

PERCEPTUAL CONTENTS
A Study on the Nature of the Contents of Perceptual Experience

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Master's Thesis
Philosophy
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SUMMARY

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The aim of the thesis is to examine various views that have been advocated in contemporary discussions concerning the content of perceptual experiences. The nature of the contents posited in those views is the focus of this study. In the views that are discussed here, perceptual contents have been argued to be either conceptual, externalist, nonconceptual or particular. In this thesis, John McDowell is presented as the proponent of conceptual content, Jeff Speaks as the proponent of externalist content, Christopher Peacocke as the proponent of abstract nonconceptual contents, and Tim Crane as the proponent of particular nonconceptual content. The revised view of John McDowell, as well as the view of Charles Travis, is also briefly presented.

The views are discussed with the emphasis on how they explain experiential aspects of our perceptual experiences, with somewhat less attention given to epistemological concerns. As a common method of analysis, the contents advocated by the views are analysed by applying classical philosophical distinctions. The contents are further analysed by examining what kind of perceptual relations they could be the contents of.

The analyses indicate that there are differing conceptions or understandings of content in play in the current discussion. These understandings can, however, be evaluated and compared in relation to what experiential aspects they can explain. Regarding such explanations, particular contents appear as perhaps the most promising alternative as the fundamental contents of perceptual experiences. The main problem with the view of particular content, as it is advocated by Tim Crane, is that it is too sparing in its descriptions of what kind of features figure in that content. Therefore, it is concluded that a genuinely descriptive account of particular psychological content is needed in the context of understanding the nature of perceptual experiences, and perhaps also in the context of understanding the nature of beliefs and mental concepts.

Key words: perceptual experience, content, conceptualism, nonconceptualism, particular content.

Contents

1. Foreword.....	4
1.1 Overview	4
1.2 Short history	6
2. Definitions	10
2.1. Perception and perceptual experience	10
2.2. The objects of perception	11
2.3. Representational content.....	12
2.4. Content and intentionality	14
2.5. Concepts and conceptuality	15
2.6. Propositions and propositionality	17
2.7. Phenomenology and phenomenal character	19
3. Views on perceptual content.....	22
3.1. Standard conceptualism.....	22
3.2 Externalism about perceptual contents	23
3.3. Nonconceptualism	23
3.4. Non-standard views	24
4. Methods for analysing what content is	26
4.1. Important distinctions	26
4.2. Analysis of perceptual relations	28
5. Standard conceptualism: John McDowell	32
5.1 McDowell’s conceptualism	32
5.2. Theoretical background: Kant & Sellars	33
5.3. Where McDowell departs from Kant & Sellars	35
5.4. Critique of McDowell’s “synthesis”.....	36
5.5. On the veridicality of experiences and the constraints on the conceptual.....	38
5.6. Peacocke: Arguments for and against conceptualism	39
5.7. The nature of content in McDowell’s view	43
5.8 Perceptual relations in McDowell’s view.....	45

6. Propositional content: Jeff Speaks.....	48
6.1. Jeff Speaks' Russellianism	48
6.2. Arguments for transparency and intentionalism.....	50
6.3. Arguments for Russellianism	52
6.4. Externalist contents and <i>de re</i> thoughts	54
6.5. The veridicality conditions of externalist contents.....	57
6.6. Crane: Arguments against propositional content.....	59
6.7 The nature of content in Speaks' view	61
6.8. Perceptual relations in Speaks' view	65
7. Nonconceptualism: Christopher Peacocke	67
7.1. Peacocke's nonconceptualism	67
7.2. Peacocke's motivation for nonconceptualism	70
7.3. Posited scenarios	71
7.4. Advantages of scenario contents	73
7.5. Protopositions.....	76
7.6. Advantages of protopositions.....	80
7.7. Spatial reasoning and cognitive penetrability.....	81
7.8. Peacocke's arguments for nonconceptualism.....	82
7.9. The nature of content in Peacocke's view	89
7.10. Perceptual relations in Peacocke's view.....	93
8. Particularity and content.....	95
8.1. The given and its myth	95
8.2. Charles Travis' critique of McDowell's view	96
8.3. McDowell's revised view.....	99
8.4. Intuitional content.....	100
8.5. Tim Crane and the Given.....	103
8.6 Givenness and content	105
8.7. Crane's phenomenological content	108
8.8. Particular and abstract contents	110
8.9. The nature of perceptual content	113
8.10. Perceptual relations.....	118

9. Questions & conclusions	122
9.1 Conceptuality and propositionality of content	122
9.2. Is perceptual content external, abstract or particular?	124
9.3. What should we think about the contents of perceptual experiences?	125
References	129

1. Foreword¹

1.1 Overview

For a few decades now, philosophers have debated about the contents of perceptual experience. ‘Content’ in this context can roughly be stated as ‘what is conveyed to the subject by her perceptual experience’. More specifically, the debate has concerned the nature of these contents. The two major points of dispute have been whether the contents of perceptual experience are conceptual or not, and whether they are propositional or not. The views that I will discuss in this thesis give differing accounts of the nature of perceptual experience regarding not only the conceptuality or propositionality of contents of perception but also, among other things, how these contents relate to phenomenal character of experience.

The conceptuality vs. nonconceptuality side of the debate deals with question of whether perceptual contents have *any* content that is not composed of concepts. The propositionality vs. nonpropositionality side of the debate deals with the question of whether those contents are propositional, or to simplify the matter, whether they are things that have a truth-value. Often, conceptual and propositional content are presented as a set package called *conceptualism*. For the sake of clarity I will call this package *standard conceptualism*. However, the questions of conceptuality and propositionality of content are separate questions, even if they are closely tied together and need to be discussed together.

Standard conceptualism, the view that perceptual contents are both conceptual and propositional, aims to explain the justificatory link between perceptual experience and the beliefs based on that experience. *Non-conceptualism*, on the other hand, is usually defined negatively as the denial of conceptuality of content, and often propositionality as well. It argues against conceptualism on the basis that it could not explain features such as the immediate nature and richness of our perceptual experiences.

¹ I would like to thank Miira Tuominen, Mikko Yrjönsuuri, Tero Vaaja, and Antti Heikinheimo for their invaluable feedback in the process of writing this thesis.

Other important questions about the nature of the contents perceptual experience are also discussed in this thesis. Those questions concern, among other things, how we should understand the contents in relation to traditional distinctions such as the externalism–internalism distinction or universal–particular distinction. Externalist views about perceptual content argue that content must also include the external perceived particulars or relations to these. The aim of externalism is to explain the transparency of our experiences; the idea that we cannot perceive any properties separate from what instantiates those properties. Internalist views, the banner under which most of the conceptualist or nonconceptualist views fit, deny both the need as well as sensibility of positing external particulars as content. Views of particular content, on the other hand, claim that the nature of our experiences is so closely tied to the particular intrinsic state we are in, in our experiences, that we should see the fundamental content of our experiences as particular as well. Other views explicitly deny that there could even be such things as particular contents involved in experience.

In this thesis, I will examine various accounts that have been presented in discussions concerning the content of perceptual experiences. My aim is to analyse these views, firstly through their advantages and disadvantages in explaining various perceptual phenomena, and secondly by applying a common method of analysis. This method consists of first applying classical philosophical distinctions to find out what is meant by ‘content’ in each view. After this, the content is further analysed by examining what kind of perceptual relation it is the content of. While I will discuss some epistemological aspects of these views, mainly concerning the justification of perceptual beliefs, epistemological issues will not be at the focus of this study.

In the debate, numerous philosophers have presented their views concerning perceptual content. The views examined in this study have been put forward by philosophers who have recently taken part in the debate – each of them also argues for clearly distinct views: John McDowell, in his earlier work, was an advocate of standard conceptualism. His view was that perceptual contents are of the form ‘that things are thus and so’. Jeff Speaks defends an externalist view of propositional content. According to him, perceptual contents are Russellian propositions that consist of individuals, properties and relations. Christopher Peacocke

advocates a nonconceptualist view; according to which perceptual contents include nonconceptual scenario contents and protopositions. Charles Travis has presented critique against McDowell's view; critique that forced McDowell to revise his view and abandon standard conceptualism. And finally, Tim Crane defends a nonconceptual view of particular, phenomenological content.

This thesis is divided in nine main sections. The first four sections present a brief historical background, some general definitions, as well as a more detailed account of the methods of analysis employed in this study. The following sections will present the views that are being examined and arguments for and against these views. The final section presents a general account of the relations between these views and links together some general concerns about the nature of perceptual content.

1.2 Short history

The historical influences on the views I will discuss are surely numerous and are likely to range from classical philosophy to less known contemporary or historical theories. Delving into those would require a deeper analysis than what I can give here. I will, however, present a brief overview on some historically significant approaches to perception. This can help illuminate how the current discussion of the nature of perceptual content has diverged from some closely related past and present discussions.

Direct realism, or naïve realism as it is sometimes called, is the view that experience provides us with direct awareness of the external world. In distinction to some forms of idealism and scepticism, direct realism claims we can have reliable awareness of the mind-independent objects and properties perceived in experience. At its simplified formulation, direct realism can be criticised of poor compatibility with cases of illusion or hallucination. In addition to

this, the physical existence of some of the perceived properties, such as colours, can be questioned².

As a critique of direct realism, *indirect* or *representational realism* is the view that the immediate objects of our experiences³ are representations of the external material world. These representations can, however, provide us with justified beliefs concerning the objects represented. These representations were called *ideas*, among others, by John Locke, and *impressions* by David Hume. Later on in the 20th century G. E. Moore introduced the term *sense-data*, which was also adopted by Bertrand Russell and H. H. Price. Since the cases of illusion and hallucination imply that we cannot have direct access to the objects themselves, what we do have direct access to must be sense data. A sense datum is an inner object that possesses the property that is perceived. Sense-data theories have been criticised of setting a veil between us and the objects we think we directly perceive, since this could lead to scepticism concerning the existence external objects.

This scepticism led some indirect realists to support *phenomenalism*, the view that physical objects do not exist as things in themselves or that they are such that we cannot have any knowledge concerning them. Perceptual beliefs, according to phenomenalism, concern only our sense-data, not the objects they represent. There are numerous objections that have been presented against phenomenalism. For example, a single object can be presented in several differing conditions, where consequently the sense data would differ as well, presenting difficulties for any direct shift from talk of objects to talk of sense-data.

The *adverbial theory* of perception aims to avoid the problems sense-data theories face in positing a metaphysical entity between the perceived object and the perceiver, while still doing

² Arguments based on colour constancy or metamerism shed doubt to the physical existence of colours as such. Colour constancy is the phenomenon of how we see colours as stable despite changes in lighting. Metamerism colours are such that they have different spectral distributions but are indistinguishable by human perceivers in the same lighting conditions. Generally, however, the physical existence of colours has been explained as surface reflectance properties of objects.

³ Or in other words; what is given to us in experience.

justice to the phenomenology of experience. According to it, sensed properties are not mental objects but modifications of the experience itself. Seeing a red circle would then be a case of experiencing *redly-circularly*, where the modifications of redness and circularity are instantiated in the experience itself, thus avoiding the need to posit anything red or circular other than the object itself. In some contexts the term *qualia* is used to refer to the qualities of experience the adverbial theory posits. One challenge presented to the adverbial theory is whether it can explain the spatial structure of our experiences while maintaining the relations between the different groups of qualities that constitute the different objects of experience. For example, if we see a blue circle beside a red square, how can the adverbial theory present their spatial relations or differentiate this case from that of seeing a blue square beside a red circle?

Some philosophers have presented *disjunctivism* as a way to save the direct connection between perception and the objects of perception. According to disjunctivist theories, like in direct realism, perception consists in direct presentation of the objects of perception. Disjunctivism accepts the possibility of illusions and hallucinations but denies that illusions and hallucinations are of same psychological kind as genuine perceptions, even if they are subjectively indistinguishable. While it is possible that hallucinations and normal perceptions have differences in internal properties of the perceiver, the same argument does not go with illusions. If a disjunctivist theory differentiates illusions or other non-veridical perceptions from veridical ones by arguing that they are of a differing kind, it must also include the external objects of perception into the identity conditions of perceptions. This makes it difficult for disjunctivist theories to explain how beliefs could be based on perception in the case of normal perception but not in the case of illusion or hallucination.

The *intentional* or *representational* theory of perception⁴, on the other hand, posits the existence of intentional or representational *content*. On this theory the objects of experience are external and material, at least when the experience is not a hallucination. The content of

⁴ This should not be confused with what some philosophers call *representationalism*, which, in the terminology of this paper, refers to the idea of the transparency of experience (see chapter 4.2). The term *intentionalism* on the other hand can refer to this view, although at least Byrne (2001) and Speaks (2009) have differing definitions of the term.

that experience is the way that the object is presented in the experience. The way things really are can differ from the way experience presents the world as being. This is the case in illusions and hallucinations. In this study, I will mainly examine representational theories of perception. After all, the concept of ‘content’ is, by its very definition, representational. The question of the nature of this content, and the answers to it, is the topic of this study.⁵

⁵ For more detailed information about these views, as well as others, see e.g. Crane (2011), Thompson (2006) and Lowe (2004).

2. Definitions

Before we can address the question of the nature of the content of perceptual experience, some clarification of the very basic concepts are in order. I will begin by briefly presenting some of the main concepts that are relevant to this study e.g. those of perceptual experience, representational content and conceptuality.

2.1. Perception and perceptual experience

In the relatively short history of the current debate there has been some variance even in the use of the concepts describing the research subject itself. This is perhaps because the roots of the debate are widely spread among different philosophical disciplines, each with their own terminological traditions. Without a single defining term, different philosophers have used the terms that best suit their views. In the works of many philosophers, ‘perceptual experience’ has been replaced with various terms, usually with just ‘perception’ or ‘experience’⁶. Often, all of these terms are used synonymously at the same occasion.⁷ ‘Content of perceptual experience’ has also been replaced with ‘phenomenal content’⁸ in order to emphasise the close connection the content has to phenomenology. The philosophers discussed in this thesis may differ in the aspects of perceptual activity they emphasise in their theories, but the common goal between them seems to be to explain the nature of perceptual experiences, whatever they are called, in its entirety. Therefore I see no reason to treat these differences as something that would hinder comparing these theories.

⁶ See, for example, McDowell (1994 & 2009).

⁷ See, for example, Peacocke (1992, 1998, 2001a & 2001b), Speaks (2005 & 2009) or Crane (2009, 2013 etc.).

⁸ See, for example, Thompson (2006).

For simplicity's sake I will mainly use the term 'perceptual experience' or 'experience' for short. Tim Crane describes some reasons for differentiating perceptual experience from perception:

Some assumptions: I assume the now standard terminological distinction between *perceptual experience*, which is non-factive or non-relational, and *perception*, which is both factive and relational.⁹

The idea of 'perception as factive is that in saying 'x perceives y' what is perceived (y) is presupposed to be true, whereas in using the term 'perceptual experience' no such presuppositions concerning the external world are made. Having an 'experience' does not imply a perceptual relation to an object or content. Charles Travis¹⁰, for example, appears to follow this distinction. In my view, however, 'perception' can be used in place of 'perceptual experience' without any issue when characterising the perceptual faculties themselves. Consequently, in this paper, 'perception' is not automatically meant as factive unless it is explicitly said to be. As Crane puts it, 'perception' being factive, as opposed to 'perceptual experience', is a "semantic point [that] is independent of all the substantive issues raised by the problem of perception."¹¹ The same notion applies to term 'content of perceptual experiences'. In this study, the terms 'perceptual content', 'experiential content' and 'content' all refer to the contents of perceptual experiences, unless it is otherwise specified in their usage.

2.2. The objects of perception

Before explaining what contents of experience are, I will show what they are not. That is, they are not objects of perception. It is fairly easy to understand by common sense what is meant by

⁹ Crane, 2009.

¹⁰ Travis,

¹¹ Crane, 2006, 134 (footnote 5).

the objects of perception. An object of perception is what one might call the *target* of the perceiving subject's perception; it is what one's perception is about. We can, however, distinguish between different understandings of 'object'. A *physical object* or a *real object* of perception is a mind-independent physical and concrete object that one's perception is about. If one sees a horse, the horse itself is the real object of one's experience. According to direct or naïve realism, what one is aware of in experience is real the objects of that experience and the properties those real objects have.

On the other hand, intentional states, such as beliefs or thoughts, can have objects that do not exist in the same sense as physical objects do. If one has a belief about unicorns, the unicorns are the intentional objects of one's belief. Perception is, or so it has been claimed, an intentional state as well. When one has a hallucination of a unicorn, the unicorn is the intentional object of one's hallucinatory experience. In such a case there either is no real object of perception, or the real object is a brain state, or some similar entity. When one mistakes a horse for a unicorn, it can be argued that the real object of the perception is the horse, while the intentional object is the unicorn. In both cases, direct realism encounters problems it must explain. It must explain how hallucinations could be direct awareness either of nothing, or of a brain state. Illusions or inaccurate experiences on the other hand include perceptions of properties that are not instantiated in the world. Where are these properties instantiated then, according to direct realism?

2.3. Representational content

So how do contents of perceptual experience differ from external, physical objects of direct realism or internal objects of sense-data theories? Firstly, contents of experience are tied to psychological entities in contrast to objects of perception that are external to us; contents can have aspectual differences or differences in accuracy or they might not have existing objects at all. Secondly contents do not replace objects in the way sense-data does. Representational content and experience is *about* the represented object. Content is merely the way the object is

represented in the experience. The term ‘content’, however, has referred to different things in some earlier discussions that have used the term ‘perceptual contents’.

The word ‘content’, in the context of mental states, is a piece of philosophical jargon or terminology and the meaning of ‘content of experience’ has changed over the years. In ‘The Refutation of Idealism’ (1903) G.E Moore rejects the view that the sensation of blue involves blueness as its ‘content’. In this sense content is something that would be better called ‘qualia’ today. Similar considerations go for Moritz Schlick. According to him “the difference between [...] form and content is, roughly speaking, the difference between that which can be expressed and that which cannot be expressed”. To him as well, content seems something quite like *qualia*.¹²

Later on the term came to have the current meaning of *representational* content. In the views of some philosophers the very nature of representational content is thought of as always representing something being ‘as so’, much like a newspaper article would. Like an article, it would be composed of conceptual sentences i.e. propositions, and have conditions under which it can be called truthful.¹³ This habit of thought is explicit in John McDowell’s conceptualism: “The very idea of representational content brings with it a notion of correctness and incorrectness [...] I see no good reason not to call this correctness ‘truth’.”¹⁴ And even if the content of experience were not conceptual ‘newspaper’ content and perhaps something not eligible for the use of ‘truth’, still it would have some sense of accuracy with which it represents its objects. This, I believe, is a point where many advocates of both conceptualism and nonconceptualism agree to some degree. But as Tim Crane has pointed out, a *picture* is representational¹⁵ and can have accuracy conditions, but that does not mean that it is conceptual or something that is either true or untrue.

¹² Schlick, 1932.

¹³ Siegel, 2010.

¹⁴ McDowell, 1994, 162.

¹⁵ Crane, 2009. Pictures are not representational in the sense of newspaper articles. No “represents ‘as so’” clause can ever capture the representational content of a picture such as it is. Of course this depends on whether ‘as so’

The habit of thought that implies representational content as always being of the sort that represents something ‘as so’ has led some philosophers to reject the idea that perceptual experience has content at all. In order to prevent any such habits of thought, Susanna Siegel defines the content quite liberally: “In contemporary philosophy, the phrase ‘the contents of perception’ means, roughly, what is conveyed to the subject by her perceptual experience.”¹⁶ This definition works as a starting point for understanding what content of perceptual experiences means for different theories.

2.4. Content and intentionality

Our perception relates us to how things are, and through it we gain knowledge of the surrounding world. This is what is commonly meant by the *intentionality* of perception. Tim Crane explains intentionality and its connection to objects and contents in the following way:

The notion of content belongs within the theory of intentionality. Intentional mental states fall into different kinds: there are hopes, beliefs, fears, desires, and so on. All these mental states exhibit what has been called ‘aboutness’ or ‘directedness’: they are about or directed on things. I express this idea in a general way, as follows: for every intentional state of kind ϕ , there is something on which the ϕ ing is directed. What the ϕ ing is directed on is the object of the state.¹⁷

How then is content related to intentionality? If we consider belief, perhaps the paradigm example of an intentional state, the content of a belief would be *what is believed*, while the object of that belief would be what the belief is about. ‘According to Crane we need contents

is ever meant to be an exhaustive description of, in this case, the picture. Even if an exhaustive description was possible, it can be argued that it would not be the same thing as the picture itself but only a description.

¹⁶ Siegel, 2010.

¹⁷ Crane, 2009, 454.

for intentional states for three distinct reasons: (i) Mental states can have the same objects but differ in some *aspect* under which they represent these objects. (ii) There are states without (existing) objects (like hopes and fears often are) but those states are real themselves and have real contents. (iii) Some intentional states can be accurate or inaccurate¹⁸ in representing reality. We can't describe the nature of every intentional state by describing the kind of state it is and describing its object.¹⁹ This can be simplified by understanding contents as *ways* of presenting objects. This applies to perception as well as other intentional states.²⁰

2.5. Concepts and conceptuality

Concepts are constituents of thoughts. The way we understand what is meant by 'concept' or 'conceptuality' is directly connected to how we answer the question of whether the contents of perceptual experiences are conceptual. Despite this, philosophers who take part in the discussion aren't always clear about their definitions of 'concept'. The question of propositionality of content is also directly linked to that of conceptuality. Presenting content as Russellian or Fregean has consequences to the definition of 'concept'. The nature of concepts is also essentially linked to the issue of 'concept possession'. The possessor of a concept can grasp the meaning and use of the concept, at least to some degree.

Alex Byrne differentiates three different senses of 'concept' used in philosophical literature. A concept in the *psychological* sense is a mental representation of a category, perhaps a word in a language of thought. Possession of that concept would then require the possession of that representation, or mentalese word.

¹⁸ Conceptualists often prefer to phrase this as contents being *veridical* or *non-veridical*.

¹⁹ Crane, 2009.

²⁰ It is worth noting that not all philosophers interpret intentionality as inherently representational. It is, however, not relevant to this study to discuss whether non-representational theories can be said to be intentional.

A *Fregean* concept relies on Frege's distinction of 'sense' and 'reference', or 'Sinn' and 'Bedeutung': An expression such as a proper name can refer to an object, but this *reference* is in virtue of the expression's *sense*, the 'mode of presentation' or description of the object in question. For Frege, a concept is the *sense* of a predicate. For example when we remove x from ' x is f ' we are left with the concept 'is f '. Together with other kinds of *senses*, like x in this case, they are the constituents of 'Fregean thoughts' i.e. propositions, as in ' x is f '.²¹

In the *pleonastic* sense, there is nothing more to a concept than what is included in the possession of the concept. According to Byrne, a concept is possessed when one has a belief that involves that concept. Hence, one possesses the concept 'F', if and only if one believes 'that ... F ...' with the dots filled in some appropriate way. In Byrne's understanding, concepts and propositional beliefs are inherently connected in such a way, leading him to believe that conceptual contents are also necessarily propositional.²²

On other definitions of concepts, conceptual content does not necessarily mean the same as propositional content. One such is Christopher Peacocke's view of concepts. According to Peacocke, concepts are at the level of Frege's 'sense', "since they are individuated by considerations of cognitive significance." They are *abstract* objects, in contrast to mental objects or states. As senses they are more discriminating than references but not as much as representations, which, according to Peacocke, are too fine-grained for concepts to capture. In his account, the same concept can have different mental representations in different individuals. Although according to Peacocke's Principle of Dependence, "[t]here can be nothing more to the nature of a concept than is determined by a correct account of the capacity of a thinker who has mastered the concept to have propositional attitudes to contents containing that concept", contents involving concepts are not necessarily propositional.²³

²¹ Fregean concepts are somewhat different from what is meant by 'concept' in contemporary context. Frege's 'sense' is something that could be defined as what is meant by 'concept', as Christopher Peacocke does.

²² Byrne, 2004.

²³ Peacocke, 1992.

John McDowell, on the other hand, links concepts and conceptuality with rationality: According to him “It is essential to conceptual capabilities [...] that they can be exploited in active thinking, thinking that is open to reflection about its own rational credentials. When I say the content of experience is conceptual, that is what I mean by ‘conceptual’”²⁴ For McDowell, concepts are an essential requirement for the possibility of rational justification.

An important question when considering the nature of concepts is why ‘concepts’ were needed in philosophical discussions in the first place. According to Tim Crane, the nature of concepts is understandable only in connection to the thoughts and beliefs that require those concepts. For a thinker to have a belief ‘P’, he must also have a multitude of other beliefs related to ‘P’. Beliefs, and other intentional states, can stand in logical and semantic relations to other beliefs and in evidential relations to perception. Concepts are needed in the drawing of inferences between beliefs; they are necessary in our reasoning. Consequently, Crane defines concepts as “*inferentially relevant constituents of intentional states.*” For Crane then, beliefs are philosophically more fundamental than concepts, and concepts are only needed to make sense of inferences between beliefs.²⁵

2.6. Propositions and propositionality

Although the question of propositionality of perceptual content is closely linked to the question of conceptuality, it is nonetheless a question in its own right. The definition of propositionality not only has a direct effect on the definition of conceptuality but also on whether propositional content is conceptual at all. Some accounts of propositionality, like that of ‘possible worlds’ propositions, are arguably not compatible with propositional content being conceptual. Fregean propositions, on the other hand, are usually seen as conceptual.

²⁴ McDowell, 1994, 47.

²⁵ Crane, 1992.

