is predicative structure in views (and some of their elements). Why is this not enough? Why do we need to import it into experience as well? And how does the importation help?

¹⁷Let me briefly address a question Siegel raises about appearances in §4.2 of her paper. I allow that appearances manifested by an object can be influenced by a large variety of factors, including expertise possessed by the subject (e.g., about elephants), beliefs and desires, and holistic processing of information in the brain. Siegel asks whether such an etiology makes a difference to the epistemic credentials of a perceptual judgment. More specifically, compare two perceptual judgments “that’s an elephant,” where one judgment is based on appearances that are not affected by (e.g.) the subject’s expertise while the other is based on appearances that are so affected. Would I see, Siegel asks, any epistemic difference in the status of the two judgments? My response is: not as such. The transitions from views to perceptual judgments would be equally rational in the two cases. If there is an epistemic difference, it would need to come from the epistemic status of some elements in the antecedent view.

Incidentally, although I allow that all kinds of factors (including mental states such as beliefs) can influence experience and its phenomenology, I maintain a sharp separation between experience and thought. The directedness of experience to the world is radically different in character and function from the directedness of thought to the world. Presentation and intentionality are, in my view, fundamentally different kinds of relation.

20. The final challenge Siegel raises concerns the salience of hypotheses. Siegel observes that sometimes a hypothesis (e.g., “it’s an elephant”) becomes salient to a subject undergoing an experience without the subject accepting the hypothesis, or recognizing a commitment to it, or even accepting the hypothesis conditionally. She suggests that the idea of experiential content can help make sense of salience.¹⁸ The challenge is to make sense of the phenomenon within the framework of the hypothetical given.

Siegel’s challenge is motivated, in part, by the analogy I have drawn between the hypothetical given and modus ponens.¹⁹ Just as modus ponens does not confer rationality on the acceptance of the conclusion, similarly experience does not, according to the hypothetical given, confer rationality on the perceptual judgment. Just as modus ponens renders rational certain transitions to the acceptance of the conclusion, similarly experience renders rational certain transitions to perceptual judgments. Siegel’s remarks highlight a disanalogy, however: a hypothesis (e.g., “it’s an elephant”) can become salient to a subject (e.g., *Z*) in virtue of an experience but not in virtue of modus ponens.

I wish to make a few observations in response. *First*, it is true—indeed, I have myself emphasized this—that the analogy between the hypothetical given and modus ponens is not perfect: experience can underwrite transitions of various kinds that are beyond the power of modus ponens. To give just one example, experience can underwrite transitions to ostensive definitions that modus ponens cannot. So, I recognize the possibility that various kinds of transitions (including perhaps some that capture salience) belong to the hypothetical given that are no part of modus ponens.²⁰ *Second*, experience can render rational transitions to thoughts

¹⁸I take the juxtaposition of her remarks on experiential content and salience in §4.3 to suggest this idea.

¹⁹I want to distance myself from one parallel Siegel draws between experience and modus ponens. Siegel suggests that there are always several rational options in response to modus ponens and that the same holds for experience. She writes, “if you start believing *P*, and then come to think that *P* entails *Q*, rationality leaves you with several options besides concluding *Q*” (Siegel 2019: 363). I do not think that this is generally true. Often there is only one option—namely, to believe that *Q*. Occasionally the option to believe that *Q* is not available, and in such cases, often there is no other option than to recognize that one is in an aporetic state. I believe that the situation with experience is parallel; see *CE*, §§79 and 341–350.

²⁰Contrary to Siegel’s assumption, I take a broad view of transitions within the scope of the hypothetical given. Transitions rendered rational by the hypothetical given include not only

such as “it’s likely an elephant” and “perhaps this is an elephant”; and, in some contexts, the occurrence of such thoughts means that the elephant hypothesis is salient to the subject. In such contexts at least, the bearing of experience on salience can be captured within the resources of the hypothetical given: experience renders rational transitions to thoughts that imply salience. The question whether in all contexts the bearing of experience on salience can be captured by the hypothetical given must be deferred until we possess a more precise account of salience. *Third*, on plausible accounts of content (including Siegel’s own), one cannot read off salience from the content of experience. In the elephant example, the content of the visual experience will be constituted of many concepts that are not salient to the subject—concepts such as “leaf,” “twig,” “shrub,” and “trunk” (to give just a few examples). The problem of saying what salience is and how experience contributes to it remains open even if we attribute content to experience. Indeed, it is unclear how attributing content to experience helps at all in addressing the problem of salience.²¹

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those to outright judgments, recognitions of commitment, and hypothetical judgments, but also to other acts such as suspension of judgment and recognition of the need for further inquiry.

²¹Thanks to John McDowell and Miloš Vuletić for helpful conversations.

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