A proposition is that which is true or false in a declarative sentence. Consequently, it is a non-linguistic entity independent of the language or linguistic structure used to declare it. Truth of a declarative sentence is, after all, not dependent on the language used to express it. The dominant view is that the contents of beliefs are propositions. Beliefs are, in this sense, *propositional attitudes*; they are belief attitudes towards the proposition that is the content of the belief. Other such propositional attitudes include doubting, insisting, judging etc. Hence, propositions can be loosely defined as shareable objects of propositional attitudes and the primary bearers of truth-value. What is left unanswered here is whether propositions are abstract or mind-independent, or what their conditions of individuation are. Propositions are structured propositions if they have parts or constituents structured in a certain order. The three prominent candidates as the propositional contents of perceptual experiences are possible-worlds propositions, Russellian propositions and Fregean propositions. Of these three, Russellian and Fregean propositions are structured propositions, whereas possible-worlds propositions are unstructured sets.²⁶

Possible-worlds propositions, also called Lewisian/Stalnakerian propositions, trace their origin to ‘possible world semantics’ for systems of modal logic. On this view, propositional contents of experience would be a set of possible worlds that are consistent with how they appear in experience. “The central idea behind this view is that to represent a situation—whether in language, in thought, or in experience—is to distinguish between two ways the world might be: first, ways the world might be if the situation does obtain, where these include the actual world; second, ways the world might be if the situation does not obtain.”²⁷

In the discussion of propositional content of experience Fregean and, especially, Russellian propositions have been more prominent than the possible-worlds view. *Russellian propositions* are structural entities that have concrete objects and properties as their constituents. Russellian-propositional contents are purely extensional. They consist solely of reference to objects and attribution of properties. In that way, Russellian theories of content

²⁶ McGrath, 2012.

²⁷ Siegel, 2010.

come close to direct realism. But if one advocates Russellian contents of experience, unless one widens the realm of ‘properties’ into things like lighting conditions, relative position or other similar relations, one encounters problems in explaining e.g. the similarities and differences between experiences of the same object in differing conditions.²⁸

Fregean propositions or *thoughts*, on the other hand, are individuated by their senses or modes of presentation.²⁹ Fregean propositions are composed of those modes of presentation, which are abstract entities, rather than objects and properties themselves. These modes of presentation or, in the case of perception, ways of presenting the objects and properties, make Fregean contents far less vulnerable to counter-examples from cases like colour constancy than Russellian contents with their requirement of direct reference to the properties of objects. The challenge for the Fregean view is to explain what these modes of presentation are.

2.7. Phenomenology and phenomenal character

In the current discussion, the *phenomenal character* of experience, often called the *phenomenology of experience* or *phenomenology* for short, should be distinguished from the common meaning of ‘phenomenology’ as a philosophical tradition or discipline. To simplify it, both ‘phenomenology’ and ‘phenomenological character’ refer here to the sensory qualities of experiences or to ‘what it is like’ to have that particular experience.

The issue of the phenomenology of experience is inherently connected with the issue of representational content. Sometimes representational content is called *phenomenal content* in this context, in order to further emphasise the close connection between the two issues. If representational content is loosely defined as ‘what is conveyed or given’ to one in one’s

²⁸ It is however somewhat problematic to include such things to Russellianism, as explaining what the extensions of those properties are is far from simple. One other issue concerning Russellian content is whether it can be said to be representational. If it is purely extensional then it could not be representational. This is, however, a point where not all theories of Russellian propositional content are explicit.

²⁹ See sense-reference distinction above, in chapter 2.5.

experience, then in the same way phenomenology or phenomenal character could be defined as ‘what it is like’ for one to have that experience. In the case of visual perception this could include the spatial phenomenology and colour phenomenology of the experience. The phenomenal character of an experience can also be defined as the experiential properties of an experience. These properties characterise the ‘way it is like’ for one to have that experience.³⁰

The term ‘intentionalism’ or ‘representationalism’ is sometimes used to refer to the view that there is a necessary connection between the representational content and the phenomenology of an experience. Some philosophers interpret this intentionalism as the view that phenomenal character is reducible to representational content.³¹ Other philosophers hold phenomenal character as somehow more basic than representational content and claim that it is phenomenology that determines representational content.³² The relation between phenomenology and content is often exemplified by cases of experience that have either the same phenomenology or same content, while differing in respect to the other.

Those who claim that phenomenology determines content usually base their arguments on the definition of contents as conceptual or propositional. So when we are presented with experiences that differ only in phenomenology but not in content, like in the case of two distinguishable shades of colour that still correspond to the same colour concept³³, we are driven to the conclusion that content does not suffice for phenomenology. The proponents of intentionalism, however, state that on the basis of the ‘transparency of perception’³⁴, there cannot be any changes to phenomenology that could not be tracked with representational

³⁰ Nida-Rumelin, 2011; Thompson, 2006.

³¹ Speaks, 2009. Jeff Speaks argues for this on the grounds of the (alleged) transparency of experience. His view is discussed more thoroughly in section 6.

³² See e.g. Siegel, 2010.

³³ It is argued that we have a finite number of colour concepts, but our phenomenology can present us with infinite number of shades of colour. Another similar example comes from colour constancy; we see a colour as stable even in cases of changing lighting conditions although the sensational properties change as well.

³⁴ The transparency of experiences is a claim that perceived properties are inseparable from the objects of those properties. For more on the transparency of experiences, see section 6.

content describing those changes. There are also views that are situated in the middle ground between this kind of strong intentionalism and the view that content is reducible to phenomenology.³⁵

We are also presented with the option of considering whether our cognitive apparatus affects the phenomenology of our experiences. Although it seems to be the dominant view that phenomenology is somehow independent of our concepts, there are some examples where our concepts can be said to affect ‘what it is like’ for one to have an experience. The phenomenon of concepts or cognition affecting perception or its phenomenology is called cognitive penetration of experience. Cognitive penetrability of perceptual content or phenomenology is also closely connected to how phenomenology or content is defined or understood. The issue is not, however, in the direct focus of this thesis.

³⁵ Siegel, 2010.

3. Views on perceptual content

“To ask what the objects of perception are is to ask, [...] what sorts of things the second relata of the perceptual awareness relation can be. To ask about the nature of the contents of perceptions is to ask, given that there are ways that perception represents the world as being—what are these ‘ways’?”³⁶

Having presented the central concepts of the discussion, I will now go on to present some general views on the nature of the contents of perceptual experiences. Chapters in this section will provide a rough overview of some of the most common types of views towards the conceptuality or propositionality of perceptual contents. In sections 5 to 8, I will discuss particular theories of these types and their specific details.

3.1. Standard conceptualism

Standard conceptualism, most usually called *conceptualism*, holds that the contents of perception are exclusively conceptual and propositional. Although the issues of conceptuality and propositionality are by themselves separate, views that advocate conceptual content but deny its propositionality are not common. This is perhaps because if contents are indeed exclusively conceptual, then it is difficult to see what other than a propositional structure could give conceptual content the unity that is required in describing ‘what is conveyed’ in the experience.

The main motivation for conceptualism is that it can provide us with a simple, rational justification of perceptual beliefs. As the basic argument for conceptualism goes, unless the contents of our experiences are conceptual and propositional, they cannot be the carriers of truth-value or rational justification and through that, make our knowledge of perceived objects

³⁶ Speaks, 2009, 540.

legitimate.³⁷ The definition of ‘concept’, of course, has great significance to the interpretation of conceptualism and its relation to closely related subjects like phenomenology. The view of John McDowell, as presented in his *Mind and World*, is perhaps the paradigm conceptualist view. McDowell’s view is presented in detail in section 5 of this study.

3.2 Externalism about perceptual contents

According to externalists about the contents of perceptual experiences, contents of experiences necessarily include a relation to the external objects or particulars. Externalism about perceptual contents aims to preserve the virtues of direct realism while escaping its weaknesses. In an externalist view, the direct connection to the perceived particulars is retained, while also including representational contents in experiential contents. Externalism is a type of disjunctivism since it differentiates between the contents of genuine and indiscernible non-veridical experiences. In section 6 I will present the externalist view of Jeff Speaks.

3.3. Nonconceptualism

Nonconceptualism is the view that the contents of perceptual experiences are *nonconceptual*. To be more accurate, nonconceptualism is the antithesis of conceptualism. Contrary to what one might think of its name, nonconceptualism does not necessarily claim that perceptual contents are altogether devoid of concepts. In order to avoid this kind of misconception Richard Heck proposed a distinction between *content view* nonconceptualism and *state view* nonconceptualism.³⁸ The content view claims that perceptual contents are indeed different in kind from conceptual contents that beliefs have. The state view on the other hand claims that

³⁷ Crane, 2009, 457; Bengson et al., 2011, 168.

³⁸ The same distinction, or at least a very similar one, is also present in Speaks (2005) renamed as *absolute* and *relative* nonconceptual contents.

perceptual contents can involve concepts that one does not possess. This means that the contents of perception are not restricted by the possession of concepts, but the content can still involve concepts.³⁹

The motivation for nonconceptual content is generally thought to be the idea that our perceptions have an immediate quality unmediated by any concepts, and that there is a richness of content in the world we perceive that cannot be expressed in concepts, at least in any real world situations.⁴⁰ However, the idea of nonconceptual content was originally presented for a reason quite separate from the features of our perceptions: Gareth Evans introduced the idea because he needed it in his theory of the references of demonstrative concepts, such as ‘that object’.⁴¹ Although Evans’ view differs from contemporary nonconceptualist views in some respects, his idea that there might be ways of representing the world independent of the thinkers conceptual capabilities inspired other philosophers to develop alternative accounts of nonconceptualism.⁴² In section 7 I will present the view of Christopher Peacocke, who has been perhaps the most prominent advocate of nonconceptualism.

3.4. Non-standard views

Some philosophers have taken what one might call a middle ground between standard conceptualism and nonconceptualism. John McDowell’s revised view is one such. He has recently claimed that the contents of perception are not propositional, but are nonetheless conceptual. His new view will be presented in section 8, along with the views of Charles Travis and Tim Crane.

³⁹ Heck, 2000. What Heck means by ‘content that involves concepts that that the perceiver does not have’ is just that the same content that requires concept possession in beliefs can be present in perception without such a requirement.

⁴⁰ Bengson et al., 2011, 167.

⁴¹ Evans, 1982. Heck, 2000, 493.

⁴² Bermúdez et al., 2012.

The figure below locates the views presented in this paper, on the axes of conceptual to nonconceptual and propositional to nonpropositional contents. The views are posited on the scales relative to whether they allow for contents of the other end of the scale in the contents of perceptual experiences. Christopher Peacocke’s view, for example, allows for contents on all of the four ends of the two axes to be included in perceptual contents. His view is posited on the nonconceptual and nonpropositional quarter because, in his account, nonconceptual content is the most fundamental type of content.

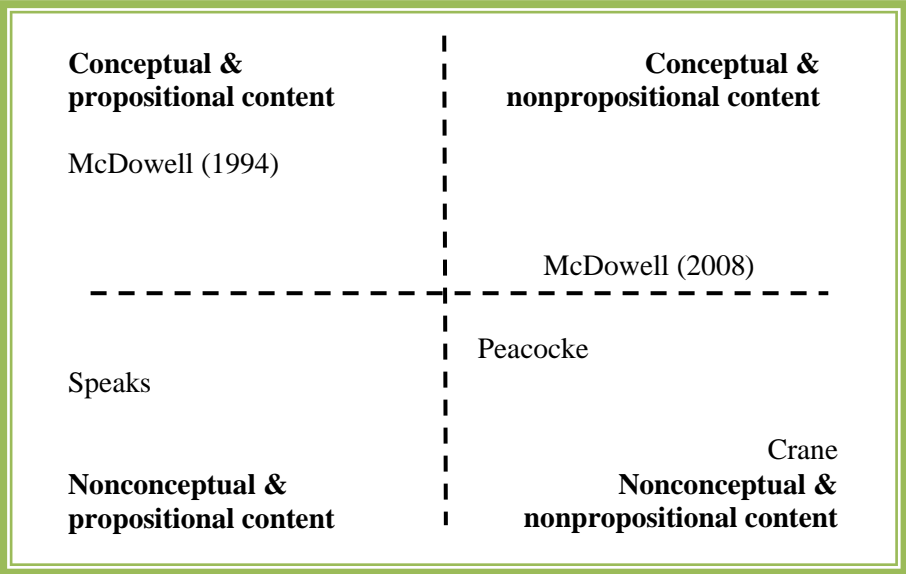


Figure 1: A simplified four-fold table of conceptuality and propositionality. Inserted are the positions of those views that can be positioned on the axes of conceptual-nonconceptual content and propositional-nonpropositional content.

4. Methods for analysing what content is

Each of the types of views on perceptual content presented in section 3 are argued for and defended by contemporary philosophers, some with greatly differing emphases. It seems that many of the advocates of conceptualism have taken seriously and responded to the challenge posed by nonconceptualism. The same is true for the advocates of nonconceptualism as well. One possible question that arises in the context of this context is whether the debate is merely terminological; a matter of where we draw the line of what it is we call perception or experience. There are, however, real points of conflict between the differing views, where they are unlikely to be explained only as terminological qualms. The general project, as it seems to me, is to shed light on how perceptual experiences act as mediators between, on one end, the external objects or the world, and on the other end, the resulting perceptual beliefs or other effects on us, influenced or caused by the experience.

While on the whole I will concentrate on examining the different theories in their own terms, I will also attempt to analyse the differing theories, which vary greatly on their implicit assumptions, through a unified method. I will do this by applying some general distinctions to the types of contents that the views propose, and by expanding on the consequences these different types of content have on what kinds of relations perception might fundamentally consist of.

4.1. Important distinctions

In addition to the questions of conceptuality and propositionality of perceptual contents, there are also other important concerns about the contents of perceptual experiences that should be kept in mind when discussing particular views. One of these is the distinction between *externalism* and *internalism* about mental contents. According to externalism, being in certain mental states, like having a belief, requires one to be related to the environment in a certain way. Internalism, also called individualism, is the denial of externalism. According to

internalism, the mental state in question is individuated solely by the intrinsic qualities of the individual.⁴³ Externalist contents are sometimes called *wide contents*, while internalist contents are called *narrow contents*. In the case of perceptual contents, externalism is the view that experience contents are individuated, at least partly, by the experiencing subject's relation to external particulars. Thus, the externalist view about perceptual contents can be also said to be a *relational* view, as opposed to a *representational* view. A representational view, on the other hand, is an internalist view as it supposes that perceptual contents are individuated by the representations of the experiencing subject. The distinction between externalism and internalism about perceptual content is closely connected to epistemological concerns about the justification of beliefs, and the externalist view is often argued for as providing a foundation for basic beliefs.

Some classical philosophical distinctions are also relevant to the discussion. These include at least the distinctions of entities into universals and particulars, abstract and concrete entities, and types and tokens.⁴⁴ Depending on the definition, *universals*, in contrast to *particulars*, can be characterised as “*having instances, being repeatable, being abstract, being acausal, lacking a spatio-temporal location and being predicable of things.*”⁴⁵ Whereas universals are repeatable and can be instantiated by different entities, *abstract* objects, as such, are neither spatial nor temporal. Numbers, for example, can be thought to be abstract but nonetheless particular entities. As opposed to *concrete* objects, abstract objects are neither mental i.e. mind-dependent, nor sensible.

The type-token distinction, on the other hand, is defined by the relation of *tokens* and the *types* they belong to. Types can be thought of as universals and tokens as their instances. Alternatively, types can be thought of as sets and tokens as members of those sets. Tokens and types should not be confused with *occurrences* of types or, in some cases, tokens. For example, the same word, a type, can have several occurrences in the same line of a poem. Similarly, the

⁴³ Lau & Deutsch, 2010.

⁴⁴ Although closely related, these distinctions should not be conflated.

⁴⁵ Wetzel, 2011.

same person, a token, can occur several times in a list or a sequence of persons.⁴⁶ Although all these distinctions are widely used in philosophy, their exact definitions are a matter of disagreement. Some definitions may present the distinctions as overlapping, especially universals with abstracta and particulars with concreta. Nonetheless, I see no reason not to employ these distinctions as a useful tool for analysing the differences between views about the contents of perceptual experiences.

4.2. Analysis of perceptual relations

Although different types of views on perceptual contents vary greatly on their emphases and assumptions, the general project in asking about the nature of perceptual contents seems to be to shed light on how perceptual experiences act as mediators between the world and the perceiving subject. At the very least, a view about the nature of perceptual contents must have some bearing on what we should think about the nature of this mediation. If we try to analyse different theories on what this mediation might consist of, we can differentiate at least three different kinds of relations that can figure in the descriptions of perceptual experiences. What I mean here by a ‘relation’ is not a relational property, at least not necessarily. Rather, what I am asking is how, for example, the objects, contents and beliefs are *related* in the acquisition of perceptual beliefs. Although it is somewhat opposite to the term’s conventional usage, I shall call these relations, for lack of a better term, *perceptual relations*. Engaging in this analysis should not be equated to claiming that perception is relational in nature, or that perceptual contents are solely individuated by the objects of perception. To me, it does not seem too far-fetched to assume that the answer to ‘what perceptual content is’ might help answer what experiences themselves are.

Firstly, some philosophers seem to understand perception, and perceptual content, primarily as something that provides justifications for perceptual beliefs. In a view like this, the perceptual relations include or consist of some kind of *justificatory relations* that occur between what

⁴⁶ Rodriguez-Pereyra, 2011; Laycock, 2011; Rosen, 2012; Wetzel, 2011.

justifies, such as states-of-affairs or facts, and what is justified, such as perceptual beliefs. The justification of beliefs appears to be independent both of the *particular* mental representations corresponding to the belief, at least as long as they exist, as well as of the *particular* way the justifying states of affairs are realised in nature, as long as they are realised. Hence, these relations in general seem to occur between entities that are externalist, abstract and not particular to the experience.⁴⁷ The conceptualism of John McDowell, presented later in section 5, is a paradigm example of a view that would posit such perceptual relations. According to it, for an experience to be justificatory towards beliefs in the discursive context, it must have contents that are such that they can be expressed as arguments in discourse – they must be of the same kind as the contents of beliefs. McDowell describes this kind as ‘things being thus and so’.

Secondly, *natural relations*, such as causal relations, can be posited between the external objects of perception and the sense organs of the perceiver. These relations continue in the production of individual physical changes in the brain of the perceiving subject, giving birth to the corresponding mental representations. Natural relations, in this sense, exist between entities that are externalist, concrete and particular to the experience. Relational views that advocate externalism about the contents of perceptual experience claim that being in a perceptual state with certain content essentially involves a relation to the perceived particulars. A relation like this should be seen as a natural relation in my distinction. In the externalist view of Jeff Speaks, as presented in section 6, these particulars are included in the contents of perception.

Thirdly, it is uncontroversial that information is conveyed in perception. In this sense we can posit different kinds of *informational relations* between entities in perception. The concept of information is notoriously difficult to define and there is enough disagreement about the nature of information to discourage me from attempting to give any explicit definition. Rather, I will try to avoid the need for this by presenting a liberal view of informational relations in perception. What I have in mind is simply the many ways a particular experience can inform

⁴⁷ In alternate views, justification may be thought as occurring between abstract propositions.

the one who has the experience. Perception of certain shapes or colours informs one of the relevant properties. Spatial experience informs one of one's surroundings and location. The experience of an object of fear or love informs one of it and consequently of the relevant psychological state. Perceived states-of-affairs or appearances may inform, or rather, give one reasons to believe something, whether that belief is justified or not. In this sense, informational relations are individuated independently of the correctness conditions of the acquired information. As opposed to justificatory and natural relations, the entities in informational relations are internalist, since the informational 'content' is dependent on the internal processing or interpretation of the information. Whereas information itself can be understood as universal and repeatable, informational relations seem to be individuated by the particular informed entities, such as intentional states or mental representations. Depending on its definition, phenomenology of perception could also be understood as consisting of informational relations.

If these three kinds of perceptual relations, or entities in these relations, are seen as somehow parallel, or as inhabiting different levels of explanation, they may be understood as related through *metaphysical relations*. Some theories of perceptual content posit relations like *supervenience* or *identity* between contents that occupy different levels of consciousness. In such a view, the perceptual relations, or some entities in them, could also be understood as being correspondingly related.

To say that *a* supervenes on *b*, where *a* could be a brain state and *b* a corresponding intentional state, would be to say that any changes in *b* can only occur with there being corresponding changes in *a*, but not all changes in *a* necessarily imply similar changes in *b*. Conversely, sameness of *a* implies sameness of *b* but not vice versa. To say that *a* is identical to *b* would be to say that changes to either one must have corresponding changes to the other.

Entities in different levels, or occurring in different types of relations, can also be seen as being in many-to-one relations to each other. For example, a perceptual belief in a justificatory relation could have several alternative corresponding mental representations. Respectively, a particular mental representation could have several alternative brain states causally linked to

the physical objects of the perception. However, the exact nature of relations between entities in different levels is connected to wider issues about, for example, consciousness. For this reason, and for the reason that relations between different levels are not actually perceptual relations, I will not discuss the issue in great detail in the confines of this thesis.

5. Standard conceptualism: John McDowell

The advocates of standard conceptualism argue that the contents of perceptual experience are propositions, as are the contents of other propositional attitudes as well. Propositional attitudes, like believing and intending, are attitudes or relations of certain type (belief attitude etc.) towards a proposition. A proposition can be the content of different types of attitudes; perceptual experience being one of them. John McDowell, among others, holds that contents of perceptual experiences are of the same type as the contents of beliefs and consequently can become contents of perceptual judgment or belief. This is how the contents of experience can directly justify perceptual beliefs. As these contents are also subject to conditions of veridicality, it is also possible to state perceptions as true or false according to McDowell⁴⁸.

5.1 McDowell's conceptualism

John McDowell is one of the most influential and discussed philosophers in the field of philosophy of perception. His conceptualist view presented in *Mind and World* has been criticised and further developed by several philosophers. Although McDowell has now changed his view from the one that he presented in *Mind and World*, it is still worthwhile to present it in this study as it is a standard view of conceptualism. McDowell is also explicit about the reasons for his theory.

In a particular experience in which one is not misled, what one takes in is *that things are thus and so*. *That things are thus and so* is the content of the experience, and it can

⁴⁸ McDowell, 1994. In later texts (2008) McDowell has changed his view and now supports a view of experience as having non-propositional content. Nonetheless he still maintains that contents of experience can directly justify perceptual beliefs. More on this in section 8.

also be the content of a judgement: it becomes the content of a judgement if the subject decides to take the experience at face value. So it is conceptual content.⁴⁹

Briefly stated, McDowell's view is that the contents of experience are conceptual and propositional, and of the same type as the contents of beliefs. Both the contents of belief and the contents of experience represent things as being 'thus and so'. His view stems from an attempt to resolve an 'anxiety' in modern philosophy. Namely an anxiety caused by the tension between *minimal empiricism* and 'a frame of mind' that seems to contradict it.

Minimal empiricism is the idea that our thoughts, specifically those that aim at judgment or fixation of belief, are somehow answerable to the world for their correctness. This answerability is realised through 'the tribunal of experience' so that our thinking is answerable to how things are. According to McDowell this tribunal can only be provided by rational and articulable evidence gained from perception.

The frame of mind that seems to conflict with minimal empiricism is the idea that taking something from the 'logical space of nature', where experience and other empirical descriptions reside, and placing it in the 'logical space of reasons, which is the realm of rational relations, would amount to a naturalistic fallacy. McDowell aims to dissolve this anxiety by positing experience as being in the 'logical space of reason'. In order to further elaborate this, I must first discuss the background of McDowell's view.

5.2. Theoretical background: Kant & Sellars

McDowell's interpretation of Immanuel Kant's concepts of the *receptivity* of the senses and *spontaneity* of thought is one of the main points of McDowell's view of conceptuality. This

⁴⁹ McDowell, 1994, 26.

classification comes from Kant's transcendental idealism⁵⁰. The following excerpt from Kant presents aspects in Kant's view on receptivity and spontaneity that are essential for McDowell's interpretation:

If the *receptivity* of our mind, its power of receiving representations [...] is to be entitled sensibility, then the mind's power of producing representations from itself, the *spontaneity* of knowledge, should be called the understanding. Our nature is so constituted that our *intuition* can never be other than sensible; that is, it contains only the mode in which we are affected by objects. The faculty, on the other hand, which enables us to *think* the object of sensible intuition, is the understanding. To neither of these powers may a preference be given over the other. Without sensibility no object would be given to us, without understanding no object would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.⁵¹

This idea of a necessary interplay of spontaneity with receptivity in perception is what motivates McDowell's view that the justification or tribunal of experience must come from the power of receptivity. However, receptivity would only be able to act as a justifying reason if it exists in the logical space of reason. This brings us to another important influence on McDowell's view, the view of Wilfrid Sellars.

Sellars advocated what he called psychological nominalism. According to it “*all* awareness of *sorts, resemblances, facts, etc.*, in short, *all* awareness of abstract entities – indeed, all awareness even of particulars – is a linguistic affair.”⁵² With his view, Sellars attacked the whole framework of givenness, according to which there is something immediately given to us, either through the senses or rationally, that would act as a foundation of our knowledge. “Now the idea that epistemic facts can be analysed without remainder—even ‘in principle’—into

⁵⁰ Transcendental idealism states that in experience even space and time are not independent of our sensibility, as opposed to transcendental realism. According to it, what we experience are only appearances, representations, not things in themselves.

⁵¹ Kant, 1929, 93.

⁵² Sellars, 1956, § 29.

non-epistemic facts, whether phenomenal or behavioural, public or private, with no matter how lavish a sprinkling of subjunctives and hypotheticals is, I believe, a radical mistake—a mistake of a piece with the so-called ‘naturalistic fallacy’ in ethics.”⁵³

5.3. Where McDowell departs from Kant & Sellars

What McDowell takes from Sellars is the idea that it is impossible to have a ‘given’ that would both firstly act as justifying other cognitive states and secondly be received by perception. If the given does justify other cognitive states or, in the case of perception, perceptual beliefs, it must have a propositional structure and stand in a justificatory relation to other propositionally structured beliefs. On the other hand, if the given is received by perception, it must have its own justification independent of its relation to other cognitive states or beliefs. Such a given would have to be both epistemically independent and efficacious, something that according to Sellars is contradictory. McDowell argues that positing a given would be expanding the logical space of reasons beyond the conceptual sphere. An expansion like this would make it questionable how the rational relations required in the space of reasons could be construed without concepts, without articulable reasons.

According to McDowell’s interpretation of Sellars, our sensory *impressions*⁵⁴ have merely indirect epistemological significance through sensory *appearings*. Impressions, or raw feels, are absolutely nonconceptual causal entities “given” in experience, whereas appearings are conceptual in nature. It is these appearances, instead of impressions, that rationally interact with spontaneity. This is where McDowell departs from Sellars: “Contrast how things look if we manage to conceive the rational answerability of beliefs to appearings as a rational

⁵³ Sellars, 1956, § 5.

⁵⁴ Such impressions would not be a case of *given* since these impressions have no (direct) epistemological significance and therefore cannot act as a foundation.

answerability to receptivity itself. Now we cannot be accused of merely shifting the mystery of empirical content from beliefs to appearances.”⁵⁵

An often quoted claim of Sellars states that “in characterizing an episode or a state as that of *knowing*, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says.”⁵⁶ Considering this, what McDowell denies is the idea that placing something in the logical space of reasons should be contrasted with giving an empirical description of it. Here McDowell elaborates on the Kantian idea that receptivity and spontaneity are inseparable in their functioning: “we must not suppose that receptivity makes an even notionally separable contribution to its co-operation with spontaneity.”⁵⁷ For McDowell, our conceptual capabilities are already in play in receptivity, in our perceptions. Due to the conceptuality of our human *second nature*, our receptivity itself is inherently placed in the logical space of reasons and can therefore provide us rational answerability to the world. We need not identify the dichotomy of the logical spaces⁵⁸ with a dichotomy between the *natural* and the *normative*. What we are left with is a theory that presents perceptual experience as representing something as ‘thus and so’. “In a particular experience in which one is not misled, what one takes in is *that things are thus and so*. *That things are thus and so* is the content of the experience, and it can also become the content of a judgement: it becomes the content of a judgement if the subject decides to take the experience at face value. [...] But *that things are thus and so* is also, if one is not misled, an aspect of the layout of the world: it is how things are.”⁵⁹

5.4. Critique of McDowell’s “synthesis”

⁵⁵ McDowell, 1994, 142.

⁵⁶ Sellars, 1956, § 36.

⁵⁷ McDowell, 1994, 51.

⁵⁸ The logical space opposing the logical space of reasons is the logical space of natural scientific concepts, according to McDowell.

⁵⁹ McDowell, 1994, 26.

McDowell's aim is to provide an account that preserves the main point of the Sellarsian idea that our epistemic claims cannot be abstracted and separated from the discursive practice of presenting and justifying such claims, while objecting to the Sellarsian 'two-component theory'⁶⁰ of perception. Instead, he attempts to provide a 'Kantian' link between perception and beliefs justified by it. Nevertheless, it is questionable whether this kind of 'simple' solution is truly viable. Merely stating that the Kantian idea of the interplay between receptivity and spontaneity resolves the problem of connecting the logical worlds does not actually explain how it does such a thing. If we follow the Kantian thought that spontaneity is inseparable from receptivity, that even time and space are 'sensible forms' of our perceptions, we are no wiser. We merely seem to be committing ourselves to a view where perceptual contents, if there even can be such things in that view, are always limited and influenced by our subjective concept possession⁶¹, rather than a view where the contents of perception are already in the discursive context of "justifying and being able to justify what one says".⁶²

According to McDowell, the possibility of being misled by experience does not mean we should not understand it as "taking how things are". Genuine perception is simply a case where "one is open to manifest facts, facts that obtain anyway and impress themselves on one's sensibility."⁶³ McDowell is also explicit in his regard of the non-veridical cases of perception as unimportant, and he sees no need to give an account of them. "The aim here is not to answer sceptical questions, but to begin to see how it might be intellectually respectable to ignore them, to treat them as unreal, in the way that common sense has always wanted to." McDowell's view claims to achieve this by postulating perception as openness to the world. This account of openness to the world bypasses the "anxieties of traditional epistemology"

⁶⁰ According to Sellars, nonconceptual impressions or sensations may *inform* perceptual beliefs but are not something that could stand in a justificatory relation to those beliefs. Talk of knowledge was, for Sellars, to be distinguished from talk of subjective personal experience.

⁶¹ That is, in addition to the *objective* human forms of time and space.

⁶² My criticism here is not directed towards Kant. There seem to be differences between Kant and McDowell in what 'conceptual' might mean in this context.

⁶³ McDowell, 1994, 29.

that would force us to believe that “the genuinely subjective states of affairs involved in perception can never be more than what a perceiver has in a misleading case”⁶⁴. But is it really believable that understanding perception as openness to the world simply makes misleading experiences unintelligible or unreal? It seems questionable to claim that giving a description of misleading or non-veridical experiences would be a case of falling into scepticism. It appears that McDowell does this merely to avoid making his disjunctivism explicit. After all, if the contents of genuine experiences are perceivable facts, then the contents of non-veridical experiences are merely misleading, misunderstood appearances. If phenomenology in McDowell’s view is determined by content, then it seems that, to McDowell, even the phenomenology of experiences entails of facts impressing on the perceiver.⁶⁵

5.5. On the veridicality of experiences and the constraints on the conceptual

The most that McDowell gives of a positive description of non-veridical experiences is the following.

Of course we are fallible in experience, and when experience misleads us there is a sense in which it intervenes between us and the world; but it is a crucial mistake to let that seem to deprive us of the very idea of openness – fallible openness – to the world, as if we had to replace that idea with the idea of emissaries that either tell the truth or lie.⁶⁶

One problem here, I believe, is to assume that perception is simply either veridical or non-veridical. Errors in perception come in degrees. There is, after all, a great difference between an experience that contains, say, a slight miscalculation of distance to an object, a non-veridical experience in the strict meaning of the word, and an experience that represents that

⁶⁴ McDowell, 1994, 112.

⁶⁵ McDowell, 1994, 113.

⁶⁶ McDowell, 1994, 143.

object as something else than what it is, or as nothing at all. If the object of experience in question is a car speeding towards one, while one is about to cross the road, the difference may be a matter of life and death. Additionally, it would be senseless to name all experiences that are inaccurate, even to the slightest degree, as non-veridical, as a case of our experiences lying to us – It would be senseless to say these are not ‘genuine glimpses of the world’ at all.

McDowell’s view is not the only way to escape ‘unconstrained coherentism’⁶⁷ either. Nonetheless, we might need concepts in the contents of perception to do this. However, we need not necessarily assume that conceptual capabilities are completely unconstrained, even if we deny that perceptual contents are entirely conceptual and propositional. Alternatively, we can assume that there are concepts in play in perception, without assuming that that is all there is in play. We may not need to flatten our perceptions as something that can only involve contents that have linguistic expressions.⁶⁸

5.6. Peacocke: Arguments for and against conceptualism

In his articles ‘Nonconceptual Content Defended’ and ‘Phenomenology and Nonconceptual’ Content, Christopher Peacocke presents and discusses arguments that tell for or against McDowell’s conceptualism, and conceptualism in general. One such argument, commonly presented against conceptualism, is the argument that conceptual contents cannot capture the ‘fine-grained content’ of perception. What is meant by this is that our perceptions can have

⁶⁷ Unconstrained coherentism is “the thesis that there are no external rational constraints on exercises of spontaneity.” McDowell, 1994, 143.

⁶⁸ McDowell does indeed hold that for the contents of experience to act as reasons for beliefs, they must be articulable. (McDowell, 1994, 166.) As a more serious consequence of this, it seems even *perceivable facts* or *states-of-affairs* must conform to this articulability requirement. If articulations of perceived states-of-affairs are seen as having the same content as the perception of these, we might end up with the conclusion that we can literally *give* states-of-affairs in discourse. However, it seems more reasonable to say that we can talk *about* states-of-affairs than talk states-of-affairs themselves. The same concern could be extended to perceptions of, or about, states-of-affairs.

contents that have a richer variety of perceived properties than what our concepts can differentiate. One way for a conceptualist to answer this problem would be to say that the fine-grained content is captured by *demonstrative* concepts, like ‘that shade of red’. However according to Peacocke, these *supplemented* demonstratives actually slice finer than our perceptions. Two people that have differing concepts might experience the same shade but one would refer to it as ‘that red’ while other would refer to it as ‘that scarlet’. One way to escape this problem would be to use *unsupplemented* demonstratives, like ‘that’. These would slice just as finely as the fine-grained properties of perception. The problem with this solution is that it is difficult for a conceptualist to fix the reference of unsupplemented demonstratives. In addition, according to Peacocke, the reference of a demonstrative concept is the *particular* instance of representation, not the way the object or property is represented. And representational contents are in the first place meant to pick out non-particular features of experiences.⁶⁹ Nonetheless, even if this alternative remained for a conceptualist to develop, it would not save McDowell. As Peacocke points out, McDowell’s conceptualism proposes to capture the fine-grained content by the conceptual content of a *recognitional capacity*.⁷⁰ Unlike demonstratives, these recognitional concepts would need to rely on memory capacities. According to Peacocke, this makes them “unsuitable for capturing the fine-grained content of perception.”⁷¹

As an argument against nonconceptualism, McDowell presented what Peacocke calls ‘The Argument from Articulability’. According to the argument, a nonconceptualist position would sever the tie between “reasons for which a subject thinks as she does and reasons she can give for thinking that way”. For a perceptual content to function as a reason it “must be no less conceptual than what it is a reason for” and that reason can simply be because “it looks that way”.⁷² Peacocke defends against the argument by noting that although the demonstrative ‘that way’ is indeed conceptual, the conceptuality of the demonstrative thought ‘that way’ should not be mixed with the conceptuality of the *reference* of that demonstrative. “The

⁶⁹ Peacocke, 2001a, 247.

⁷⁰ McDowell, 1994, 57.

⁷¹ Peacocke, 2001b, 611.

⁷² McDowell, 1994, 165-166.

conceptual character of the demonstrative is entirely consistent with the nonconceptual character of the way to which it refers.”⁷³ Consequently, the argument is indifferent to whether perceptual contents themselves are conceptual or nonconceptual.

McDowell also argues that nonconceptual content of perception could not explain how we can have ‘seeming glimpses’ of the world, that is, experiences understood as providing awareness of features of the objective reality.⁷⁴ Seeming glimpses are available only to a “subject [who] has the conception of them as revealing aspects of a spatial world [...] in which he can move around, can experience from different positions, and build some idea of its layout from successive perceptions thereof”⁷⁵, and this would require conceptual capabilities. This however only works as an argument against a nonconceptualist who holds that nonconceptual representational contents of experience can also be present in a creature without any rudimentary concepts. Peacocke, among others, rejects this kind of autonomy from conceptual contents. A nonconceptualist position can regard “conceptual contents and non-conceptual contents as forming a local holism.” In a nonconceptual position like this, “neither kind of content can be given a constitutive elucidation without reference to the other. Another thing that McDowell claims nonconceptualism is unable to explain is how experience can “come under the self-scrutiny of active thinking”⁷⁶. But as Peacocke notes, the presence of nonconceptual contents need not preclude rational scrutiny. One is able to demonstratively think about the way the world is presented in experience without the requirement of this way of presenting being conceptual.

In addition to this, McDowell claims that nonconceptualism forces one into a *sideways-on* view of concepts. According to McDowell, one of the purposes for a nonconceptualist view is to individuate concepts without circularity, and any noncircularity requirement is “in effect an insistence on sideways-on accounts.”⁷⁷ McDowell understands sideways-on accounts as views

⁷³ Peacocke, 1998, 383.

⁷⁴ McDowell, 1994, 54-55.

⁷⁵ Peacocke, 1998, 386.

⁷⁶ McDowell, 1994, 53.

⁷⁷ McDowell, 1994, 168.

that claim that there is an outer boundary around the conceptual space of reasons, “with a reality outside impinging inwards on the system” by causal impingements. And as McDowell claims, causal impingements could not stand in rational relations that are required for this individuation. In McDowell’s view, a sideways-on view is avoided by relying on the interplay of receptivity and spontaneity in perception, thus presenting a way that receptivity can act in the space of reasons. Peacocke, on the other hand, argues that there is, in some sense, some boundary around the conceptual, but since he distinguishes the conceptual from a non-empty class of nonconceptual contents, “the boundary does not have the objectionable features of the boundary in a sideways-on account.”⁷⁸ The impingements across that boundary need not be merely causal. It seems that, contrary to what McDowell claims, the problems that one faces if one abandons conceptualism are not actually compelling.

According to Peacocke, among the reasons for nonconceptualism, “the most fundamental reason [...] lies in the need to describe correctly the overlap between human perception and that of some of the nonlinguistic animals.” Peacocke argues that this overlap is not simply a matter of analogy. For instance, in the case of representing the distance of a flat brown surface from oneself, the representational properties would be literally the same between human and non-linguistic animal perceivers. “If the lower animals do not have states with conceptual content, but some of their perceptual states have contents in common with human perceptions, it follows that some perceptual representational content is nonconceptual.” Furthermore, contrary to McDowell’s claims⁷⁹, these contents can be objective, or concern the objective world, without the requirement that the perceiving subject has a conception of objectivity. A nonhuman animal can have objective representational contents that “contribute to the construction of the animal’s cognitive map of the layout of the world, and thereby contribute to the explanation of the animal’s actions under descriptions that relate them to the environment.” A creature can enjoy objective contents, if it is capable of building up, over time, a representation of the layout of its world. On the other hand, someone who has even a

⁷⁸ Peacocke, 1998, 388.

⁷⁹ McDowell claims that animals cannot have any kind of representational contents, since these are limited to those with the rational powers of spontaneity. See e.g. McDowell, 1994, 121.

rudimentary conception of objectivity can understand that the methods with which one builds up these representations are latched on to independently existing objects and properties. “Those objects and properties may be discovered to have characteristics going beyond the characteristics attributed by application of the canonical methods”⁸⁰ of building representations of the world. Rational critical thinking requires one to have some grasp of objectivity, but perception does not.

5.7. The nature of content in McDowell’s view

At this point we should examine McDowell’s view through the methods presented in section 4. Firstly, the distinctions I presented can shed light on what the contents of experiences are in McDowell’s view. In his view, perceptual experience is openness to manifest facts. When these perceived facts are taken at face value, one acquires directly justified factual beliefs with the same contents as those of the experiences. These contents then are shareable through linguistic expressions of those experiences or beliefs. In a simple case, the content of a sentence is the same proposition as the one that is given as the content of the experience which is described by the sentence. But this is the case only in veridical perceptions. As he gives no direct account of them, we can only surmise what contents of nonveridical experiences are. What seems clear is that they are of a different type than the contents of veridical experiences. Hence, all we can say with certainty is that McDowell is a disjunctivist.

⁸⁰ Peacocke, 2001, 614.

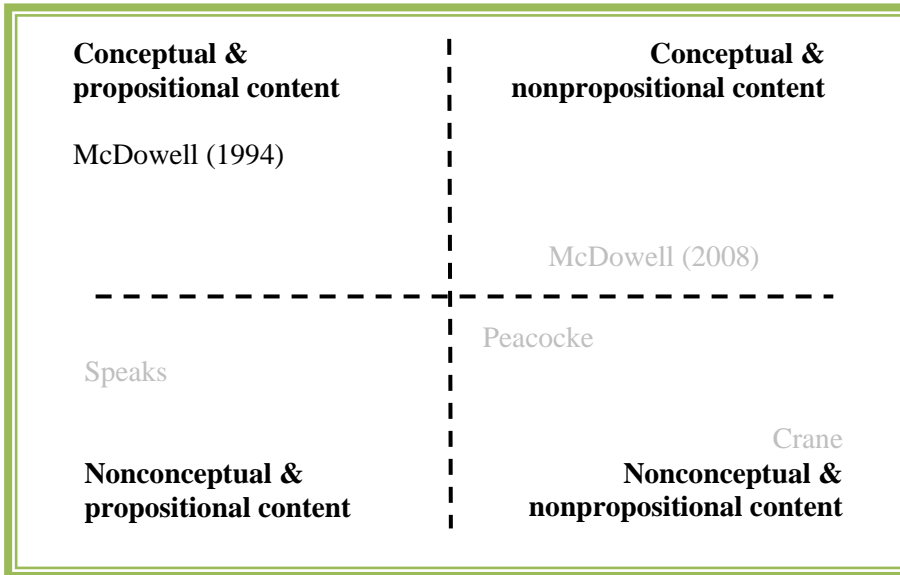


Figure 2: In McDowell's standard conceptualist view, the contents of perceptual experiences are exclusively conceptual and propositional.

McDowell's characterisation of contents gives us a clear way to apply some of the distinctions, while applying others is more complicated. Experiential contents seem to be abstract universals, as they are repeatable nontemporal entities, but whether they are types or tokens, or externalist or internalist contents, seems to be unclear. On the one hand, contents seem to be types since they are repeatable in experiences and beliefs. On the other hand, if they consist of propositions, they could be understood as abstract tokens as well. Whichever contents are, the issue seems to be dependent on how types and tokens are defined. McDowell's disjunctivism implies that the contents are externalist since their veridicality, and consequently their very nature, relies on the existence of external perceivable facts. On the other hand, he is not explicit with his disjunctivism; external particulars are not included in his view of perceptual contents and he never considers contents as anything else than representational. Thus, we have reason to see him as an internalist about contents as well. The question of externalism and internalism about perceptual contents does not seem to be answerable, or perhaps even relevant, from the viewpoint of McDowell's account.

McDowell's view of perceptual contents has two evident weaknesses. The first one is the weakness of standard conceptualism in general: His view does not allow for the possibility of any other kinds of perceptual representations except those that are already fully conceptualised.

This is not only a problem in explaining similarities between animal and human perceptions. It also presents a very strict requirement for ordinary everyday perceptions of adult human beings. In his view, one could never simply perceive an object, such as a Cardinal bird, except by perceiving the state of affairs concerning that object.⁸¹ The second weakness is related to his disjunctivism: Since nonveridical perceptions can be, and often are, mistakenly thought of as being veridical, we cannot actually always know whether the contents of our experiences are perceived facts or just misleading appearances. If we cannot know what the contents of our perceptual experiences are, how could they be something *conveyed to us*? And if the veridicality of contents is not just unknowable but instead perhaps verifiable through iterations of perceptions, would we not be better served with a Sellarsian view where contents are appearances that have only indirect justificatory powers?

5.8 Perceptual relations in McDowell's view

McDowell's primary emphasis in his view of perceptual content is on the rationality and justificatory powers of perception. Consequently, justificatory relations are at the focus of understanding the perceptual relations in McDowell's view. This justificatory relation clearly occurs between justifying states-of-affairs and the perceptual beliefs that are justified with these. However, it also seems that there is an informational relation embedded in his view of perceptual justification. What are conveyed to the subject in experience are conscious and conceptual perceptual beliefs. Moreover, as McDowell is a disjunctivist, these are also justified and true beliefs.

What should we think of cases where what is conveyed is nonveridical? As a quietist, McDowell ignores such cases and tells us we should ignore them as well. But if we consider the perceptual relations in such cases, the justificatory relation would still be valid. The only difference to the genuine perception is that the state-of-affairs would be missing, and thus the relation would make the nonveridical perceptual belief unjustified. This seems a desirable

⁸¹ This weakness seems to be the reason he has changed his view on perceptual contents. For more, see section 8.

consequence for McDowell's view. What, then, should we think of the informational relation? Once again, McDowell's quietism does not tell us much. At first sight, he appears to be left with two alternatives. Firstly, he could posit the informational relation as occurring between the relevant state-of-affairs and the perceptual belief. In nonveridical cases what would be conveyed would be the nonveridicality of the experience, and thus the subject would not end up with an unjustified belief that merely seems justified. The problem of course would be that the experience would not actually be nonveridical. On the contrary, it would be a veridical experience of the lack of certain state-of-affairs, and the informational relation would be necessarily truth-bearing. That would mean a view where subjective error in perception is impossible. The second alternative would be that the informational relation occurs between seemings or appearances and perceptual beliefs. But as seemings or appearances do not necessarily correspond to the states-of-affairs, the informational relation might relate nonveridical seemings or appearances to perceptual beliefs, which would thus be only seemingly justified. If nonveridical beliefs are only seemingly justified, a sceptic could argue that the same must also apply to veridical beliefs, and that would be unacceptable to McDowell.

But it seems that the informational relation in McDowell's view is a disjunction of both of the above alternatives: In veridical cases perceptual beliefs are related to genuine states-of-affairs whereas in nonveridical cases they are related to merely seeming states-of-affairs. While this may help defend against sceptical arguments about the justification, it would be a strange description of the psychological reality of perception. Also, in the case of inaccurate perceptual representations of only some aspects of experience, we might end up with both of the relations included in the experience; perceptual belief would be partly related to states-of-affairs and partly related to seeming states-of-affairs. But would this not make the belief only partly justified? That does not seem to be the way justification works, and it would be unlikely that McDowell could ever accept something like partial justification.

The justificatory relation thus seems to work best when it is not accompanied by any informational relations. This seems to be one reason for McDowell's quietist disjunctivism. It

is much easier to explain justification of perceptual beliefs when the difficult cases, where one's perceptual beliefs are actually untrue and unjustified, are bracketed and ignored.

6. Propositional content: Jeff Speaks

The question of whether the contents of perceptual experiences are propositional is separate from the question of conceptuality. Some philosophers, Jeff Speaks among them, argue for propositional content which is nonetheless nonconceptual. Other philosophers have argued that propositional content must be conceptual.⁸²

6.1. Jeff Speaks' Russellianism

In his article 'Transparency, Intentionalism and the Nature of Perceptual Content', Jeff Speaks argues that the contents of perceptual experience are Russellian propositions.⁸³ Russellian propositions, in contrast to Fregean propositions, have individuals, properties and relations, instead of concepts of these, as their constituents. Common to many other advocates of Russellianism, Speaks' arguments are motivated by the idea of *transparency* of perception. According to this idea, or transparency intuition, perceptually experienced properties can only be experienced as instantiated by an individual. In seeing the ocean, the blue of the ocean is not experienced as a property of the experience, but rather as a property of the ocean itself.⁸⁴

Speaks begins his argumentation by presenting G.E. Moore's examination of an experience of a blue surface, the point of which is that we cannot find anything else through introspection of our experiences, other than what the experience is an experience of. According to Speaks, the nature of perception is transparent to us in this sense. From this he draws 'the principle of

⁸² Alex Byrne, for example, argues that perceptual contents are propositional and conceptual, but contrary to McDowell's view that they do not justify beliefs. Byrne defines conceptualism in the pleonastic sense. (Byrne, 2004)

⁸³ Fred Dretske, Gilbert Harman and Michael Tye, among others, have presented somewhat similar versions of Russellianism.

⁸⁴ According to Brad Thompson (2006), all Russellian views of perception, or at least those that have prima facie plausibility, are motivated by the transparency intuition.

transparency' for the contents of perception. Speaks claims that 'the principle of transparency' can be used to argue for *intentionalism* and the view that the contents of perception are Russellian propositions. Speaks defines 'intentionalism' as "the view that there is a necessary connection between perceptual content and perceptual phenomenology" and 'Russellian contents' as "structured objects the constituents of which are worldly items such as objects and properties."⁸⁵

Speaks' principle of transparency states that in introspection of our perceptual experiences, the only things we can find are the *objects* and *properties*⁸⁶ that are represented in the experience. From this principle, he draws the supervenience of phenomenal character on the content of experience and the principle he calls *minimal intentionalism*: "If two experiences differ in phenomenal character, they differ in content."

In the argument for Russellian content of experience, Speaks takes the only other viable alternative to be Fregean propositions, which consist of ways of thinking about, or modes of presentation of, objects and properties. A single Russellian proposition would then have several corresponding Fregean propositions that differ from each other by their mode of presentation. However, coupled with the phenomenology/sense principle⁸⁷ two differing Fregean propositions that correspond to a single Russellian proposition would have to have the same phenomenology, which is contradictory or at least makes the idea of Fregean propositions unintelligible. Therefore, we are left with Russellian content as the content of experiences.

If we follow Speaks' arguments, we should either abandon the transparency intuition or accept Russellianism. There are, however, reasons to question his arguments, the most important of which is that the arguments seem to assume what they are trying to prove in the first place. I will come to these points below.

⁸⁵ Speaks, 2009, 540-545.

⁸⁶ Speaks evidently includes relations, or relational properties, into the class of properties.

⁸⁷ "If two experiences have the same phenomenology, then they have the same sense." (Speaks, 2009, 548)

6.2. Arguments for transparency and intentionalism

Let us examine Speaks' arguments step-by-step. The first step he takes is to reinterpret Moore's claim of transparency of perception as applicable not only to objects but to contents as well.

- (i) Moore's claim about the transparency of perception to its objects can be adapted to apply to perceptual contents instead.

Although Speaks does not give any clear arguments for his reinterpretation of Moore's original claim, depending on the definition of 'content', the transformation of the claim from one that concerns only objects to one that concerns contents is less than obvious. If one presumes that contents of experience are indeed Russellian as Speaks does, then the only change in the transformation from Moore's to Speaks' version of the claim is that experience is transparent only to those objects and properties that are presented in the experience. This does not seem like a leap at all and might be easily accepted if one assumes Moore's transparency⁸⁸ and Russellianism.

However, it is much more difficult to argue for this transformation if one does not presume that contents are Russellian. Take, for example, Fregean contents. Fregean contents differ from Russellian contents in that the perceived objects and properties are given in a certain mode of presentation. If we accept Moore's original claim then those modes of presentation would not be, in Speaks' terms, *available to introspection*⁸⁹. However, an advocate of Fregean contents has no need to ascribe to Moore's original claim, as it has no notion of the way the

⁸⁸ There are reasons to doubt the transparency claim. As Crane points out, if I remove my glasses, or turn off the light in the room, I do not experience the objects I'm seeing as blurry or dark. Contrary to what the transparency-intuition claims, it is the experience itself that is blurry or dark. (Crane, 2006, 130.)

⁸⁹ Speaks understands transparency claims as claims about being available to introspection.

object is presented to the perceiver. Nonetheless that would not mean that the advocate of Fregean content would have to ascribe to (i) either: If a Fregean theory argues for the introspectability of the modes of presentation, it would not require it to assume that the modes of presentation are completely transparent. I see it as a reasonable alternative for an advocate of Fregean contents to assume that the modes of presentation can be available to introspection if brought to attention, but that they are not necessarily immediately available and certainly not all the modes at once.

Theories of nonconceptual content of perceptual experience, on the other hand, would deny, by their very definition, that all contents of experience are conceptual and immediately available to introspection. All these considerations make it doubtful that any other than an advocate of Russellianism would need to ascribe to transparency claims about perceptual contents. Speaks continues:

- (ii) Transparency: Nothing is available to introspection other than the objects represented as in one's environment, and the properties they are represented as having.

This claim is merely the substitution of 'contents' by 'objects and properties' and therefore is dependent on the assumption that experience contents are Russellian. Consequently, (ii) is ineffective as an argument against any other than a Russellian.

- (iii) Transparency/Difference Principle: If there is an introspectable difference between two experiences, then there is a difference in the objects and properties, those two experiences represent as in one's environment.

It seems reasonable that this follows from (ii). Next Speaks connects the issue of phenomenology to introspection:

- (iv) If two experiences differ in phenomenal character, there is an introspectable difference between them.

- (v) Minimal intentionalism: If two experiences differ in phenomenal character, they differ in content.

Step (iv) depends directly on how Speaks understands ‘introspection’. As Speaks does not give an explicit definition, we can only draw conclusions from the way in which he uses the term. For Speaks, introspection is an ability that, at the very least, enables one to analyse the objects and properties given in perceptual experiences. Speaks also presents time-unrestricted and interpersonal versions⁹⁰ of minimal intentionalism which implies that introspection is something that can actually compare experience contents between past and present experiences and can even enable comparisons of experience contents between subjects. These considerations imply that Speaks’ introspection concerns only conceptual content and that it is not something that could reach contents that deal with any nonconceptual aspects, making the arguments ineffective against the advocates of such views.

Following from the earlier arguments, in claim (v) we are led to Speaks’ version of intentionalism. Here we should note that while (v) appears to be a claim about contents in general, whether it is Russellian or not, it still relies on the assumption of Russellianism. It assumes that introspection of the phenomenal character of an experience can present us with the objects and properties given in the experience and that these objects and properties are the contents of that experience. Consequently, Speaks’ arguments for transparency and intentionalism do not seem convincing unless one subscribes to those Russellian assumptions.⁹¹

6.3. Arguments for Russellianism

It is only at this point that the arguments turn to Russellianism itself. As the only contesting view for the contents of experience, Speaks presents Fregeanism, the view that the contents of

⁹⁰ I will not examine these further in the confines of this thesis.

⁹¹ Speaks, 2009, 541 – 543.

experiences are Fregean propositions. According to Speaks, there is “wide, though not universal, agreement that these are the two most plausible views of the contents of mental states.”⁹² As the third, abandoned, alternative he presents possible-worlds propositions. Any other than propositional contents do not seem to come into consideration for Speaks.

To argue for Russellianism and against Fregeanism, Speaks presents the case of puzzling pairs. Fregean contents, as we recall, are contents that are individuated by their senses, or modes of presentation of objects and their properties.⁹³ Puzzling pairs are pairs of Fregean propositions that differ in sense but correspond to a single Russellian proposition. Two sentences that differ only in respect to the concept they use in referring to the same object would express a puzzling pair. For a Fregean, Speaks claims, these senses play the role of contents and hence determine the phenomenology experiences.

- (vi) Phenomenology/Sense principle: If two experiences have the same phenomenology, then they have the same sense.

This seems reasonable, although not necessary, for a Fregean to agree on. A Fregean might however disagree on what comes next. There is a classic example, from Frege, of two sentences that have differing senses although they only differ by the names they give to planet Venus. Phosphorus, the morning star, and Hesperus, the evening star, both are names that refer to the same object, namely planet Venus, but they are different in sense. One presents Venus as the evening star and the other as the morning star. Speaks, however, brings this example to a different light. According to him, for each Russellian proposition attributing a property to an object there are “many Fregean propositions which are ‘about’ the same object and property but differ with respect to the mode of presentation of the property.” If one considers a puzzling pair of two Fregean propositions *fp1* and *fp2*, corresponding to a single Russellian proposition *rp*, then due to the phenomenology/sense principle (vi), *fp1* and *fp2* must have differing phenomenal characters. Here Speaks brings up the Transparency/Difference principle (iii) he

⁹² Speaks, 2009, 545.

⁹³ See chapter 2.6.

previously argued for.⁹⁴ According to (iii), both *fp1* and *fp2*, which refer to the same objects and properties, must have the same phenomenology, something that directly conflicts with (vi) and the initial premise that *fp1* and *fp2* are distinct Fregean propositions. The phenomenology of experiencing Hesperus does not differ from the phenomenology of experiencing Phosphorus, or Venus, for that matter.⁹⁵

According to Speaks, the only plausible way a Fregean might defend against this would be to block (vi). This, on the other hand, would only make the notion of the Fregean sense of an experience “unacceptably obscure”. If the mode of presentation of an experience does not even affect phenomenology, then the difference between *fp1* and *fp2* is indeed puzzling, “in what could such a difference of mode of presentation consist?” For Speaks, the contents of experience are intimately linked with its veridicality conditions, and consequently, puzzling pairs would need to have differing veridicality conditions even though they would have the same phenomenology and Russellian ‘content’. Here, Speaks contends, we should reject Fregeanism and turn to Russellianism, as it is more consistent with intentionalism.⁹⁶

6.4. Externalist contents and *de re* thoughts

At this point, I believe we should further examine what content is for Speaks. Firstly, we should approach the question of whether Speaks’ Russellian contents are conceptual or not. The following passage is revealing; “The core difference between Russellian and Fregean

⁹⁴ As I argued in the previous pages, the arguments for the Transparency/Difference Principle are essentially based on the assumption of Russellianism. As his argumentation for Russellianism relies on this principle, it significantly decreases the power of his arguments against Fregeanism.

⁹⁵ The issue of cognitive penetration of experience is not approached here, even though the example of Hesperus and Phosphorus would be quite useful in that issue: Although both names refer to the same planet, the Greeks who used those names were not aware of that. They would have been unlikely to accept that seeing one is the same seeing the other, no matter how similar they seem. After all, apart from their location in the night sky, many stars are indistinguishable to the naked eye.

⁹⁶ Speaks, 2009, 545 – 553.

views of content is that the Russellian thinks of contents as built up from worldly items like objects and properties, whereas the Fregean thinks of contents as built up from modes of presentation of, or concepts of, these items.”⁹⁷ This difference is perhaps easier to understand in the context of propositions as the semantic values of sentences. In structured proposition views, such as the Russellian or the Fregean one, propositions have as their constituents the semantic values of expressions occurring in that sentence. The difference between Russellian and Fregean views of propositions would then be that the Russellian view maintains that these semantic values, i.e. the constituents of propositions, are individuals, properties and relations, whereas the Fregean view claims that they are modes of presentations or concepts of individuals, properties and relations.⁹⁸ The same characterisations should apply to propositions as contents of perceptual experiences as well.

If Fregean contents are built up from concepts and Russellian contents are not, in what way then do the Russellian contents represent the objects and properties in that experience? At first glance, we are left with two alternatives. The first alternative is that Russellian contents consist of the perceived external objects and properties themselves, and consequently, are not representational at all, making Russellianism a version of direct realism. In that case, Speaks’ view would actually be a theory of *relational* content of instead of representational content. However, contrary to this, Speaks discusses of “ways that perception represents the world”.⁹⁹

The other obvious alternative is that Russellian content is indeed representational and that this representation is somehow purely extensional. Here, the content of one’s experience would not represent the objects of experience as anything, or in any way, instead it would provide a direct access to the perceived objects and their properties. In such a view, perception would not represent objects even as demonstrative ‘that’ or ‘that thing’. But how could a view like this explain the indistinguishability of the contents of hallucinations from the contents of veridical experiences? Perhaps the former merely represents mental objects while the latter

⁹⁷ Speaks, 2009, 546.

⁹⁸ King, 2011.

⁹⁹ See the quote in the beginning of section 3 above.

represents actual external objects. The problem, of course, would be to explain how perception consisting of pure representation could mistake internal objects for external ones. Then again, if the extensional representation is purely individuated by the extension to the represented external object or property, it seems we would be getting closer to the first alternative, a relational theory. But apparently Speaks chooses neither alternative. For Speaks, the content of an experience is both representational and relational.

Speaks differentiates between contents that are phenomenology-affecting and phenomenology-silent. He proposes that, given the existence of perceptually indistinguishable objects, we can easily find cases “in which two experiences differ in content but not in phenomenology”. In these cases, the differences are either in phenomenology-affecting contents and the differences are too small to generate a difference in phenomenology¹⁰⁰, or in phenomenology-silent contents, that by definition cannot cause changes in phenomenology. What then does Speaks mean by these phenomenally silent contents? Speaks believes that external particulars can and do figure in the contents of perceptions but not in their phenomenology. His view is externalist about content and internalist about phenomenology. The content, however, is not purely external but instead consists both of internalist phenomenology-affecting contents and externalist, phenomenology-silent contents. The content of a perceptual experience, it seems, also includes the perceived objects and properties, or at least a direct reference to them.

The basis for this claim appears to be the Perception/Availability Principle, which states that the contents of experience are differentiated by the thoughts they make available for the subject of the perception. As *de re* thoughts of an object are distinct from merely thinking of it under a certain description, thus must also the thoughts that are made available by indistinguishable experiences of differing objects be distinct e.g. in the case of

¹⁰⁰ A paradigm example is distinguishing between shades of colour i.e. the difference between RED4191 and RED4192 would be indistinguishable to the human eye but the difference between RED2549 and Red4191 would be easily noticeable.

indistinguishable cases of veridical perception and hallucination¹⁰¹. This leads Speaks to claim that, in addition to what is ‘given’ or conveyed in the experience, contents are also directly individuated by external particulars.

6.5. The veridicality conditions of externalist contents

The main problem with Speaks’ externalist view is that it seems to lose the meaning of the term ‘content’ itself. As Tim Crane puts it:

The basic commitment one incurs in saying that experience has content [...] is the commitment that experiences represent the world. This way of introducing content is in line with most contemporary uses of the term. For those who reject the idea that experiences represent the world tend also to reject the idea that experiences have content.¹⁰²

The term ‘content’ was brought to replace the talk of the external objects of experience with the talk of ‘what is conveyed’ or ‘given’ in experience, or in Speaks’ own words, what the “ways that perception represents the world as being” are. Speaks argues for Russellianism as such that it includes, or so we must assume, the representations of the perceived objects. Consequently, in adding the external particulars – what we can call the real objects of perception – to the contents of experience, the contents become bipartite. Speaks himself presents this in the distinction between two kinds of contents: On one side there is content which is internalist, phenomenology-affecting and hallucination-available, on the other side there is content which is externalist, phenomenology-silent and hallucination-unavailable. Both types of contents figure as contents of perceptual experiences.

¹⁰¹ In the case of veridical perception and hallucination, the first does, while the second does not, put one in a position to have *de re* thoughts about the object in question.

¹⁰² Crane, 2009, 456-457.

Regardless of its virtues, this division entails problems of its own. It seems that the contents of an experience must always include the same object or property both as how it is presented to the perceiver and as it is in itself. This makes it very difficult to understand what this content could actually be and what role it fulfils. Perhaps the most accurate description would be to call it ‘what really happened’, or ‘the truth’ about the experience in question. The externalist contents would clearly not be directly available to the subject of the perception¹⁰³, whereas the internalist contents would not be available to anyone else who is not aware of *all* the phenomenology-affecting contents that were given in the experience. Crane fittingly calls an externalist view like this a ‘mixed’ view of intentionality as it presents a mental state as sometimes being a relation, and sometimes not.¹⁰⁴

The advantage of this bipartite content is that it would certainly justify the relevant perceptual beliefs. And this justification would be provided only in the case of veridical experiences. The division between these two kinds of contents, however, makes it difficult to understand how perceptual contents could be shareable, whether in argumentation for perceptual beliefs or otherwise. If the externalist contents are truly not available to the experiencing subject in virtue of his experience, it is hard to see how they could be shareable. The internalist contents, on the other hand, determine the phenomenology of the experience, and phenomenology in many cases might not be considered directly shareable. Even if the internalist contents were shareable, externalist contents do not seem to be, thus ultimately making the complete contents of experiences unshareable.

Another concern about Speaks’ externalist notion of content is that it makes it difficult to understand how the *contents* could be veridical or non-veridical. If the contents of veridical experiences contain the external particles that correspond to the perceived properties, then the contents actually contain their own veridicality conditions. Here, the veridicality of a content

¹⁰³ Including external particles into the contents that are available to the subject would not seem to allow any notion of fallibility. As Speaks admits that fallible experiences are possible, we should conclude that contents, in Speaks’ definition, are not available to the perceiver on the basis of the experience in question.

¹⁰⁴ Crane, 2006, 18.

of experience is dependent on the content itself, instead of any kind of correspondence¹⁰⁵ to the world outside the content. In a sense, the veridicality of a Russellian content that contains, or is individuated by, external particulars is an *a priori* matter. The veridicality of a genuine experience would be, in essence, a tautology.

6.6. Crane: Arguments against propositional content

Tim Crane's article 'Is Perception a Propositional Attitude?' argues against the view that the contents of perceptual experiences are propositional in nature. According to Crane, the defenders of the propositional content view often point to the fact that experiences have accuracy or correctness conditions, and from this they conclude that perceptual contents must be propositional since propositions have veridicality conditions and the veridicality conditions of propositional contents of experiences are the best explanation for the accuracy conditions of experiences. But, according to Crane, propositional contents are neither the only alternative nor the best one for explaining the accuracy conditions of experiences.

Propositions are things one can judge, and propositions are either true or false. But as Crane notes, "Accuracy is not truth, since accuracy admits of degrees and truth does not." The same distinction applies for correctness as well. Unlike with propositions, other types of representation can allow a degree of accuracy. Crane compares an experience to a picture. "Like an experience, a picture can be more or less accurate. A proposition, on the standard understanding at least, cannot be more or less true. Truth and falsehood are all or nothing. It is central to the idea of a proposition that it can be true or false, since truth and falsehood are the crucial semantic concepts of propositional logic."¹⁰⁶

So, pictures are not simply true or false. Neither do pictures, nor experiences, stand in logical relations to other pictures or experiences. But perhaps we should also distinguish between a

¹⁰⁵ The same argument should apply to other theories of truth as well.

¹⁰⁶ Crane, 2009, 458.

picture and its content. Could the *contents* of pictures, or experiences, stand in logical relations to each other? According to Crane, we can indeed distinguish between a picture and its content, like we can between a sentence and the proposition it expresses. The content of a picture is what the picture represents, and how it represents it. There are, however, differences with sentences and pictures in this regard. While speakers can use sentences to assert something, the same does not apply to pictures. According to Crane, one can assert or deny something with a picture, only if one accompanies the picture with something, for example “This is what happened!” or “This is not how it was!” Merely presenting a picture would not assert or deny anything.

One could argue, however, that there can be a sentence that has the same content that a picture or an experience has. No matter how complex a picture or an experience is, there can be, at least in principle, a sentence that ‘gives’ the content of the picture. However, as Crane points out, this would be a *description* of the picture, not its content. “To say that for every picture there is a sentence which expresses a proposition and this sentence gives the content of the picture is not the same thing as saying that pictures have propositional content.”¹⁰⁷ This also applies to other kinds of intentional content. The same pictorial content can be described in many ways as well. On the other hand, it would make less sense to claim that the same experience has alternative, equally descriptive but nonetheless distinct, contents.

Crane also discusses McDowell’s view, according to which what we perceptually ‘take in’, are perceivable facts. The problem with this is that “we do not judge facts; we judge that something *is* a fact, in other words, that something is true.” The same clearly applies to Speaks, as in his view the contents of a factual experience always include the external particulars, the existence of which *is* the truth-condition of the experience. Thus the content is not something that could be judged to be true in Speaks view either. In addition, a view of propositional content makes it difficult to understand how we could experience *events* or *changes* instead of facts, object or properties. When, for example, does the experience convey to one the proposition of things changing or happening? Is it during or after the change or event?

¹⁰⁷ Crane, 2009, 461.

Although the contents of pictures are not perfect candidates for the contents of experiences, the existence of such contents nonetheless illustrates that there can be representations that are not propositions. The comparison to pictures is apt also because when painting a realistic picture a painter is portraying *how things look*. The comparison should not be understood as claiming that visual perception is essentially pictorial; “it is rather that picturing is essentially visual.”¹⁰⁸ Crane summarises his arguments against the propositional content view in the following way:

We are faced with the perceptual ‘given’ in all its complexity, and we make judgements about how things are or how things look (sound, smell, etc.) on the basis of this. In attending to some element or elements of what is experienced, we judge that things look, or are, a certain way. Perceptual judgement (judgement made on the basis of perception) is normally selective, and the result of attention. This is, of course, only a starting-point for a description of the relationship between perceptual experience and judgement. But whatever the exact account of this relationship, [...] it is a mistake to read back from the content of a perceptual judgement a hypothesis about the structure of experience on the basis of which it is made.¹⁰⁹

6.7 The nature of content in Speaks’ view

Speaks’ division of perceptual contents into internalist and externalist contents is a starting point for understanding what perceptual contents essentially are for Speaks. First of all, the contents are divided in two. Partly they are internalist, phenomenology-affecting and hallucination-available and partly externalist, phenomenology-silent and hallucination-unavailable. Speaks does not, however, elaborate on the nature of these contents in any more detail: Are there other features they share or differ in? Do they even fill the same role or

¹⁰⁸ Crane, 2009.

¹⁰⁹ Crane, 2009, 465.

function as contents of perception? How could they both be Russellian contents when their natures are so different? Would this not give us two alternative definitions of Russellian content? Speaks does not provide an answer, but the distinctions presented in section 4 above may help determine some of the differences between these two types of content.

First of all, the externalist contents contain the external, perceived particulars. As such those contents are clearly individuated by particulars but whether they themselves are particular is unclear. If we see them as Russellian propositions, they are probably best understood as abstracta, even though their constituents may well be concrete particulars. As such, these externalist Russellian propositions could be understood as abstract particulars. In contrast to the kinds of perceptual contents that can also become the contents of beliefs, externalist contents could not be the contents of any kind of mental representations. If phenomenology is determined by representational content, as Speaks claims, and externalist content is not phenomenology affecting, then the externalist contents cannot individuate any perceptual mental representations. The only thing that the externalist contents seem to individuate is the external – or perhaps in some cases internal – objects of perception.

Internalist contents, on the other hand, determine the phenomenology of experience. Consequently, internalist content must also be the content that individuates perceptual mental representations. Here, it seems, we can draw the line between relational and representational contents in Speaks' view: internalist contents are representational whereas externalist contents are relational. As such, internalist and externalist contents would have to be different types of Russellian propositions. As I previously argued in section 6.4, representational Russellian contents would have to consist of purely extensional representation whereas relational Russellian contents would have to consist of the particulars themselves. Since the internalist contents consist of references to particulars and references are repeatable entities, the internalist contents appear to consist of abstract universals. Hence, internalist contents would clearly not be particular even though externalist contents do seem to be.

Speaks also claims that small, indistinguishable changes in phenomenology-affecting content may fail to cause changes in phenomenology. The example Speaks presents is between

indistinguishable, yet differing patches of colour. This claim, however, presents a problem for Speaks' view. Are they phenomenology affecting but external contents after all? The difference between such indistinguishable pieces of content seems to be a difference in representation, in internalist contents, which also individuate the psychological state of the perceiver. This means that we would need to posit a finer level of perceptual representation than what is determined by the phenomenology: Perhaps as some kind of representation in sub-personal level. If we examine the case of indistinguishable colour patches we might have to accept that the 'fineness of grain' or resolution of this representation is infinitely accurate. This, on the other hand, would clash with the physical constraints of our sense organs and nervous system. The only two alternatives I see here are either to count indistinguishable contents as externalist contents, or to allow for indistinguishable contents to cause changes in phenomenology. The latter alternative would require one to define indistinguishability in a different way, perhaps by understanding it as concerning perceptual judgments. The limits to the accuracy of phenomenology would also need to be explained somehow. The former alternative, on the other hand, would change the claim itself into the obvious claim that there can be small, indistinguishable changes in the external objects of perception, which do not cause changes in representation. Unless the claim is modified, we are left with a problem: If internalist content simply slices finer than representations, what then determines the more finely grained features of this content? Not the object or property itself since those things figure in externalist contents, not in internalist contents; nor the representational features of experience since those affect phenomenology. The features that are finer-grained than phenomenology, would simply seem undetermined and, by all measures, unnecessary.

In summary, perceptual contents in Speaks' view come in two different types. Externalist contents are relational and consist of concrete particulars.¹¹⁰ They individuate the real objects and properties of perceptual experiences. Whether these are external or internal particulars is

¹¹⁰ One issue intentionally avoided here is whether perceived properties are concrete or particular. Properties themselves do not seem to be concrete or particular, but property-tropes could well be. As such, property-tropes seem more likely as constituents of externalist Russellian contents. However, the issue is not vital to the current discussion since the externalist contents clearly include concrete and particular objects whereas internalist contents contain references to these.

not something that could be determined solely on the basis of the perceptual representations of subject of perception. Conversely, internalist contents are representational and consist of references to particulars, and references are abstract universals. Internalist contents individuate the phenomenal character and representational features of perceptual experiences. One could say that the internalist content of perception is what is conveyed to the subject of perception from his being in a perceptual relation to the externalist content of perception.

It seems that there are two clearly different functions, and definitions, of the term ‘content’ in Speaks’ view. As there are no clear arguments to the contrary, perhaps we should judge one of those as not concerning ‘content’ at all. The most obvious alternative seems to be the externalist contents – we could simply call them the real objects¹¹¹ of perceptual experiences.

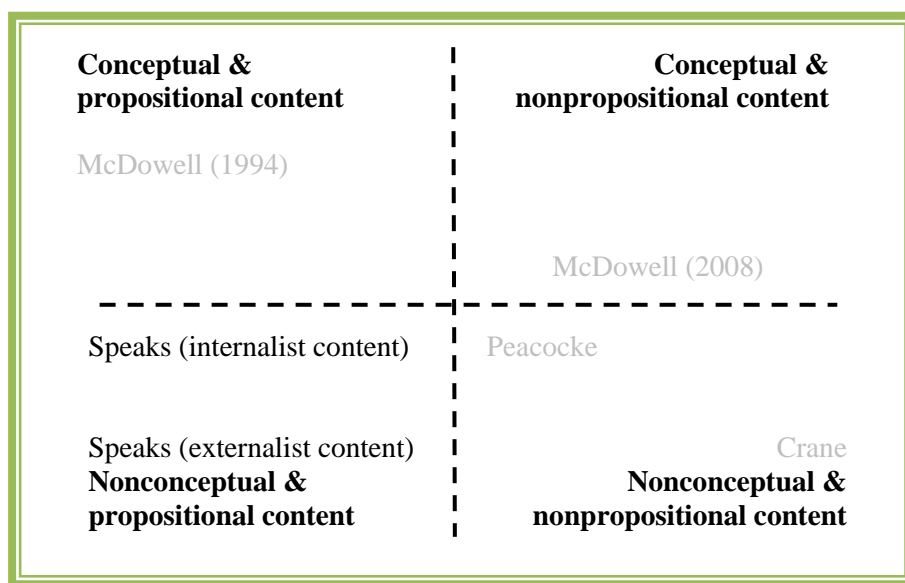


Figure 3: In Speaks’ view, externalist contents contain concrete particulars, whereas internalist contents might contain concepts, or at least the references of concepts. As a Russellian view, in contrast to a conceptual Fregean view, Speaks’ view of content is nonetheless a view of nonconceptual propositional content.

¹¹¹ These would not be the intentional but the causal objects of perception. In the cases of nonveridical experiences, they could simply contain the inner objects or states that are the direct causes of the misrepresenting state.

6.8. Perceptual relations in Speaks' view

Following the considerations about what content is in Speaks' view, we begin to have a clear picture about what the perceptual relations posited by his view could be. At first glance it seems there are two perceptual relations in Speaks' view. One would be the externalist relation that relates the real object of the experience to the percipient. The other would be the internalist relation that relates perceptual representations to what they are representations of. The first relation appears to be a natural relation and the second seems to be an informational relation. However, as the internalist content seems to consist of pure Russellian references, we can see that what should be at the other end of the internalist relation is not actually 'what is represented', i.e. an intentional object, but rather 'what causes the representation', i.e. the real object. Thus, we see that these two relations are in fact one and the same relation – the relation that relates the real objects of perception to the perceptual representations gained in the experience. Furthermore, it seems that the relation is purely natural after all. Granted, on one end of the relation are perceptual representations which could be said to be informed by the real content. But, to my mind, the proper way to understand this would be to say that real objects determine the representational content in the same way that physical brain states determine the content of mental states in a materialistic worldview. That is, they would not describe any of the subjective qualities of the experience.

The problem here is that purely natural relations do not seem to include any way for cognitive capacities to affect perceptual representations, and to me this seems a fatal flaw in the view of Speaks: we could not conceive of seeing aspects, or of any way of perceiving objects or properties as falling under the category of that object or property. The only way to remedy this but still stay in the domain of natural relations would be to include brain states in the real objects. But this would simply present the relation as relating brain states to corresponding mental states, perhaps through something like a supervenience relation. While positing a relation such as this might be an acceptable claim to any materialist, positing such a relation does not actually explain anything about our *perceptions*. Purely natural relations, it seems, are not very helpful in determining the nature or features of perceptual experiences.

It is possible that Speaks has something different in mind when he characterises the internalist contents as Russellian. In that case, however, he leaves unanswered questions about what the internalist perceptual relation might actually be and what lies on the other end of that relation, as well as important questions about the connection of these internalist contents to the externalist contents.

7. Nonconceptualism: Christopher Peacocke

In the previous chapters, I presented the views of John McDowell and Jeff Speaks. Briefly stated, McDowell's conceptualist view is that perceptual contents must be articulable and propositional. He proposed that the contents are of the form 'that things are thus and so'. Speaks' view, in contrast, is that, in addition to representation, experience must also consist of a relation to the external particulars that are represented. Hence, the contents would include external particles. Both views had similarities to disjunctivism as both presented the contents of hallucinations and illusions as somehow differing from the contents of genuine experiences. Both were views of propositional content, although differing in many respects. There are, however, alternative views to these. According to Tim Crane, "we do not have to choose between a theory which treats perception as propositional [...] and those which treat it as relational [...]. There is, it seems, a third way: experience might be representational without being a propositional attitude."¹¹² Christopher Peacocke's view of Scenario content and protopropositional content is one such view, arguing for nonconceptual and nonpropositional representational content. This section provides a brief overview on Peacocke's view of the contents of perceptual experiences. Although his account of perceptual content is closely connected to his account of concepts, I shall concentrate more on his arguments for nonconceptualism and some against conceptualism, than on his extensive theory of concepts.

7.1. Peacocke's nonconceptualism

Christopher Peacocke is one of the few philosophers who have presented a view of nonconceptual content with a detailed positive description. Peacocke has been an ardent critic of standard conceptualism and has had his share of critique as well. Previously in, for example, his *Sense and Content* (1983), Peacocke had argued for conceptual and propositional content of experience. Later on, he abandoned this view in favour of a nonconceptual and

¹¹² Crane, 2009, 469.

nonpropositional view. In his *A Study of Concepts*, he presents his theory of concepts, and at the same time, his nonconceptualist view about the contents of perceptual experience. He proposes that the contents of experiences have both nonconceptual and conceptual contents. Respectively, Peacocke divides nonconceptual contents into two types of contents. These are *scenario contents* and *protopositional contents*.

Of the two types of nonconceptual content, scenario content, or more accurately, *posited-scenario content*, is the more fundamental one. It consists of a set of *ways of filling out the space* around the perceiver. The things that scenario contents represent are merely the lines, surfaces, colours, sounds and other perceptibles as located in relation to the subject's body. Protopositional and conceptual contents, on the other hand, provide us with representations of a richer variety. Scenario content is needed to adequately reflect the spatial and first-personal perspectives in experience. According to Peacocke, the things we perceive are always presented as located somewhere in relation to us. However, we do not need the concepts of spatial properties, like 'to the left', in order to *have* these kinds of experiences - describing and specifying a scenario on the other hand does need them. Consequently, these contents are both nonconceptual and nonpropositional, and they include a point of origin and orientation, in relation to the subject's body.¹¹³ Scenario content contributes to a noncircular way to individuate first-person concepts.

Protopositional content, on the other hand, is a type of nonconceptual content that represents phenomenal properties and relations. For example, it can represent an object, or objects, as SQUARE, CURVED, PARALLEL TO, EQUIDISTANT FROM, SAME SHAPE AS, or SYMMETRICAL ABOUT.¹¹⁴ Protopositions contain properties and relations, rather than the concepts of these. The properties and relations themselves can be represented "as holding of places, lines, or regions in the positioned scenario, or of objects perceived as located in such

¹¹³ Siegel, 2010.

¹¹⁴ Peacocke uses small capitals to distinguish the properties and relations a word refers to, from the concepts the word expresses."

places.” The properties and relations in protopositions can provide a noncircular basis for the explanation of the acquisition of concepts of those properties and relations.

Although scenario content is more fundamental, protopositional content is not determined by posited-scenario content. Experiences with same scenario contents can nonetheless differ in protopositional contents. An example of this can be found in, say, experiences before and after seeing that two of the perceived objects have the same shape. The other experience will represent the SAME SHAPE AS-relation between the objects, while the other does not. Protopositional contents can also explain the contents of experiences of “impossible” three-dimensional objects, like those depicted in Escher’s drawings. While a scenario could not entail impossible ways of filling out the space around the perceiver, the protopositional content can nonetheless represent “impossible” combinations of relations.¹¹⁵

Conceptual contents are also included in Peacocke’s view. According to him, a creature without any concepts could not be in states with these nonconceptual representational contents. At the very least, posited-scenario content requires the subject to possess a primitive first-person conception, combined with an ability to construct, over time, some kind of cognitive map of the world around the subject. Consequently, nonconceptual content is not autonomous of the conceptual. Instead, nonconceptual and conceptual contents are tied together at the most basic level. Peacocke is explicit on this:

On the approach I am advocating, then, nonconceptual content is not a level whose nature is completely explicable without reference to conceptual content. It is rather a type of content that, though nonconceptual, cannot be explained except in part by reference to its relations to certain primitive conceptual contents. At the most basic level, conceptual and nonconceptual content must be elucidated simultaneously. The most basic elements of the scheme themselves form a local holism.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Peacocke, 1992, 78-79.

¹¹⁶ Peacocke, 1992, 90-91.

Considering that Peacocke includes both conceptual and nonconceptual contents in the contents of experiences, it would be questionable to claim that Peacocke's view is content nonconceptualism. Many critics of nonconceptualism nonetheless claim this, perhaps because those critics assume that Peacocke posits scenario contents as completely separate from the conceptual level. On the contrary, Peacocke's scenario contents not only require some primitive concepts, but also directly involve perceptual concepts in a creature that possesses these.¹¹⁷

7.2. Peacocke's motivation for nonconceptualism

According to Peacocke, there are five "at least moderately intuitive claims about nonconceptual content" which one can expect a proponent of nonconceptual content of perceptual experiences to believe. Firstly, a nonconceptualist is expected to believe that certain perceptually based concepts are made available by the nonconceptual content of perception. For example, demonstrative concepts, like *that shape* or *that interval of time*, are made available by the relevant aspects of the nonconceptual content of the experience. Nonconceptual content can also make general, non-demonstrative recognitional concepts, such as *regular diamond shaped* or *red*, available to the perceiver.

The second claim is that fine-grained nonconceptual content can provide an empirical basis for the acquisition, and learning, of general concepts, such as *regular diamond shaped*. In this case, the nonconceptual representational content should be sufficient for someone to apply the concept rationally. Thirdly, nonconceptual contents that correctly represent the relevant features of the world should make a suitably related conceptual judgment rational. The fourth claim is that some of the nonconceptual contents of human perception can be identical to representational contents of animals that either possess no concepts, or have a limited

¹¹⁷ Peacocke, 1992, chapter 3.

conceptual repertoire. The fifth and final claim is that the nonconceptual content of experiences can enter the explanation of features of intentional action.¹¹⁸

These claims provide us with an insight into Peacocke's motives for advocating nonconceptualism. On the one hand, nonconceptual contents provide a noncircular individuation, as well as a basis for acquisition, of demonstrative and general perceptual concepts. On the other hand, nonconceptual contents also provide a way to maintain at least some similarity between the experiences of concept-possessors and creatures without concepts, these including human infants. These two aspects of nonconceptual content, in addition to its ability to explain fine-grained contents in a simple way, are what generally seem to be the virtues of nonconceptual content. Conversely, giving an account of rationality is more difficult in a nonconceptualist framework than in a conceptualist one. With the third claim, Peacocke illustrates how, in order to answer the challenges posed by conceptualism, a theory of nonconceptual content must also account for rational transitions between experiences and perceptual beliefs.

7.3. Posited scenarios

Peacocke presents posited scenarios in order to explain how our experiences can represent our perceived location, as well as the perceived locations and directions of objects in the space around us. To simplify, a scenario is a spatial representation. However, Peacocke's account of the nature of this representation is not as simple as that. According to Peacocke, one basic form of our representational content involves a spatial type; "the type being that under which fall precisely those ways of filling the space around the subject that are consistent with the correctness of the content." The correctness of this content is a matter of instantiation: "the instantiation by the real world around the perceiver of the spatial type that gives the representational content in question."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Peacocke, 2001a, 242.

¹¹⁹ Peacocke, 1992, 62.

This first description merely individuates a *set of ways* that is consistent with the correctness conditions of the experience. By two steps, Peacocke aims to specify one of these spatial types, a scenario: “The first step is to fix an origin and axes. The origin and axes will not be a specific place and set of directions in the real world.” Instead, the type can be instantiated at different places. The origin and axes are not merely a notational matter. According to Peacocke, they must be labelled and fixed in the content, if they are to capture distinctions in the phenomenology of experience. When looking straight ahead at, for example, the Buckingham Palace, the content of the experience would differ in the Palace’s represented direction in relation to oneself from a case where one was walking past it, even if the view was exactly the same. One experience might represent an object as being straight ahead, while the other could represent it as located on, say, the left side. According to Peacocke, the origin and axes of a scenario are labelled so that they are somehow fixed to one’s bodily parts. But while one’s representations of direction in visual experience might be fixed on the direction and location of one’s torso, the represented direction in a tactile experience could be fixed on the centre of one’s palm. “Actually, in the specification of the representational content of some human experiences, one would need to consider several such systems of origins and axes, and to specify the spatial relations of these systems to one another.”¹²⁰

The second step in specifying posited-scenario is to consider how it fills out the space around the origin. According to Peacocke, set of ways that gives the content is restricted by the perceiver’s perceptual acuity. “Greater acuity corresponds to restriction of the set of ways of filling out the space whose instantiation is consistent with the correctness of the representational content.” As the correctness conditions become more exact, the set that is consistent with them becomes narrower. Peacocke proceeds with the following suggestion, with regard to visual experience: “For each point [...], identified by its distance and direction from the origin, we need to specify whether there is a surface there and, if so, what texture, hue, saturation, and brightness it has at that point, together with its degree of solidity.” Peacocke’s suggestion would then be a sort of 3-dimensional bitmap that contains a point of

¹²⁰ Peacocke allows for the overlapping of scenarios between different sense-modalities.

view. According to him, the orientation of the surface, lighting conditions, rate of change over time, and more, should be included in the visual case. Peacocke stresses that the content is nonconceptual – there is no requirement for the perceiver to possess the concepts that are used in specifying scenario content.

Peacocke proposes that a scenario is correct if it corresponds to the real world *scene*, the particular place it represents. For a scenario to be in such a way outright assessable, it must be a *posited scenario*. It must have an assigned origin and axes fixed in relation to the body of the perceiver, hence allowing the correctness conditions as correspondence to the scene. On the scene itself, the assigned axes can be located in relation to the subject's body. The scenario must also have an assigned time that fixes it to the current present tense when the experience takes place. "We can then say that the content given by the posited scenario is correct if the scene at its assigned place falls under the scenario at the assigned time, when the scenario is posited there in accordance with the assigned directions." According to Peacocke, the posited scenario is "literally meant to be the content itself" as distinguished from any mental representation of the content. Positioned scenarios can also equally give the contents of fully perceptual experiences as well as hallucinatory experiences.¹²¹

7.4. Advantages of scenario contents

One of the advantages of posited-scenario content view is that it offers a relatively simple account of the fine-grained representations of directions or spatial locations in our experiences. A conceptualist view, on the other hand, would have to restrict representations of directions and locations only to those perceivers who possess the concepts that are needed to specify the exact represented directions and locations. A conceptualist might reply to this by pointing that, in specifying a scenario, we would have to use concepts as well. Peacocke admits that in describing a scenario we have to employ concepts, and in fixing a scenario uniquely we would have to use very fine-grained concepts indeed. Nonetheless, the need for concepts in fixing a

¹²¹ Peacocke, 1992, 61-65.

scenario should not be taken as a claim that concepts are the components of scenarios, or as a requirement that the perceiver should possess these concepts. “We should not confuse the scenario, the spatial type itself, with the infinitely various ways of picking it out. It is the type that is involved in the content of the experience, not descriptions of the type.” Peacocke adds that an ordinary-language description of a scenario could be, at the most, a partial description.¹²²

Peacocke also describes posited-scenario contents as having an *analogue* and *unit-free* character. Scenario contents are analogue in the sense that many dimensions, among them hue, shape, size and direction, are “such that any value on that dimension may enter the fine-grained content of an experience.” According to Peacocke, “an experience is not restricted in its range of possible contents to those points or ranges picked out by concepts [...] possessed by the perceiver.” The unit-free character of scenarios refers to how perceptual representations of, for example, the width of a table, are not given in any unit of length e.g. in centimetres as opposed to inches. The same point holds for directions as well. Experiences with analogue or unit-free characters could not be captured with non-indexical, or non-demonstrative, conceptual contents.

As Peacocke noted in his critique of conceptualism¹²³, a conceptualist might explain fine-grained contents by relying on unsupplemented demonstrative concepts. As these would ‘slice’ just as finely as any nonconceptual content, they could also account for the analogue and unit-free representations in a conceptualist framework. But the problem with this solution is that what a demonstrative concept actually picks out is the particular instance of representation. Even if one demonstratively refers to a property as common to many objects, it would nonetheless involve a tie to particular representations. This would make the content unrepeatable, conflicting with Peacocke’s definition of content: “Ways of perceiving are inherently general. For instance, the shapes of two different objects may be perceived in exactly the same way, either on one occasion or on different occasions. [...] The way, which is

¹²² Peacocke, 1992, 68.

¹²³ See chapter 5.6.

general, lacks the tie to particulars which is characteristic of the perceptual demonstrative.” Perceptual contents, at least in Peacocke’s view, consist of types, or universals, instantiated in particular perceptual experiences. Consequently, demonstratives are, for him, an unsuitable candidate for capturing the fine-grained contents of experiences.¹²⁴

According to Peacocke, replacing scenarios with Russellian contents would be just as implausible. He argues that a Russellian view could accurately represent egocentric directions only if it “involves the use of the first-person way of thinking in giving the content of the [...] experience.” Otherwise, a Russellian view would assign identical contents to any two experiences that present the same area with the same property, for example a part of a field as misty, even if those experiences had clear differences in what direction the area is represented as being. Peacocke claims that, “purely propositional accounts, unlike the theory of scenarios, make impossible an adequate account of the first-person way of thinking.” On this argument, Peacocke relies on how he defines concepts. The Principle of Dependence, as he calls it, states that there can be no more to a concept than is determined by a correct account of what it is to possess that concept. A propositional view would be forced to circularity in giving the possession conditions of the first-person concept: According to Peacocke, the first-person concept¹²⁵ is partly constituted by its connection to our present-tense non-inferential spatial judgments, with which he seems to mean some kind of unmediated conception of being located. These spatial judgements are a part of our experiences. As a propositionalist can only explain experiences by referring to the first-person concept as possessed by the perceiver, he would have to explain the possession of a concept by assuming its possession. According to Peacocke, the circularity is evident, and escapable only if one turns to nonconceptual scenarios in explaining possession conditions of the first-person concept. Scenario content fixes the

¹²⁴ Peacocke, 2001a, 247.

¹²⁵ Here, Peacocke also uses ‘first-person way of thinking’ but the referral seems to be to the concept. Peacocke apparently uses the terms ‘concept’, ‘conception’ and ‘way of thinking’ as synonymous, at least to some degree. This is understandable in his framework of identifying concepts with their possession conditions. To possess a concept one must have a ‘conception’ or a ‘way of thinking’ about the concept.

spatial judgments, which a first-person conception requires, in relation to the labelled central bodily origin and axes.¹²⁶

7.5. Protopositions

Although scenario contents can explain some features of experiences that conceptual contents cannot, they do not explain all the features in perceptual experiences. In Peacocke's view, the contents of perception consist of more than one type of content. How many exactly, he leaves open:

The representational content of experience is a many-splendored thing. This is true not only of the remarkable range of detail in the perceptual content but also of the range of different and philosophically interesting types of content that can be possessed by a particular experience.¹²⁷

Of all these types of content, the posited-scenario content is the most fundamental type. In Peacocke's view, however, there is need for another level of nonconceptual content in addition to scenario content. The reason that Peacocke posits a second level of nonconceptual content is that scenarios can neither provide individuation to certain perceptual-shape concepts, nor explain certain perceptual representations, such as those concerning "impossible" objects. These representations cannot be conceptual, as they do not require that the subject of the experience possesses the concepts that describe the representations. Peacocke presents protopositions as a type of nonconceptual content that both allows for an adequate account of experience of "impossible" objects, and individuates perceptual-shape concepts.

A protoposition contains an individual, or individuals, together with a property or relation. "When a protoposition is part of the representational content of an experience, the

¹²⁶ Peacocke, 1992, 70-71.

¹²⁷ Peacocke, 1992, 61.

experience represents the property or relation in the protoposition as holding of the individual or individuals it also contains.” According to Peacocke, protopositions are also assessable as true or false. Peacocke writes of *protopositions* instead of protothoughts “because protopositions contain objects, properties, and relations, rather than concepts thereof.” He also differentiates *protopositions* from propositions because “they are not determined as part of the content of an experience by being fixed by some conceptual content the experience possesses.” The connection between scenarios and protopositions is that the properties and relations that a protoposition contains “can be represented as holding of places, lines, or regions in the posited scenario, or of objects perceived as located in such places.”¹²⁸ These properties and relations hence appear to exist only between entities that are already perceived in the scenario, instead of any particulars whether perceived or not. It seems scenario contents include entities having such properties and relations, but without representing them as being attributed to the entities. Protopositions would then fill the role of attributing these properties and relations to those entities.

Experiences of “impossible” objects or figures are a case that illustrates how some representations cannot be captured by scenario contents. A scenario cannot provide any such way of filling out the space in the region of the impossible object that would be consistent with the correctness of the experience. It seems that a scenario, by definition, cannot describe anything as impossible or as having conflicting dimensions. A protoposition, on the other hand, can give conflicting conjunctions of properties or relations to objects in scenarios. In seeing something like a picture of a Penrose triangle or Penrose stairs (see figure 4), “the protopositional representational content of one’s experience could include, for instance, that **x** is above **y**, that **y** is above **z** and that **z** is above **x**”, where **x**, **y** and **z** correspond to the three corners of the triangle. Protopositions can contain an inconsistent set of representational contents like these, without necessarily positing switches in attention or temporary indefiniteness to experiences with these contents.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Peacocke, 1992, 77.

¹²⁹ Peacocke, 1992, 79.

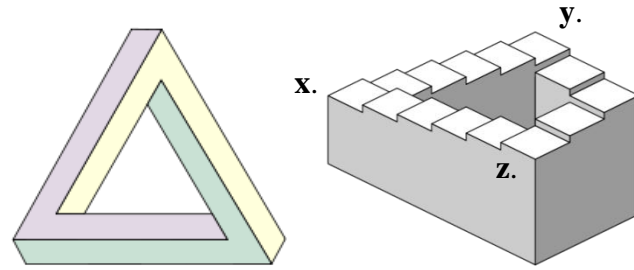


Figure 4: illustrations of a Penrose triangle and Penrose stairs¹³⁰

Peacocke presents *square* and *diamond shaped*¹³¹ (see figure 5) as examples of perceptual shape concepts that are individuated by protopositions. The concept *square* can be possessed without the subject’s awareness of any geometrical definition, and it is a concept with “inherently fuzzy boundaries.” The simple solution would be to individuate the concept *square* with a shape in a scenario, thus providing noncircular possession conditions for the concept. The problem with the simple solution is that it could not distinguish between the concepts *square* and *regular diamond*. After all, the shape of a regular diamond is, in a simple way, the shape of a square rotated 45 degrees. Nevertheless, perceiving something as a regular diamond, instead of a square, is not simply a matter of rotation. According to Peacocke, “one can even naively see a square at a 45 degree angle as a square, rather than as a regular diamond, if the context is right.”

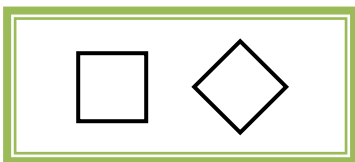


Figure 5: regular diamond and square shapes

According to Peacocke, the intuitive difference between perceiving something as a square and perceiving it as a diamond is “in part a difference in the way in which symmetries are perceived.” A diamond is perceived as symmetrical about the bisectors of its angles, whereas a

¹³⁰ Image by Wikipedia users Bromskloss (triangle) and Sakurambo (stairs). Public domain. Labels **x**, **y** and **z** added by me.

¹³¹ The *italics* indicate concepts in Peacocke’s notation. The example of the square and regular diamond shapes comes from Ernst Mach (1914).

square is perceived as symmetrical about the bisectors of its sides. Here Peacocke notes that if we understood this perception of symmetries as depending on possession of the concept *symmetrical*, we would be merely explaining the mastery of the concept *square* with the mastery of another concept. Once more, this circularity can be avoided with nonconceptual content. Peacocke claims that “it is plausible that any theory of possession of these relatively observational-shape concepts will have at some point to exploit this way of avoiding circularity.”

As is evident with the case of perceiving squares and regular diamonds, scenario contents do not determine protopositional contents. Protopositional content can represent the same shape in the same scenario as either a square or a regular diamond. On the other hand, the connection from protopositional content to conceptual content is more direct. In Peacocke’s view, nonconceptual contents not only provide a noncircular individuation to certain perceptual shape concepts, but also good reasons for a belief that employs those concepts. If the protopositional content of an experience concerns those symmetries, and the straightness of certain lines, that provide the possession conditions of the concept *square*, then the experience provides a thinker who possesses the concept “not merely reasons but good reasons” to believe that the demonstratively presented object is square. “If the thinker’s perceptual systems are functioning properly, so that the nonconceptual representational content of his experience is correct, then when such experiences occur, the object thought about will really be square.”

The possession conditions of a concept like *square* concerns nonconceptual contents. The correctness conditions of these nonconceptual contents, in turn, concern the world. When the correctness conditions of the relevant nonconceptual contents are fulfilled, the world is as the concept represents it. While the possession conditions of the concept *square* do not mention that the justifying experience represents the object as falling under the concept *square*, the experience “will indeed also have a representational content involving that concept if the thinker possesses the observational concept *square*.”¹³² This, however, does not mean that

¹³² Peacocke, 1992, 80.

someone who has an experience of an object as SQUARE must possess that concept; nor does it mean that someone who possesses the concept must also possess the concepts that give the full possession conditions of the concept.

7.6. Advantages of protopositions

Compared to a conceptualist view, Peacocke's account of protopositional content makes lesser requirements, as regards the possession of other concepts, for a possessor of an observational concept or a perceiver of simple shape properties. Compared to a view of pure scenario content, one of the advantages of protopositional content is that it reduces the demands on a subject regarding the functioning of memory, recognition and spatial reasoning. When his experience has protopositional contents, "the perceiver does not have to remember highly detailed scenario contents, with their specifications for each point." Similarly, recognition of objects from different angles or conditions would require "immensely complex operations on highly detailed content", if one's experiences had no, or only meagre, protopositional content. In protopositional contents, a thinker is also provided with simpler representations to his cognitive map of his surroundings, "rather than having to transform one complex scenario content into a corresponding complex content for his map." In the terms of Fred Dretske, protopositional content consists of *digitalization* of the *analogue* scenario content.¹³³

The nature of scenario contents is closely connected to their role in spatial reasoning. According to Peacocke, attributing genuine spatial contents to a subject's state would not be justified "unless the subject were on occasion to employ states with these contents in identifying places over time." This identification requires that scenario contents contribute to the construction of a cognitive map of the world around the subject. This construction, on the other hand, makes sense only if the subject possesses some form of a first-person concept. Attributing spatial contents to a subject is therefore essentially dependent on the subject

¹³³ Peacocke, 1992, 78.

possessing a first-person conception. This is the “local holism” of nonconceptual scenario content and conceptual content in Peacocke’s account. The very basic first-person concept and the most fundamental spatial content are connected, and must be elucidated simultaneously.¹³⁴

7.7. Spatial reasoning and cognitive penetrability

Spatial reasoning, in Peacocke’s terms, is the percipient’s ability to build a consistent representation of the world around him or her. Some parts of this reasoning is conceptual, some protopositional, and some, namely those that involve scenarios, purely nonconceptual and nonpropositional. While concepts may be individuated by their possession conditions, scenarios are individuated by their role in spatial reasoning. Peacocke leaves the details of this to be further developed. Nonetheless, the role of scenarios in spatial reasoning is connected to the ability of spatial reasoning to explain the spatial properties of a thinker’s actions. In Peacocke’s general framework, scenarios are not only contents of perception, but also of two other states that are connected to actions; “our distinctive knowledge of bodily position” and “our immediate (sub)intentional tryings” also have posited-scenario contents. “It is this threefold presence that makes the information in perception immediately usable in performing actions.”¹³⁵

Peacocke also includes a sketch of cognitive penetrability in *A Study of Concepts*. Although in his account the direction of explanation runs mainly from experience to concept possession, according to him, it is essential to allow that some causal explanations run in the opposite direction. “Once a thinker has acquired a perceptually individuated concept, his possession of that concept can causally influence what contents his experiences possess.” As an example of this, he presents the case of two perceivers, one of whom is completely unfamiliar with Cyrillic script, seeing a sentence in that script in the same conditions. According to Peacocke, the posited scenarios and protopositional contents of their respective experiences can be

¹³⁴ Peacocke, 1992, 90–91.

¹³⁵ Peacocke, 1992, 91–93.

identical, but the experiences would differ in that the other would recognise the symbols “as of particular orthographic kinds”, and sequences of symbols “as of particular semantic kinds.” Peacocke’s view does not, however, answer what this difference consists in. “The question of the nature of his difference and, more generally, of what constitutionally makes an experience have a conceptual content remain as urgent and open as ever.”¹³⁶

7.8. Peacocke’s arguments for nonconceptualism

Peacocke presents several arguments for nonconceptualism. These arguments are, in many ways, intertwined but nonetheless distinct from each other. In “Is There a Problem about Nonconceptual Content?” Jeff Speaks distinguishes between seven different arguments that have been presented in defence of nonconceptualism. Some of these arguments are not connected to Peacocke’s argumentation, but at least four of them are essential to his defence of nonconceptualism. I will present these four arguments first in their more general form and then in the form Peacocke presents them.¹³⁷

1. The argument from fine-grained content

The first argument connected to Peacocke’s argumentation is the argument based on *fine-grained content of perception*. According to the argument, the contents of perceptions are richer, or more detailed, than the conceptual contents of thoughts and beliefs. The argument stems from Gareth Evans who claimed that we do not have as many colour concepts as there are shades of colour we can perceptually discriminate.¹³⁸ McDowell replied to this in *Mind and World* by providing an alternative of relying on demonstratives, such as *that shade*. Furthermore, Sean Kelly replied to McDowell by claiming that we do not possess enough demonstrative concepts for this. This is because, according to Kelly, possession of

¹³⁶ Peacocke, 1992, 89-90.

¹³⁷ My numbering, and the order of the four arguments presented here, differs mostly from that in Speaks’ paper.

¹³⁸ Evans, 1982, 229.

demonstrative concepts, at least in the views he criticises, requires an ability to consistently re-identify the object or property as falling under that demonstrative concept.¹³⁹

According to Speaks, Kelly's possession condition has implausible consequences: The possession condition would deny that a subject can have demonstrative thoughts about objects or properties that he is attending to, unless he is able to re-identify them. Hence the argument itself is inconclusive in Speaks' account. Peacocke, however, does not present such possession conditions to demonstratives as Speaks claims Kelly must subscribe to. In Peacocke's view, a perceiver can have conceptual demonstrative thoughts about the nonconceptual features of experience, without any apparent re-identification criterion for those thoughts.

Peacocke's arguments based on the fine-grained content have already been presented in chapter 7.4 as a defence of scenario content. In brief, Peacocke argued that a conceptualist would have to restrict representations of directions and locations only to those perceivers who possess the concepts that are needed to specify the exact represented directions and locations. Nonconceptual scenario contents on the other hand are unit-free and pose no such restrictions. Nonetheless, Peacocke agrees with Kelly on that "fineness of grain is not the critical issue in the case for nonconceptual content", as a conceptualist could rely on unsupplemented demonstratives that "slice" just as finely as nonconceptual contents.¹⁴⁰ Even if the conceptualist answer to the argument from fine-grained content is successful, nonconceptual representational content is not necessarily redundant if it is needed in "the philosophical explanation of the perceptual-demonstrative concepts."¹⁴¹

2. The argument from the nature of demonstratives

The second argument is closely connected to the argument from fine-grained content. This argument is, in effect, a response to a conceptualist answer to the first argument. It is an

¹³⁹ Kelly, 2001b.

¹⁴⁰ Peacocke, 2001b, 610.

¹⁴¹ Peacocke, 1992, 84.

argument which relies on some features of the conceptualist arguments to draw the conclusion that these features require that there is a level of nonconceptual content for their basis. Although the argument is present in Peacocke's account, a similar, more explicit version of the argument has been presented by Richard Heck. According to him, if we assume, as McDowell does, that we come to possess certain demonstrative concepts in virtue of our experiences, and that those experiences are conceptual in nature, we are left with a circular account of those demonstratives. In Heck's account, the argument is a part of the defence of the Richness Argument against objections presented by McDowell. The Richness Argument corresponds to the first argument here, the argument from fine-grained content. As the conceptualist answer to the Richness Argument relies, for the most part, on demonstratives capturing the fine-grained content, presenting demonstratives as dependent on nonconceptual content would effectively rebut the conceptualist response to the Richness Argument.¹⁴²

As with the first argument, the general idea of the argument can be traced to Gareth Evans. Evans advocated nonconceptual content, not because he wanted to solve problems in the theory of perception, but because he needed it in his theory of the references of demonstrative concepts. According to Heck, without the claim that perceptual content is nonconceptual, "Evans could not give the sort of account he does of what fixes the contents of demonstratives such as 'that object'." Evans describes nonconceptual informational states as follows: "The informational states which a subject acquires through perception are *non-conceptual*, or *non-conceptualized*. Judgements *based upon* such states necessarily involve conceptualization: in moving from a perceptual experience to a judgement about the world (usually expressible in some verbal form), one will be exercising basic conceptual skills." Demonstrative thoughts, on the other hand, are based on these informational states and take place in a continuing informational link between the subject and the object.¹⁴³ Heck simplifies Evans' view in the following way: "For a demonstrative concept to be of a particular object *x* is for one's attitudes toward contents containing that concept to be sensitive, in the right sort of way, to information

¹⁴² Heck, 2000.

¹⁴³ Evans; 1982; 227, 145-146. Evans stresses that the thoughts are not *about* the informational states but of the world, they are only *based* on the thoughts.

about x , information that is, in central cases, delivered by perception.” According to Heck, Evans would have good reason to reject McDowell’s suggestion that demonstratives are part of the contents of experiences, since the suggestion would make it impossible to say what fixes the contents of such concepts.¹⁴⁴

Peacocke’s account bears a resemblance to Evans’ account in the aspects relevant to this argument. In his view as well, the nonconceptual contents of experience are precisely what make demonstrative thoughts and concepts available to a perceiver. However, instead of demonstratives concepts of objects, he talks of demonstratives concepts of the fine-grained *ways* objects and properties are given in experience: “When some property is given to a thinker in perception in way W , then, if that thinker is sufficiently reflective, there seems to be a conceptual way C_w of thinking of that way W , where this conceptual way C_w , seems to be made available to the thinker precisely by her enjoying an experience whose nonconceptual content includes that way W .” In addition, Peacocke assumes that the “relation of ‘being made available by’ consists at least in part in a certain canonical sensitivity of judgments involving the concept C_w to evidence about the way W which the subject has precisely because she is experiencing some property as given in way W ”¹⁴⁵

Peacocke’s focus in the individuation of concepts is on their possession conditions. According to his Principle of Dependence, “there can be no more to a concept than is determined by a correct account of what it is to possess that concept.”¹⁴⁶ Consequently, a satisfactory account of demonstrative concepts should explain their possession conditions in a noncircular way. Providing a noncircular individuation of the demonstrative concept of a square, as distinguished from an identical regular diamond-shape, would not be possible without a nonconceptual level of perceptual content. Perceiving something as a square as opposed to a regular diamond depends on perceiving different symmetries of the same shape. If a conceptualist were to explain demonstrative concepts of either a square or a regular-diamond

¹⁴⁴ Heck, 2000, 493.

¹⁴⁵ Peacocke, 2001a, 258.

¹⁴⁶ Peacocke, 1992, 71.

as based on conceptual demonstratives of these symmetries, he would only be postponing the question. In such a case the “issue of the possession conditions for these additional demonstratives has also to be addressed.” Moreover, it would be implausible to assume that the demonstrative concept *symmetrical about the bisectors* has to enter the representational content of the experience of anyone who sees something as a regular diamond. “It can take reflection to see that the diamond has that property even when it is demonstratively conceptualized, but the diamond is seen as a diamond before any such reflection takes place.”¹⁴⁷

Heck admits that this argument does not rule out a noncausal explanation in which having an experience makes the concepts available: There would be no possession of demonstrative concepts like these without the experience. As Speaks notes, a noncausal explanation would fit well with McDowell’s discussion of the issue: “surely part of the point of McDowell’s rhetoric about faculties of spontaneity being active in perception is that I come to have the concept in having the experience”¹⁴⁸ But, according to Heck, McDowell’s assumption that experience makes demonstrative concepts of objects available to us, is itself in need of explanation. If what explains that one has certain demonstrative concepts is that one has (had) an experience with a certain sort of content, it is hard to see how those concepts could be part of that experience. “There would not seem to be sufficient distance between my having the experience and my possessing the concept for the former to explain the latter.” For the explanation of demonstratives that is wanted here “the content of the experience would have to be stated in terms that did not involve these demonstrative concepts.” And since, on the basis of the Richness Argument, we cannot possess enough general concepts to capture the fine-grained representations presented in experience, we should conclude that perceptions have nonconceptual content.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Peacocke, 1992, 84-86.

¹⁴⁸ Speaks, 2005, 398 (33).

¹⁴⁹ Heck, 2000, 492. A major difference of Peacocke’s view to those presented by Heck and Evans is that Peacocke acknowledges that experiences do include conceptual contents when the subject possesses the relevant concepts, in this case, the demonstrative concepts made available by the nonconceptual contents of (previous)

As noted in chapter 5.6 above, a further argument for why demonstratives are ill-suited in capturing the fine-grained content is, according to Peacocke, that demonstratives pick out particulars rather than non-particular ‘ways’. In this sense, demonstratives would be unsuitable as constituents of content, since representational contents are meant to pick out non-particular features of experiences in the first place.

3. The argument from the overlap of human and animal perception

The third argument we can find in Peacocke’s account relies on the similarities between perceptions of humans and non-human animals. Peacocke’s simple formulation of this argument is as follows: “If the lower animals do not have states with conceptual content, but some of their states have contents in common with human perceptions, it follows that some perceptual representational content is nonconceptual.”¹⁵⁰ More precisely, Peacocke’s arguments are against the “hard line” on animal perception. The hard line is the thesis that “none of the conscious perceptual states with representational content enjoyed by mature humans can be enjoyed by nonlinguistic animals without concepts, or with only minimal conceptual capacities.”¹⁵¹

In *Mind and World*, John McDowell advocated the hard line on animal perception. McDowell defended a Kantian idea, according to which: “the objective world is present only to a self-conscious subject, a subject who can ascribe experiences to herself; it is only in the context of a subject’s ability to ascribe experiences to herself that experiences can constitute awareness of the world. [...] It is the spontaneity of the understanding, the power of conceptual thinking, that brings both the world and the self into view. Creatures without conceptual capacities lack self-consciousness and – this is part of the same package – experience of objective reality”¹⁵²

experiences. However, the argument presented here does not claim that perceptual contents are completely nonconceptual.

¹⁵⁰ Peacocke, 2001b, 614.

¹⁵¹ Peacocke, 2001a, 260.

¹⁵² McDowell, 1994, 114.

While Peacocke sees something plausible in McDowell's position, he points out that we should distinguish content that is objective from content that is also conceived as objective. According to Peacocke, creatures without conceptual capabilities can have objective perceptual contents, in the sense of the contents being about the objective world, they can have contents "whose correctness conditions concern the objective world." This, however, does not mean that the creature could, in any way, conceive the world as objective, as this would require some conception of objectivity. Peacocke agrees with McDowell "that the minimal requirements for thought about an objective world that is in some way conceived as objective are not met simply by the possession of perceptual states with nonconceptual representational content." A grasp of objectivity is a necessary prerequisite for rational critical thinking. It is this grasp that provides us with a sensibility to the "open-endedness" of grounds for accepting contents as objective; what those grounds are is something to be discovered and are in no way "restricted to what can be attained through perception and the use of a cognitive map." In Peacocke's view, the conception of objectivity provides us openness to novel methods, for example when, for some reason or another, we cannot tell something "just by looking."¹⁵³

Openness to novel methods, and the flexibility of critical thinking, are both grounded in an appreciation of objectivity that need not be present in a subject enjoying perceptual states with only nonconceptual content. Those perceptual states provide the necessary basis for more flexible forms of thought, but they can also exist in the absence of those more sophisticated abilities.¹⁵⁴

4. The argument based on the rationality of conceptual contents

Although Peacocke's distinction between contents that are objective and contents that are conceived as objective is a part of his defence of the previous argument, it is also an argument in its own right. What makes the distinction an argument for nonconceptualism can be found

¹⁵³ Peacocke, 2001a, 261-263.

¹⁵⁴ Peacocke, 2001b, 615.

in the following claim: “The most primitive aspects of representational content in perception, which our subjective experience shares with the mere animals, do not involve the grasp of objectivity required for conceptual content.”

We can find two different premises in this argument. According to the first premise of the argument, conceptual contents – the contents of beliefs and thoughts – require and involve a grasp of objectivity. This grasp of objectivity enables flexible critical thinking and openness to novel methods of inquiry other than plain perception. This first premise complies with a conceptualist view like the one McDowell advocates, although a conceptualist is not compelled to consider the grasp of objectivity an essential feature of conceptual contents. The second premise is that primitive aspects of human perception do not, or at least need not, involve the concept of objectivity. In conjunction with the first premise, this amounts to the argument that the contents of perception are not conceptual. However, a conceptualist might not be willing to accept the second part of the argument. McDowell, for one, considers rationality or spontaneity an essential feature of perception. His idea that perceptions only occur in the interplay of spontaneity and receptivity would not allow for perceptions to occur without a conception of objectivity, since some conception of objectivity seems to be essential to the spontaneity of thoughts. What we share with non-linguistic animals would then be merely a similar sensitivity to our environment. In linguistic beings, or concept possessors, on the other hand, this sensitivity has been transformed into conscious perception which always involves spontaneity. As is evident in McDowell’s view, these last two arguments are connected to wider questions about the nature of rationality, and that of human and animal consciousness. Consequently, the arguments, and responses to them, can be heavily dependent on theoretical background assumptions of the particular philosophers who take part in this discussion.

7.9. The nature of content in Peacocke’s view

Having presented the main points of Peacocke’s account and his arguments for it, we can now say something about what perceptual content itself is for Peacocke. According to Peacocke,

neither a conceptualist view nor a relational view of perceptual content, such as the view of Jeff Speaks, can capture the fine-grained differences between experiences that, for example, represent the same shape as a square and a regular diamond. In addition to limiting perceptions like these only to those who possess the concepts *square*, *regular diamond-shaped*, *symmetrical* and so on, a conceptualist view cannot give noncircular possession conditions to any of these perceptual concepts. On the other hand, a relational view that individuates contents with the external particulars cannot even distinguish between representations of a square and a regular diamond, since both of these can represent the same particular shape.

In understanding what content is for Peacocke, it is essential to see that in his account objects and properties are always perceived in some particular *way*. The way in which the object or property is perceived, corresponds to a *particular* mental representation that the subject has. Contents, on the other hand, are non-particular. Scenario contents are the spatial *types* of fundamental spatial mental representations. In Peacocke's account, mental representations with a given scenario content stand in a many-one relation to the scenario content itself. In perceiving two different scenes with distinct but identical objects "that are perceived fully veridically and in the same way [, we] can regard a scenario as being the type that captures the similarity of two such different perceptual cases."¹⁵⁵ In a sensationally identical but nonetheless distinct case, the scenarios would be the same.

Propositions, on the other hand, differentiate between various *ways* of perceiving individuals, for example shapes, by containing the properties and relations as well as the individuals that are perceived as holding these properties or relations. Peacocke's account allows for conceptual contents of perception as well: "There is no good reason for denying the overwhelmingly plausible view that we see things as trees or hear a sound as that of a car approaching."¹⁵⁶ These examples are not necessarily examples of propositional perceptual contents, but nothing in Peacocke's account seems to exclude the possibility of these either. If

¹⁵⁵ Peacocke, 1992, 65-67.

¹⁵⁶ Peacocke, 1992, 88.

we consider the fourfold table I presented earlier, we can see that Peacocke’s view allows for all of the four content types to be included in the contents of perceptual experiences.

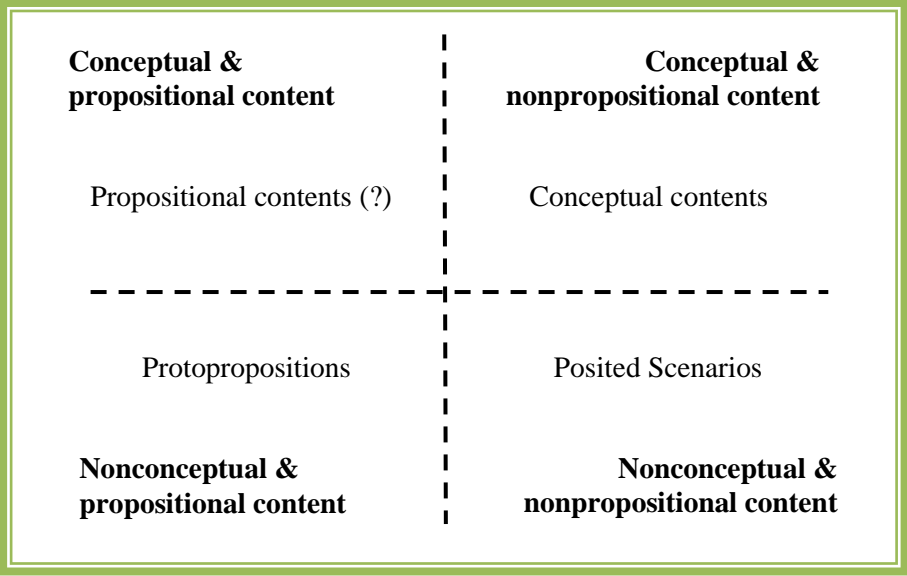


Figure 6

At this point, we can gain further understanding of what content is for Peacocke if we consider the distinctions presented in section 4. While each of the types of content in Peacocke’s account are distinct, and perhaps incompatible in the views of some philosophers, they are all nonetheless non-particular types. A certain type is a part of one’s contents of experiences when one has particular mental representations of that type. Because these contents are determined by particular mental representations, they are arguably internalist contents. Since the contents are repeatable non-particulars they are also universals. Whether they are abstract or concrete is less obvious. They are sensible in some sense of the word but, more precisely, they are ways in which sensible objects and properties can be perceived. Hence, as contents are also externalist and mind-independent, it seems reasonable to understand them as abstracta.

We can note a possible problem in Peacocke’s characterisation of perceptual content. He characterises a scenario as “a way of locating surfaces” and “features”. He also talks of prot propositions having an important role in a perceiver’s memory and recognition as “the

perceiver does not have to remember highly detailed scenario contents.”¹⁵⁷ If we understand these characterisations of content literally, should we conclude that the contents themselves have a role in the subject’s perceptual states and representations? Are scenarios and protopositions mental representations or psychological entities after all? Considering Peacocke’s previous characterisations, it would seem unlikely. If it is simply the case that these contents somehow give or describe the corresponding mental representations, should we understand these types of content – scenarios, protopositions and conceptual contents – as exhaustively describing and individuating the particular psychological states and representations a perceiver has?

As Peacocke does not really explain how the separate types of content could ever form a single uniform content of experience, we might end up with the conclusion that our experiences are in fact fragmented to three or four completely separate parts: perceptions of spatial features, perceptions of simple properties, and perceptions of objects or properties as concepts represent them, or even perceptions of states of affairs. These types of perception could have separate mental representations, separate corresponding psychological states and even separate phenomenological characters. It would also be hard to see what kind of psychological state would be exhaustively described with a *set* of ways of filling the space around the perceiver, as per the characterisation of scenario contents. On the other hand, if the representations and psychological states corresponding to the types of contents are understood as somehow overlapping, which seems reasonable to me, the contents could not be completely exhaustive in their descriptions of the corresponding representations and psychological states. In that case, even the complete “many-splendored” contents, with their different content types, would have to consist of some abstraction from the particular perceptual representations. Otherwise, we might have to understand the complete contents as particulars or tied to particulars, which would be strange since all of the content types themselves appear to be abstracta.

¹⁵⁷ Peacocke; 1992; 64, 78.

If we are to understand Peacocke's content as abstracting from the particular mental representations and psychological states given in perception, we should perhaps also doubt that Peacocke's content is all that is conveyed in perception – that it is the actual complete content. Some of Peacocke's characterisations also seem to assume too much of our perceptual representations. Does perception really represent every empty point between the objects we see as empty, as his account of scenario content seems to imply? Would it not be more economical for us to just represent what we see, instead of all the points between us and what we see as well? If abstractions fail as contents, perhaps we should also consider the plausibility of perceptual contents that are either particular themselves or tied to particular perceptions. This question is discussed in more detail in the following section.

7.10. Perceptual relations in Peacocke's view

Based on the distinctions above, we can analyse what kind of relations Peacocke's view of content posits. First of all, we can note that there seem to be three or four different perceptual relations, corresponding to the types of content Peacocke proposes. But as we noted in the previous chapter, all of the contents seem to fulfil the same role. Namely, they attempt to describe or give their respective levels of perceptual representation in as much detail as they can. More specifically, what they seem to describe are the particular mental states of the subject of experience that are informed or affected by the experience. Thus, perceptual relations, in Peacocke's case, are not posited between content and something else, but rather they can be seen as described or given by the content.

The perceptual relations in Peacocke's view appear to be informational. Firstly, scenario contents describe a relation that connects basic perceptual input to a mental representations or cognitive maps about basic spatial features of the surrounding world. Secondly, protopositions describe a relation that connects certain features of the acquired cognitive map to perceptions of basic objects, properties, and relations in that cognitive map. Thirdly conceptual contents describe a relation that connects features of this cognitive map to further conceptual representations in a richer cognitive map of the surrounding world. And fourthly,

propositional contents, if there are such contents in Peacocke's view, describe a relation that connects the cognitive map enriched by concepts to perceptions of states-of-affairs. All these relations seem to be on hierarchical levels, with the more primitive level being a basis for more abstract ones. Peacocke's view, thus interpreted, presents us with a view of perception that, through some kind of interpretive processes by our mental faculties, gives us experiences of the world that become richer and richer in content the deeper the interpretive process goes in levels. This view does not seem at all implausible to me. Peacocke's addition of the possibility of cognitive penetrability could even allow for higher cognitive capabilities to affect the interpretive process in a more basic level.

It seems that, rather than being something actually conveyed in experience, perceptual contents in Peacocke's view attempt to answer, as accurate as possible, the question "What is conveyed in experience?" A possible problem with Peacocke's view is that his content necessarily involves interpretation. The problem here is not that higher levels are based on interpretation of the lower level, but rather that the content itself that is supposed to give the representational mental state seems to abstract from the representation, meaning that it might not be able to give all features of the mental state after all. Furthermore, being abstractions, the contents can also describe aspects that are not actually represented in the mental state, such as the points of empty space in scenario contents. These concerns are closely connected to the question of whether we can actually have particular perceptual contents that do not consist of abstraction. I will examine this question in the next section.

8. Particularity and content

This section will examine the questions of whether it is possible to understand representational contents as composed of particular entities, and if so, whether we should understand the contents of perceptual experiences in such a way. The section briefly presents the revised view of John McDowell and some arguments from Charles Travis, arguments that forced McDowell to revise his old view. Both McDowell and Travis argue that representational content can only be abstract and propositional, and for that reason advocate nonrepresentational views. However, most of the focus in this section will be given to the view of Tim Crane. Crane argues that the most fundamental perceptual content is phenomenological content which is both representational and particular.

8.1. The given and its myth

The question of whether perceptual contents are particular, or tied to particulars, is closely connected to the issues of the given and ‘the Myth of the Given’. The issue of givenness will hence serve as the backdrop for the following chapters. The term ‘given’ comes from C.I Lewis’ distinction between the immediate data which are presented or *given* to the mind and the construction or interpretation which the mind brings to those data. That is to say, the immediate data is such that when put into words or otherwise made propositional, we only “under some category or other, select from it, emphasize aspects of it, and relate it in particular and unavoidable ways. [...] It is that which remains untouched and unaltered; however it is construed by thought.”¹⁵⁸ Thus, if the given is strictly separated from all interpretation that the mind brings to it, it might be best seen as concrete or particular, and conversely, abstractions of the given seem to fall into the category of what the mind brings to the immediate data.

¹⁵⁸ Lewis; 1929; 38, 52-53.

Wilfrid Sellars attacked Lewis' view by presenting it as a myth: How could we be justified in making judgments about the empirical world on the basis of something merely given to the senses. According to Sellars, such a given would have to be both epistemically efficacious and independent, and no cognitive state could fulfil both requirements. Something merely given to the senses could not draw on capacities of reason that are required for justification. In "characterizing an episode or a state as that of knowing, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says." Since epistemic facts cannot be analysed, even in principle, to non-epistemic facts, something given independently of the space of reasons could not act as a justifying foundation to anything.¹⁵⁹

8.2. Charles Travis' critique of McDowell's view

As was already discussed in section 5, in *Mind and world* John McDowell continued Sellars' attack on the given. However, instead of accepting the Sellarsian idea that appearances only inform, not justify, perceptual beliefs, McDowell departed from Sellars by advocating a Kantian synthesis of receptivity and spontaneity, with which he supposed to bridge appearances to receptivity. McDowell defended a view of propositional and conceptual content, according to which the contents of perceptual experience are of the form '*that things are thus and so*'. 'That things are thus and so' is also something that can be judged, thus eliminating any need of positing a shift from one type of content to another in perceptual judgements. McDowell, however, has revised his view and abandoned the view of propositional content. In his article 'Avoiding the Myth of the Given', he presents his new and revised view about the contents of perceptual experiences:

I used to assume that to conceive experiences as actualizations of conceptual capacities, we would need to credit experiences with propositional content, the sort of content judgments have. And I used to assume that the content of an experience would need to

¹⁵⁹ Sellars; 1956; §5, §36.

include everything the experience enables its subject to know noninferentially. But both these assumptions now strike me as wrong.¹⁶⁰

McDowell revised his view in light of critique from Charles Travis. The critique Travis presented against McDowell focused, among other things, on his condition for the justification of perceptual beliefs. According to the condition, normative relations, such as justification, exist only between entities in the logical space of reasons. Consequently, perceptual contents can justify or warrant beliefs only if they belong to the logical space of reasons. And as “the space of reasons does not extend further than the space of concepts”¹⁶¹, these contents must be of the same kind as the contents of beliefs are, which is to say, of the form ‘that things are thus and so’.

According to the condition, “something non-conceptual [...] could not impinge rationally on what one is to think. It could not stand in a rational relation.”¹⁶² The Myth of the Given is the myth that there could be some such nonconceptual foundation that justifies beliefs from outside the space of reasons. When presented as a foundation that justifies beliefs from outside the conceptual sphere, the innocuous given becomes the mythical Given. In McDowell’s view in *Mind and World*, what avoids the Myth by providing justification from receptivity but nonetheless from *inside* the space of reasons, is the interplay of receptivity and spontaneity in all perception. According to McDowell, “we must not suppose that receptivity makes an even notionally separable contribution to its co-operation with spontaneity.”¹⁶³

Travis rejects this condition and claims that there is another way to be connected to the normative. Whereas conceptual entities can stand in normative *logical* relations to each other, the nonconceptual can stand in normative relations to conceptual entities by bearing for on what to think. In such a way, the nonconceptual is in reason’s reach. According to Travis, “there precisely must be rational relations between the conceptual [...] and something else if

¹⁶⁰ McDowell, 2008, 3.

¹⁶¹ McDowell, 1994, 14.

¹⁶² Travis, 2007, 229.

¹⁶³ McDowell, 1994, 51. For more on McDowell’s view in *Mind and World*, see section 5 above.

we are to make sense of experience bearing on what one is to think.” Travis sees that our ability to recognise instances of general kinds of things from nonconceptual particulars in our sensibility bears for us on what to think about the world. And this world’s ‘bearing for one on what to think’ is exactly how perceptions justify beliefs. “What cannot be right is that it bears only through relations within the space of the conceptual. Nor can it be that experiential intake is conceptually structured. Passivity makes more than a notionally separable contribution to spontaneity.”¹⁶⁴

If McDowell’s condition is not rejected, we would have to conceive seeing what is before oneself “as visually confronting some given battery of conceptual structures” that is, as seeing the fact that such-and-such is the case. The problem with perceiving conceptual entities is that some conceptual entities are situation dependent, or in Travis’ terms, occasion sensitive. Depending on the occasion one may be warranted to use a concept in describing some state of affairs while on another occasion one may not be so warranted. For example, one might not be warranted to describe lamb kidneys as ‘meat’ if one is trying to buy meat from a butcher. On the other hand, when one is planning a vegetarian meal, kidneys are likely to count as meat on the understanding on which one would then speak of something being meat – “one would not (usually) serve kidneys to a vegetarian with the remark, ‘I made sure there would be no meat at dinner’.” McDowell would then have to explain the following: If there are different, equally correct ways of representing what we perceive in the world, what would determine which representations we are given in experience? And if only one of the representations is given in experience, would the given representation warrant one to claim that things are how another representation presents them? It seems not. If an experience represents kidneys with the concept ‘meat’ instead of ‘kidney’, the representation would not rationally justify one in having beliefs about there being kidneys. The same problem applies to other occasion sensitive notions as well.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Travis, 2007, 235. Elsewhere, Travis also speaks of the world ‘bearing factive meaning’ in perception. (Travis, 2004) This appears to be an alternative formulation to “bearing for one on what to think.”

¹⁶⁵ Travis, 2007.

Travis' critique on McDowell's condition can be summarised in the following way: In McDowell's view, perceptual experience conveys to us only conceptual representations. Perceptual representations are abstractions of particular perceived entities. However, depending on the situation, the same perceived particular may warrant different abstractions, abstractions which by themselves may not warrant each other. Consequently, experiences that convey only abstractions do not necessarily warrant other abstractions, even if the perceived particulars should warrant them. McDowell's condition hence fails. Perceptual contents, placed in the space of reasons, fail to justify all that perceptions should, in fact, justify. In Travis' view, abstractions cannot be 'what is conveyed' in perception; they cannot be the contents of perceptual experiences.¹⁶⁶

8.3. McDowell's revised view

Travis' critique effected a change in McDowell's view. In the confines of his previous view McDowell would have had to claim that perceptions involving recognitions of even the most common objects must have in their contents a proposition including the concept of the object. This is something that McDowell now rejects:

Suppose I have a bird in plain view, and that puts me in a position to know noninferentially that it is a cardinal. [...] On my old assumption, since my experience puts me in a position to know noninferentially that what I see is a cardinal, its content would have to include a proposition in which the concept of a cardinal figures: perhaps one expressible, on the occasion, by saying 'That's a cardinal'. But what seems right is this: my experience makes the bird visually present to me, and my recognitional capacity enables me to know noninferentially that what I see is a cardinal. Even if we go on assuming my experience has content, there is no need to suppose that the

¹⁶⁶ As Travis thinks of all contents as representational contents, and considers representation as abstractions, he also denies experiences having content at all.

concept under which my recognitional capacity enables me to bring what I see figures in that content.¹⁶⁷

According to McDowell, the experience of seeing a cardinal can be the same whether one can recognise cardinals or not, the difference in those cases would merely be in one's recognitional capacity, in what Travis calls expertise. Although McDowell's revisions so far appear to conform to Travis' critique, there are some things he preserves from his previous view as well.

Even though McDowell no longer claims that perceptual content is propositional, he has not altogether abandoned his conceptualist roots. McDowell still argues that "on pain of the Myth of the Given, capacities that belong to the higher cognitive faculty must be operative in experience." According to him, in giving one things to know, experience must draw on conceptual capabilities. "Some concepts that figure in knowledge afforded by an experience can be excluded from the content of the experience itself [...] but not all can."¹⁶⁸

According to both McDowell and Travis, representation is always representing something 'as so' and consequently also conceptual and propositional. In their views, the idea that there could be nonconceptual or nonpropositional representation makes no sense, although McDowell's reasons for this are likely to differ from the reasons Travis has. McDowell nonetheless has to either agree with Travis on that perception has no content at all, or give an account of nonrepresentational content. McDowell chooses the latter option.

8.4. Intuitional content

McDowell's alternative for propositional content is what he calls intuitional content. An intuition as a content of experience is an intuition in a Kantian sense. He defines intuition as '*a*

¹⁶⁷ McDowell, 2008, 3.

¹⁶⁸ McDowell, 2008, 4.

having in view' from the translation of Kant's *Anschauung*. Intuitions do not just relate one to the objects of perception; they have a unity, which, according to Kant, is given to them by the same function that gives unity to judgments. That is, perceived objects and properties are presented in a structured unity like those that are expressed in a proposition. McDowell argues that "the higher cognitive faculty needs to be in our picture not just to account for the unity with which certain content figures in such an intuition, but also, in the guise of the productive imagination, to provide for part of the content itself [...]"¹⁶⁹

McDowell considers judgments as inner analogues to assertions and therefore something we can count as discursive activity. In an assertion one simply makes something discursively explicit. Intuiting, on the other hand, "is not discursive, even in the extended sense in which judging is. Discursive content is articulated. Intuitional content is not." Intuitions also typically have aspects that the subject has no means of making discursively explicit. In order to make such an aspect discursively explicit, "one would need to carve it out, as it were, from the categorically unified but as yet unarticulated content of the intuition by determining it to be the meaning of a linguistic expression, which one thereby sets up as a means for making that content explicit."¹⁷⁰

If intuitional content is not discursive, and consequently not representational either, why then does McDowell claim that it is conceptual? According to McDowell, every aspect of intuitional content is "present in a form in which it is already suitable to be the content associated with a discursive capacity."¹⁷¹ If one does not already have a discursive capacity for some aspect of an intuition, one will have to introduce new discursive capacities. For something to be conceptual in McDowell's view is, as Tim Crane puts it, "not for it to be conceptualised [...] but for it to be conceptualizable."¹⁷² And this is something that many would see as a form of nonconceptualism. McDowell nonetheless insists that higher cognitive faculties are in play in intuitions, reflecting those that give unity to discursive activity.

¹⁶⁹ McDowell, 2008, 5.

¹⁷⁰ McDowell, 2008, 6.

¹⁷¹ McDowell, 2008, 7.

¹⁷² Crane, 2013, 231.

However, McDowell agrees with Travis on that visual experiences merely “bring our surroundings into view, thereby entitling us to take certain things to be so, but leaving it a further question what, if anything, we do take to be so.”¹⁷³ But, unlike the nonconceptual in Travis’ view, intuitions are not a case of mere sensibility. In this way, McDowell argues, he can avoid falling into the Myth of the Given as Travis’ view does.

The problem with McDowell’s view is that it does not explain how intuitional content could be, in his own earlier terms, in the conceptual space of reasons without actually being conceptualised. Such content would have surely been nonconceptual in his earlier account. Thus, it appears that McDowell wants to eat his cake and have it too; he wants to acknowledge Travis’ critique of conceptualism and still remain a conceptualist. But merely claiming that intuitions have the same unity as propositional content does not actually explain *how* they could be conceptual when they do not involve all the concepts a proposition would have to involve. Neither does it explain how *any* concepts could figure in intuitions. McDowell, however, does give us a clue: when a subject “does not already have a discursive capacity associated with some aspect of the content of an intuition of hers”, all she needs to do to acquire it, is introduce “new discursive capacities to be associated with those significances.”¹⁷⁴ So, intuitions involve concepts by aspects of intuitions being associated to discursive capacities. But this raises a question: Would it not be better in accordance to the meaning of ‘conceptual’ to say that an aspect of intuitional content is conceptual when it is associated to discursive capacities, and conversely that it is nonconceptual when it lacks such an association? If that is the case, then we would have every reason to call intuitional content nonconceptual content, even if *some* concepts were necessarily present in all of the intuitions a concept possessor may have.

Additionally, even if all the aspects of an intuition were associated to conceptual discursive capacities, would this association justify calling that intuition conceptual? When a feature, whether it is a perceived property, a particular or a representation, is associated with some

¹⁷³ McDowell, 2008, 11.

¹⁷⁴ McDowell, 2008, 7.

conceptual discursive activity, it is that discursive activity which is conceptual in perceptions involving that feature, not the feature itself. In any case, there is a clear distinction between the natures of intuitional contents and the contents of discursive capacities. McDowell himself stresses that “we should centre our idea of the conceptual on the content of discursive activity.”¹⁷⁵ It seems that intuitions are, even to McDowell himself, conceptual only in name.

If McDowell’s revised view is interpreted as a nonconceptualist view, we can further interpret his claims of higher cognitive faculties being in play in perception as claiming that rational relations – the reach of reason – extends further than the conceptual. Whether this extension of rationality to the nonconceptual consists of possession and application conditions of concepts as Peacocke claims, or of bearing on what one is to think, or of association to discursive capacities, the general claim remains the same. Peacocke, Travis and McDowell all seem to have something in common, even though all of them have greatly differing views on what the nature of perceptual contents is. And it may be this shared idea of extending the reach of rationality to what is perceptually given that saves their views from falling into the Myth of the Given.

8.5. Tim Crane and the Given

The accounts of McDowell and Travis leave some questions about the nature of perceptual contents unanswered. One of these questions is about the way content is related to particulars. McDowell’s account is unclear on whether intuitional contents include particulars or abstracta. Nonetheless, he holds that intuitions are a type of content, albeit nonrepresentational one. Travis, on the other hand, is explicit in both arguing that the nonconceptual consists of particulars as well as denying that it could be called content since it is not representational. Although Travis claims that the nonconceptual is not content, the claim relies on his understanding of contents as representational in the propositional sense; the nonconceptual in his view could still be understood as content in the nonrepresentational sense. Thus, the

¹⁷⁵ McDowell, 2008, 6.

accounts of both McDowell and Travis leave us wondering whether particulars could be called contents, either in the representational sense or in some other sense. In his article “The Given” in *Mind, Reason and Being-In-The-World: The McDowell-Dreyfus Debate*, a volume edited by Joseph Schear, Tim Crane claims that the contents of perceptual experiences are fundamentally particular and representational.

In Crane’s view, perceptual content is essentially tied with phenomenology. His arguments for his ‘phenomenological content’ rely on two main premises. The first premise is the plausibility of positing many different types of representational content to experience, while the second premise is the implausibility of these many types of content being given to the subject in experience. These premises lead Crane to the claim that propositional representational content should be distinguished from the more fundamental phenomenological content.

The issue of givenness is closely connected to the issue of content in Crane’s discussion. Crane’s approach to the issue differs from those of McDowell and Travis by its focus on the original distinction between ‘what is given’ and ‘what is brought to experience’. In McDowell’s and Travis’ discussions, the issue of givenness appears to have the emphasis on the Myth of the Given. According to Crane, both McDowell and Travis nonetheless share the idea that perceptual justification essentially consists of a connection between two kinds of fact. “For McDowell, the connection is between the unified nonpropositional content of an intuition and the propositional content of the judgement which one makes. For Travis, the connection is between what is seen and the judgement which one makes by applying concepts to what is seen.”¹⁷⁶ In both of their views, the Myth of the Given is avoided by making this connection – by bringing concepts to bear on sensibility. But if the Myth is avoided, is there any longer a point in talking about givenness; about what is given and what is brought to experience? Crane argues there is.

Crane argues that the issue of givenness is still significant, though not for the reason of there being a myth we should avoid, but rather because of the usefulness of the original distinction

¹⁷⁶ Crane, 2013, 232.

between what is given in experience and what one brings to experience. Like Travis, Crane distinguishes the particular given from abstractions of that given. The difference between Crane and Travis, however, is that Crane argues that this given is also content, and not only content in the non-representational sense of McDowell's intuitions, but rather content in the normal, representational sense. How Crane argues for this relies on his discussion of what is meant by terms 'content' and 'representational'.

Firstly, Crane notes that the issue of the givenness should be connected, in some way at least, to the issue of the content of experience. In earlier uses of the word, 'content' referred to something specifically sensory: the way in which G.E. Moore talks of blueness as the contents of sensations of blue, as well as how Moritz Schlick considers contents such as 'the green of the leaf' inexpressible, have more in common to what is today referred to as 'qualia' than the contemporary notion of content, which is usually understood as representational content. However, these differences in what is meant by 'content' do not necessarily mean that we should choose one of these uses of the term over the other and define it as the only correct meaning. If we adopt a liberal definition of 'content', we can preserve both of these uses of the term. Crane presents Susanna Siegel's definition of content as something that can refer both to the sensory and representational aspects of experience. Siegel defines content as "what is conveyed to the subject by her perceptual experience."¹⁷⁷ By this definition, McDowell's intuitional content and even Travis' account of the nonconceptual can be considered valid views about the contents of perceptual experiences.

8.6 Givenness and content

With Siegel's definition, Crane presents a connection between content and the given: "To my ear, 'what is conveyed' sounds rather close to 'what is given'. So if we adopt Siegel's definition of 'content', we can also say that the content of an experience is what is given to the

¹⁷⁷ Siegel, 2010.

subject in that experience.”¹⁷⁸ This ‘given’ or ‘content’ need not be a mythical Given, nor is it necessarily a nonconceptual given. It seems that one could even consider contents in standard conceptualism as something ‘conveyed to the subject’, even if one were to understand concepts as something one brings to experience. McDowell’s earlier view would then also be a valid view about content in Siegel’s terms. Whereas in McDowell’s earlier view ‘what is conveyed’ was something conceptual and representational, in his revised view, ‘what is conveyed’ is something intuitional. It seems that intuitions, conveyed or given in experience, are not quite representational, nor are they just one’s perceived surroundings as would be the case with ‘mere sensibility’. As for those who reject the idea that perceptual experience has any content at all, what they truly are rejecting is *representational* content, which on Siegel’s account of content is not presupposed. In this way, when Siegel’s definition is adopted, content in the broad sense can be distinguished from representational content.

According to Crane, the dominant view about the nature of perceptual contents is the propositional content view, which he calls *standard intentionalism*. He claims, however, that there is a tension in standard intentionalism between two kinds of views about propositions: On the one hand, Russellian views emphasise the ‘object-involving’ and ‘direct’ nature of experiences. On the other hand, Fregean views emphasise the ‘aspectual’ nature of experiences by presenting perceived properties as perceived under some mode of presentation, or through how a concept represents them. While the Russellian view relates the experiencing subject to the perceived objects and properties¹⁷⁹, the Fregean view relates the subject to representations of these objects. And here the tension in standard intentionalism becomes apparent: If the views relate the subject to different types of entities, and hence neither view strictly excludes the other, which one of the views should we consider as the correct view about content, and on what grounds? After all, it is somewhat uncontroversial that both of the proposed relations exist, at least in normal veridical perception.

¹⁷⁸ Crane, 2013, 233.

¹⁷⁹ Perhaps by pure reference or by an externalist relation (see chapter 6.4).

One possible response to this tension is to adopt a pluralistic view about perceptual content, such as the one proposed by David Chalmers. Chalmers proposes that experiences can have multiple contents with different corresponding ‘perceptual’ relations. These contents could also include other kinds of contents besides Russellian and Fregean contents.¹⁸⁰ According to Crane, Chalmers’s proposal is based on the idea that the pluralistic view can serve to highlight different aspects of perceptual states, much in the same way *de dicto* and *de re* distinctions can serve to highlight different aspects of some other mental states, such as desires. Chalmers’ view is plausible, according to Crane, but only if it is understood as a claim about the information that experience delivers or what can be derived from it. In that sense it is plausible to say that perception of the planet Venus shining in the sky can convey to one also that Hesperus or Phosphorus is shining in the sky or that something is shining in the sky, and so forth. However, if Chalmers’ proposal is understood as a view about the phenomenology, about what it is like to have an experience, it makes considerably less sense. “When having a visual experience of the planet Venus in the evening, it does not seem as if many distinct (and possibly incompatible) contents are being conveyed to me.”¹⁸¹

In Crane’s view, inability to explain phenomenology is a serious flaw in a view about perceptual content. For Crane, the connection between content and phenomenology is more than what is determined with the commonly-held constraint that perceptual content “must be adequate to its phenomenology.”¹⁸² While a constraint like this is present in the views of John McDowell, Jeff Speaks and Christopher Peacocke, among many others, what Crane proposes is that phenomenology should be a part of content itself:

Given how Siegel originally introduced the word ‘content’, it seems like an understatement to say that phenomenal adequacy is simply another ‘constraint’ on content. Content, remember, is what is conveyed to a subject in an experience, and an

¹⁸⁰ For more, see e.g. Chalmers, 2006.

¹⁸¹ Crane, 2013, 237.

¹⁸² Siegel, 2010.

experience is a conscious state or event. Surely part of what is conveyed is how things are consciously?¹⁸³

But could phenomenology be a part of content that is propositional? According to Crane, propositional content and phenomenology may have in common the idea that what is given has a certain form, but the propositional ‘that things are thus and so’ necessarily abstracts from the real presence of what is perceived. It is by abstracting from this ‘real presence’ that propositions can outlive the experience and become the contents of judgement. The phenomenal given should thus be distinguished from propositional content. “The reason for this is the plausibility of content pluralism, plus the implausibility of saying that multiple representational contents are given to the subject.”¹⁸⁴ Crane’s point appears to be that in order for propositional content to be plausible as content of experiences, it would have to be pluralistic content, and pluralistic content could not be what is phenomenally given.¹⁸⁵

8.7. Crane’s phenomenological content

Crane’s distinction between propositional content and what is phenomenally given is not meant as a claim that there is no propositional content. Instead, he says, “we have to see it as playing a different role.” What Crane has in mind stems from Frege’s distinction between sense, reference and idea:

In ‘On Sense and Reference’ Frege employed an analogy with seeing the moon through a telescope to distinguish between sense, reference and what he called ‘idea’. The moon is analogous to the reference of a word; the image on the telescope lens is the sense (it is the ‘property of many people’) and the idea is compared to the image on

¹⁸³ Crane, 2013, 238.

¹⁸⁴ Crane, 2013, 239.

¹⁸⁵ Of course the ‘phenomenal given’ could be a part of pluralistic contents, but even if that were so, the distinction would hold between those contents that are phenomenally given and those that are not.

the retina. An idea is something which is dependent on a particular perceiver, a particular subject, at a particular moment. It is, therefore, by definition unshareable.¹⁸⁶

Propositional contents are, claims Crane, contents in the level of Frege's sense. "Contents [in standard intentionalism] are abstract objects, and intentional states are relations to these objects."¹⁸⁷ The contents Crane proposes, however, are to be contents in the level of Frege's ideas, and these two levels of content do not exclude each other. The plausibility of propositional contents would not, in this sense, diminish the plausibility of phenomenological contents proposed by Crane.

What then are these phenomenological contents supposed to be? Unsurprisingly, following Siegel's characterisation of content, Crane defines it as "what is phenomenologically given or conveyed to subjects in their experience." More ambitiously, Crane also defines it as the 'real content' of the experience. This sense of 'real', however, is meant to be contrasted with 'ideal', 'abstract' or 'general'. Propositional contents, in contrast to phenomenological contents, are thus abstract in two senses. Firstly, they have no spatiotemporal location and secondly, they necessarily abstract from "the concrete reality of the experiential episode." Because of their abstract nature, propositional contents can be shared between individuals. Phenomenological contents, on the other hand, are likened to particular mental representations in that they are unrepeatable, dated, located and concrete occurrences. While one could have experiences which seem exactly the same, the phenomenological contents in these experiences would be nonetheless different. If there is sameness of content between such experiences, it is merely sameness of generalisations or descriptions of the real, phenomenological content. According to Crane, this distinction between a concrete act, its 'real content', and its abstract content should be fundamental to the theory of intentionality.

Crane argues that there is nothing mysterious about nonpropositional representational content. Pictures, he claims, are an example of this: "they represent objects and their properties but are

¹⁸⁶ Crane, 2013, 239.

¹⁸⁷ Crane, 2013, 239.

not the kind of thing you can use to ‘say’ things.” Crane also differentiates between a content having a correctness condition expressible as a proposition – something a picture can have – and that content itself being propositional. While this distinction does not seem too convincing to those who might deny pictures having content at all, it may, nonetheless, speak against an account of pictures having propositional content. Of course, it would not be as effective against views that see the talk about contents of pictures as actually being about contents of interpretations of pictures. Then again, such a view could be criticised by pointing out that an interpretation would have to be an interpretation of something that is, at least to some degree, contentful as well. This seems to be something that Crane assumes, although he never argues for it explicitly.

Crane’s view has some obvious similarities with the views of both McDowell and Travis. All three views present perception as conveying something nonpropositional, which can then be made discursive by abstraction or explication. Their greatest difference, on the other hand, is that, in Crane’s view, what is conveyed is representational content instead of intuitional content or something that is not content at all. So for Crane, experience is not only representational but it also represents the experienced world in a particular and concrete way specific to the percipient and to the particular experience. Assigning a correctness condition to an experience is merely to specify one of the ways it represents the world. “[T]he nature of that experience itself as a representation is what is *described* by the correctness condition; it does not consist in the assignment of a correctness condition.”¹⁸⁸

8.8. Particular and abstract contents

While these characterisations are still not very informative for understanding what Crane’s particular representation actually is, there is another excerpt in “The Given” that can contribute to our understanding. According to Crane, “[t]he psychological reality of the act [of perceptual experience] is its reality as a representation; a representation is an intrinsic state (of the person, or the brain, or the soul), and this intrinsic state is something which has a specific,

Crane, 2013, 242.

concrete nature of its own.” Now, Crane does not seem to be merely claiming that there is a (close) connection between content and the corresponding perceptual or mental state¹⁸⁹. That would be something that advocates of abstract content could claim as well. Rather, it seems that Crane’s claim is the *identification* of phenomenological content with the corresponding state. While the state itself might not be something that could be called content in the eyes of, say, Christopher Peacocke, perceptual states are nonetheless *conveyed* in experience and they *represent* the world in some way, thus giving Crane ample reason to call them representational contents.

Crane notes that his view could be accused of ignoring the distinction between the vehicle and content of a representation. The vehicle-content distinction is the same as, or at least corresponds to, the traditional distinction between a sentence and the proposition it expresses. The sentence is the vehicle that carries propositional content. Other representational vehicles that can carry content could be, for example, signs, pictures or brain states. In the context of (visual) experiences, the representational vehicles between which we can distinguish are, according to Crane, imagistic and linguistic representation.¹⁹⁰ Crane defends against such accusations by claiming that, since there is a phenomenological dimension to content conveyed in experience, the form in which that phenomenology is conveyed, i.e. that it has something in common with an image, cannot be irrelevant to the content of the experience. Characterisation of the phenomenal character of an experience would thus be dependent on the nature of the vehicle of that experience as well. “One might even say that where the phenomenological conception of content is concerned, we should not make the distinction between vehicle and content: it is central to the phenomenology of an experience that what is conveyed to the subject includes its specific vehicle.”¹⁹¹ If Crane’s idea is plausible and we extend it to other forms of vehicles and representations, it might even provide us with

¹⁸⁹ I see no reason not to call states of souls or brains mental states in this context.

¹⁹⁰ According to Crane, another understanding of representational vehicles is one that distinguishes between, say, the analogical or digital realisation of an image. This understanding seems to correspond to the distinction between what Crane calls different *media* in which e.g. a sentence can be realised or stored; such as written, spoken or digital. (For more, see e.g. Crane, 2003, 135-137.)

¹⁹¹ Crane, 2013, 243.

phenomenology as a bridge between vehicles and contents of mental representation altogether. On the other hand, if phenomenological content is indeed identical with the corresponding psychological or mental state, the idea becomes somewhat trivial. If the state involves an imagistic form, it seems uncontroversial to claim that the imagistic form is also a part of what that state is like for the subject i.e. a part of the subject's phenomenology.

The role left for propositional contents in Crane's view has less to do with what is conveyed in perception and more with what can be said about it. The relation between the real, phenomenological content and propositional content is likened to the relation between physical magnitudes and abstract numbers: "[T]he weight of a standard bag of sugar can be thought of as a relation [...] between the bag and the number 1[...]. It is true, literally true, that the weight can be related to this number in this way; but this is not what something's weight fundamentally is." Thus, in the same way that the abstract number can be used to "model" the physical magnitude of the weight, the propositional content of an experience can be used to model the real content of that experience. The same thought is applicable to a belief as well. According to Crane, "it is literally true that the belief is a relation to a proposition; but this is not what the belief fundamentally is." Modelling mental states with abstract propositions unavoidably has an element of idealisation. That is why, Crane claims, even if we model beliefs with propositions, "we do not expect a system of a subject's real beliefs to exhibit deductive closure."

Propositional contents are an example of what Crane calls the *semantic conception of content*. All semantic contents consist of interpretation. To slightly simplify it, they assign objects to names and sets of objects to predicates, and determine the truth of the content by virtue of whether the object belongs to that set, thus entitling Crane to call them 'semantic' contents. While different interpretations – different propositional contents – can highlight different aspects of the real content of a representational state, and some interpretations are better at capturing how things seem to a subject, no amount of interpretation can ever fully capture the representational nature of that state, according to Crane. Even Peacocke's detailed scenario content with its "set of ways of filling out the space whose instantiation is consistent with the

correctness of the representational content”¹⁹² is, in Crane’s definition, content in the semantic sense. Thus we can see that content pluralism is plausible precisely because multiple semantic contents can highlight multiple aspects of an experience, when only one of the contents would be lacking with respect to the aspects highlighted by the other contents.¹⁹³

Crane’s idea seems to be that contents that characterise the ways in which experience represents the world necessarily fall short of that representation. Only the phenomenological conception can ‘capture’ the real content of the experience. Although, as the phenomenological content is not semantic, it cannot actually capture or describe anything, it simply is, by definition, that which is conveyed. Thus we are left with two differing conceptions of content, one is content conveyed in experience and the other is content based on interpretation.

8.9. The nature of perceptual content

This section briefly presented three different views on perceptual content: The view of Charles Travis, according to which perception has no content at all; the revised view of John McDowell, according to which perceptual content is intuitional; and the view of Tim Crane, according to which perceptual content is fundamentally phenomenological. All three views differ from each other but are also similar in some aspects in comparison to the other views presented in this thesis. Namely, the views take a more or less explicit stand against the idea that any single abstraction or interpretation of what is given in experience could suffice to be the whole content of that experience.

¹⁹² Peacocke, 1992, 63.

¹⁹³ One should note that, for Crane’s arguments to be effective, the plausible pluralist contents should include multiple representational contents and not merely relational contents in addition to a singular representational content. After all, while relational contents might highlight some aspects of the experience, they cannot highlight aspects of the phenomenological character, since that is representational according to Crane, and Crane’s arguments rely on the idea that the phenomenological content cannot be captured by any abstract content.

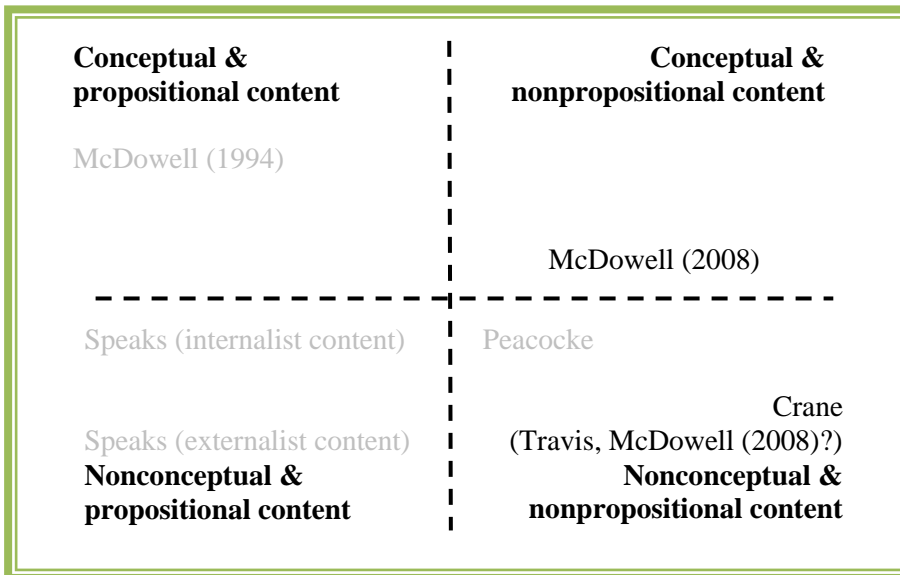


Figure 7: Although McDowell claims to be a conceptualist and Travis claims that the nonconceptual is not content, under the normal understanding of (non)conceptualism and a more liberal understanding of content, we could see them both as actually advocating nonconceptualist views.

Travis' view is simply that there is nothing we could call perceptual content, but as I previously noted, this mainly follows from Travis' conception of contents as necessarily representational and propositional. Under some other conception of content, such as the one proposed by Susanna Siegel, what Travis calls 'the nonconceptual' could perhaps be classified as content. McDowell's view, on the other hand, is that perceptual content is intuitional. Intuitions necessarily involve capacities from higher cognitive faculties both in providing the unity of the content as well as in the form of productive imagination, which presents objects to us as three-dimensional instead of as mere surfaces. Thus it might seem that intuitional contents involve abstract entities after all. However, McDowell stresses that not all of the intuitional content is associated to conceptual discursive capacities in experience and an experience could be the same independently of one's possession of concepts relevant to that experience. In light of this, it seems we could never have experiences with purely abstract contents. And of course, if we were to follow a thought similar to what Crane proposed, we could also understand conceptual capacities in play in experience as something that have their own phenomenological character, or the concepts involved in experience as not being *fundamentally* merely relations to abstract concepts. All in all, if intuitions present objects through their perceivable properties and these properties need not have discursive capacities associated to them, then what is given in experience does not seem to be dependent on the

existence any particular conceptual capacities.¹⁹⁴ McDowell's and Travis' views seem to be compatible with Crane's suggestion that perceptual content is particular, at least to this extent.

However, contrary to Crane, both Travis and McDowell argue that perceptual content cannot be representational if it is not propositional or abstract. Although Crane argues for particular representation, he is not very clear on what this particular representation consists of. We can assume that this particular representation has to do with particular mental states, which, being meaningful psychological states, have content and, in the case of perception, also represent the world. But this notion of representation seems to differ from the representation that is associated with Crane's semantic contents. Representation in semantic contents appears to be based on interpretations of some parts of the 'real content' as corresponding to relevant parts of the world, and thus that part of the content would represent the relevant part of the world. The real content, on the other hand, is defined as not involving interpretation, since that is what distinguishes real content from ideal content and the given from what is brought to the experience.

Representation in phenomenological contents would therefore have to be understood in a different way – perhaps the representation could be seen as some kind of causal imprint of the perceived properties on the percipient's cognitive machinery through the mediation of the sense organs. This, however, would come close to relational views, against which Crane has previously argued. Another way, and I think a more plausible one, would be to conceive phenomenological contents as also including some type of psychological instances of concepts.¹⁹⁵ Crane never denies that phenomenology could involve concepts, and following

¹⁹⁴ McDowell does speak of some concepts that cannot be excluded from the content of the experience, but what these could be is less clear. He mentions experience as "drawing on conceptual capacities associated with concepts of proper and common sensibles" such as shape, size, position, movement etc. (McDowell, 2008, 4-5), but particular shape concept for one do not seem to be good candidates since one can arguably perceive many shapes one does not possess concepts for. Neither would it seem reasonable to assume that one would have to include more general concepts, such as 'oblong shaped' or 'shape', every time one perceives something for which one does not possess the proper shape concept.

¹⁹⁵ And perhaps also other ways psychological meaning can be related to experience, such as emotional responses.

McDowell, we could understand conceptual capacities, in the form of productive imagination, as providing a part of the phenomenological content itself. While at first this seems to shed doubt to Crane's use of the distinction between the given and what is brought to the experience, the distinction can nonetheless be maintained. What the productive imagination, as well as something like seeing aspects, provides to experience does not seem to be something that could be changed by later interpretation. The phenomenology of the experience might present some things through a psychological category or conception but that would not be affected by the interpretation that is brought to experience. It could also be that the occurrences of these concepts in experience have their own particular phenomenal characters, and that the phenomenology actually involves these characters. Perhaps that is partly what Crane meant when he modelled his phenomenological content on Fregean ideas. While much of this is conjecture, these claims are at least something Crane could use to defend his view, if he indeed accepts concepts to his phenomenological content.

Of all the views discussed in this thesis, Crane's is perhaps the most explicit one with regards to the nature of his view of perceptual content. At the same time, he is also perhaps more sparing than some others in describing what kind of features are involved in that content. This is why, in order to flesh out his account, one is forced to interpret his claims in the best possible way. Conversely, McDowell's descriptions about the nature of his intuitional content are somewhat lacking in detail and we have to interpret them. The contents in both views are clearly closely connected to mental entities, if are not mental entities themselves. Thus we should see both McDowell and Crane as advocating internalist views.

With regard to the other distinctions presented in section 4, Crane's phenomenological content is explicitly described as concrete and particular, in contrast to semantic contents which seem to be universal and abstract types. As the phenomenological content cannot be captured by any single abstraction, perhaps we should not see them as tokens of types or even occurrences of types. Rather, it seems that phenomenological contents, and the mental states they are contents of, by their nature seem to fall outside of the type-token distinction. Of course, if being a token of some type is simply seen as anything that can be interpreted as falling under that type, we could understand phenomenological contents, as well as almost anything we can interpret, as

being tokens of innumerable types. But this would make the distinction itself somewhat vague and perhaps even useless in this context.

McDowell's view is somewhat difficult to classify in accordance with these distinctions. His departure from his earlier view in *Mind and World* is nonetheless a clear change to a view of content that is not abstract and universal in the same way propositional content is. For example, intuitions seem to be clearly located and temporal entities, at least in the same sense that other mental entities are located, and thus concrete. Whether they are repeatable entities is less clear. Characterising intuitions as not altogether conceptualised and seeing concepts in perceptual contents as consisting of association to discursive capacities are clearly concessions to the richness argument, and comes rather close to saying that they are not repeatable – that the content is particular. Then again, McDowell also talks of visual experiences which could be completely alike in what they make visually present to the subject, and it is not quite clear whether we should understand the visual intuitions in these cases as being the same repeatable entity – a universal content. This distinction as well seems to lose some of its utility when we are dealing with an issue that closely connects with both concrete sensations and abstract perceptual judgements.

The view of Travis is even more difficult to analyse with these distinctions, mostly because he does not actually advocate a view of perceptual content and, if we interpret his view as a view about content in accordance to something like Siegel's definition of content, we must also conjecture on what it is that takes the place of content in this interpretation. Travis speaks of nonconceptual particulars that bear for us on what to think about the world. These particulars, or perceptions of these particulars, could be understood as something that is conveyed in experience. The nonconceptual particulars are clearly not types, universals or abstracta, but are they internal or external? As Travis denies representational content, we could understand the nonconceptual as the actual physical particulars which are perceived. Then again, how could external particulars be conveyed in experience? Travis speaks of the world bearing for one on what to think. This 'bearing' is apparently realised by one's ability to recognise general instances from the nonconceptual. When one is misled in experience it is apparently because of one's lack of expertise in recognising the actual general instance. It seems that the

recognitional ability is a kind of interpretation, and interpretation must be interpretation of something. Thus, there should be something given in experience, perhaps the nonconceptual particulars, on which the interpretation is based. This would bring the nonconceptual closer to being a part of the psychology of the subject. On the other hand, it is quite possible that what Travis means by ‘the nonconceptual’ is simply the external perceived world. The content would then have to be found in the relation between the nonconceptual and the percipient. Perhaps it is this bearing for one on what to think, or bearing of factive meaning, that we ought to understand as content. After all, ‘bearing’ could be understood as a way of something being conveyed. The problem is, of course, that this relation of bearing might have externalist particulars on one end of the relation and internalist abstractions on the other. What should we then think about that which conveyed or born from those particulars? All in all, it seems that in this context it becomes difficult even to determine whether an entity is internalist or externalist.

8.10. Perceptual relations

The three views presented in this section diverge from the view of Christopher Peacocke, as presented in the previous section, in one important aspect. While Peacocke saw perceptual content as something that is necessarily abstract, the views in this section present perceptual content as something that is more intimately connected to mental representations – as a having-in-view or as the phenomenology given in experience. Thus, the role of content in these views also appears to differ from that of Peacocke’s view. The contents in Peacocke’s view describe or give features that are given in experience – the contents themselves are not given. Thus the contents describe, but do not take part in, the perceptual relations that can be found in Peacocke’s view. In the views of Crane and McDowell, perceptual content is something actually conveyed or given in experience, and thus we should see it as taking part in the perceptual relations.

First, however, I will examine the perceptual relation that is present in the view of Travis. As opposed to the other views presented in this thesis, Travis does not propose a view about content. Instead, what his view describes is a perceptual relation that provides justification to

perceptual beliefs. The relation consists of nonconceptual particulars bearing for the percipient on what to think. It is somewhat unclear what the nature of these particulars is, as is what these particulars are related to. Travis defines this relation as a rational relation between the conceptual and something else, namely, the nonconceptual. A rational relation, as presented by Travis, seems to be both a justificatory relation as well as an informational relation. If the nonconceptual is the way things are, then it bears on the truth and justification of beliefs that are based on the way things are perceived to be. If the way things are is given in experience, the given way also informs the percipient of the way things are, and makes it rational for the him or her to think that the world is in that way. Apparently, if the percipient lacks in some relevant expertise, he or she may be misled in perception by taking things to be in another way than the way things really are. Thus it seems we can differentiate two perceptual relations after all. One relation is the truth-making relation between the way things are and beliefs or propositions of things being in that way. The other relation is the relation between the way things are, given in perception, and what is recognised of that given way. The problem here is that the relations are not good at explaining experiences where we are misled. In such a case, the way things are would bear for one to think in a different way than the way one ends up thinking. Cases of hallucination would be especially difficult to explain when one could only rely on misrecognition of the way things are. Hallucinations, by their nature, present the way things differently from the way things really are. The truth-making relation also seems to be independent of any experience-occurrences. The way things are justifies propositions of things being in that way, whether it is perceived by anyone or not. It seems the relation would not even be something we should call a perceptual relation. In this respect, Travis' view faces the same problems as McDowell's previous view in *Mind and World*.

In the revised view of McDowell we can find perceptual relations that first relate the external world to perceptual intuitions about features in the world and then relate these intuitions to beliefs of things being as the intuition presents as being. The first relation seems to be linking natural objects to intentional ones. Thus, explicating this relation would be to explicate an answer to the so called 'hard problem of consciousness', and something that is not possible in the confines of this thesis. Suffice it to say that the relation would somehow bridge natural relations to informational relations. The second relation is the relation that, according to

McDowell, justifies taking things to be in the way the intuition presents things as being. This justification is due to the nature of intuitions, which, while not completely conceptual, are immediately conceptualizable. Why this relation is actually justificatory is less clear. “If intuitions make knowledge available to us, merely seeming intuitions merely seem to make knowledge available to us.”¹⁹⁶ But what differentiates seeming intuitions from the justifying ones? To follow the sceptical argument, how can one know one is not in the seeming case and be justified in believing what the intuition presents? Nonetheless, this second relation does seem to have an aspect of an information relation as well. If intuitions and seeming intuitions are mental entities, then they are involved in informing one’s beliefs about one’s perceptual intake. The nature of this informing appears to be purely conceptual, since beliefs are purely conceptual and propositional in McDowell’s view. The informational relation would thus consist of conceptualization of the intuition.

Crane’s view is similar to McDowell’s in the sense that his phenomenological content also relates the world to abstract propositions. How the world is related to phenomenology once again approaches the hard problem of consciousness, especially with regard to questions about phenomenal consciousness. On the other hand, how the phenomenological content relates to both propositions and beliefs that are based on abstractions from that content is of interest to this study. Contrary to McDowell, Crane doesn’t claim that phenomenological or semantic contents justify beliefs. The relations would thus be best understood as informational relations. Crane also emphasises that propositions, which are semantic contents, are based on interpretation where only some of the aspects of the phenomenological contents are highlighted – other interpretations could highlight different aspects. Propositional contents of an experience thus appear to be in a many-to-one relation to the phenomenological content. But the reverse appears to be plausible as well: There may be innumerable particular phenomenological contents that would fall under or conform to one interpretation. This, however, does not seem to be anything that should worry Crane. One could say that it is in the nature of interpretation that it finds differences and commonalities between particulars that are being interpreted. The relation between phenomenological content and propositional semantic

¹⁹⁶ McDowell, 2008, 10.

content seems to be a many-to-one or supervenience relation between entities on different levels of representation.

What then should we think of the relation between phenomenological contents and beliefs? The simple answer would be to identify beliefs with their propositional contents. However, as was previously explained, Crane claims that beliefs are not fundamentally relations to propositions, and that is why we do not expect deductive closure from the system of a subject's real beliefs. Nevertheless, he does not expand on the exact nature of beliefs. It seems reasonable to assume that whatever beliefs fundamentally are – we might call them belief-occurrences, belief-states or psychological instantiations of beliefs – they stand in similar many-to-one relations to propositional contents, as phenomenological contents do. If beliefs are fundamentally concrete and particular mental entities in Crane's view, similar to phenomenological contents, then the informational relation that occurs between the phenomenological contents and beliefs is a relation occurring on a level of concrete representation. Consequently, the relations between phenomenological contents and perceptual judgements could be understood as consisting firstly of relations between the phenomenological contents and concrete belief-states, and secondly of relations of interpretation between these concrete belief-states and abstract-level propositions.

It seems that in order for a view of particular content, such as the one Crane proposes, to be properly extendable to a view of perceptual relations, one would also have to flesh out an account of the nature of particular belief-states. Unfortunately, Crane does not provide enough material this. The question of the nature of particular mental occurrences of beliefs is also closely connected to other wider issues concerning, for example, the nature of justification of beliefs and the nature of mental equivalents of concepts. The question clearly deserves further examination and more extensive study than what could be accomplished in this thesis only.

9. Questions & conclusions

Now, having discussed particular views found in the discussion about the contents of perceptual experiences, as well as their advantages and disadvantages, I will continue with some important questions that were, so far, left unanswered. While the questions may not be given simple answers, our analyses of perceptual contents give us a direction in which to proceed in answering them.

9.1 Conceptuality and propositionality of content

One of the questions I set to find out about was whether we should understand perceptual contents as conceptual or nonconceptual. A similar and closely connected question concerns the propositionality of perceptual contents. One important thing to note in the context of these questions is that perceptual contents can, at least in principle, admit to degrees of conceptuality and propositionality. However, conceptual and propositional contents are normally defined as exclusively conceptual or propositional. Perhaps the most plausible way of understanding exclusively conceptual contents is when they are in exclusively propositional form. This is the view of standard conceptualism. Nonconceptual and non-propositional contents, on the other hand, are defined negatively in relation to conceptual and propositional content as not exclusively conceptual or propositional. Thus, a nonconceptualist or a non-propositionalist view can also involve concepts in perceptual contents, although usually such views do not. What the nature of contents would be, if they were partly conceptual and partly nonconceptual, is something that has not been satisfactorily answered. Therefore, such combination contents are often seen as implausible candidates for perceptual content. This difficulty appears to be one motivation for pluralistic views of perceptual contents. Christopher Peacocke, for example, posits conceptual content as separate from nonconceptual content.

Conceptual and propositional contents have been claimed, by conceptualist, to be a requirement for justification of perceptual beliefs. The Myth of the Given appears to derive from the same idea. Standard conceptualism also has an advantage over nonconceptualism in explaining recurring or identical experiences. Nonconceptualism, on the other hand, is better equipped for explaining the fine-grained differences between similar experiences, as well as explaining experiences of features for which the percipient either has no concepts, or simply has not applied any such concepts. Nonconceptual contents also seem to allow for better accounts concept possession and learning. Views of nonconceptual but propositional content, on the other hand, as uncommon as they are, face their own share of problems. Even the nature of those propositions seems to be difficult to understand. This happens, for example, in the case of nonconceptual forms of Russellianism. Moreover, understanding how such contents could be conveyed in experience is not any easier.

Although conceptualism and nonconceptualism both have their own merits as views about the contents of perceptual experiences, nonconceptualism, it seems to me, has more plausibility. Presenting perceptual contents as solely conceptual effectively denies that we could be given features of experiences that we have not already conceptualised. While the nature of justification is a debated subject, our having conscious (in any reasonable sense of the word) experiences of not-yet-conceptualised properties seems to be simply undeniable.¹⁹⁷ Even John McDowell, who is often seen as a paradigm example of a conceptualist, seems to have abandoned the view of exclusively conceptual content.

¹⁹⁷ Some views about perceptual content have tried to refrain from this choice by positing nonconceptual and conceptual contents as fulfilling different functions (e.g. Bengson et al., 2001) or by presenting their apparent conflict as caused by an error of combining entities from different levels of consciousness. I think these kinds of solutions to the conflict between conceptual and nonconceptual content are solutions only in name. They are not likely to explain the connection between the contents, and presenting something like attention or supervenience as the magical link between these levels hardly counts as an explanation. Additionally, only one of these contents, in their differing levels or functions, can be defined as actually being the content of perception, while the other is demoted to being the content of, for example, mere awareness. I do not see this as a desirable feature for a view of perceptual content.

9.2. Is perceptual content external, abstract or particular?

The views of Jeff Speaks, Christopher Peacocke and Tim Crane differ from John McDowell's view in *Mind and World* by allowing for fine-grained features in their perceptual contents. However, all three views have significant differences pertaining to the nature of perceptual contents. One could say they are three different ontologies of contents.

Speaks advocates externalist contents that are determined by the relation between external particulars and the subject of the experience. As was discussed in section 6 of this thesis, the view faces problems in explaining both how these externalist contents are connected to the internalist contents as well as how the externalist contents could ever be understood as something that is conveyed in experience. The externalist content might be best understood as the truth about the experience, or as that which causally determines the perceptual state. Since that is not something that is available to the subject through perception, it may best that the externalist content is not seen as content at all but rather as the real objects of the perceptual experience. The externalist content thus seems to fail as the *content* of experience, but not perhaps as its *object*.

Even though the views of Peacocke and Crane both are views of nonconceptual content, they are nonetheless, by their definitions, opposing to one another. Crane claims that the fundamental perceptual content is the particular and concrete phenomenological content, whereas Peacocke claims that the representational contents of experiences – or contents in general – are by definition abstract and meant for picking out general features of experiences. Thus, Peacocke's conception of content denies the possibility of phenomenological contents, and Crane's distinction presents contents in Peacocke's view as semantic contents, making them secondary to the real content.

But are the views of Peacocke and Crane in conflict with each other only about what can said to be content, or also about the nature of perception itself? Considering what the analysis of perceptual relations revealed about both views, we could see them as compatible or even

complementary in explaining features of perceptual experiences. One content is a mental representation and the other a description of a mental representation. If we were to translate their views from claims about content to claims about the nature of perception itself, we might end up with the following: Crane's claim is that the nature of perception is so closely tied to the particular phenomenal character of the experience that no abstraction from that particular phenomenology could ever capture the complete nature of the mental representation, or convey it to, say, another person. This would not mean that descriptions were not possible or even that they would necessarily be somehow incomplete. Rather, it would mean that descriptions are always descriptions, and not something that could convey the actual phenomenology. In a sense this is reasonable; we do not have the phenomenology of the original experience available to us after the experience – we cannot simply relive the experience in all its richness by simply remembering it, not even if we had access to the scenario-, protopositional- and conceptual contents that describe the experience.

Peacocke's view, on the other hand, we could translate as claiming that the informational role of perception is possible to capture through abstractions, but for these abstractions to completely capture the content, they must include scenarios and protopositions as well as conceptual contents. But now the views of Peacocke and Crane do not seem as conflicting any longer. We could understand phenomenological content as the representational nature of an actual experiential mental state, something that *is conveyed* in experience but not something that could be further conveyed. Scenario contents, protopositional contents and conceptual contents could be seen as things that *can further convey* or describe how things are represented as being in that actual experiential state in as much detail as possible. In this sense, we could accept Crane's claim that there are both particular and semantic contents. The meaning of 'content' and 'representation' would simply be different in those types of content.

9.3. What should we think about the contents of perceptual experiences?

In what way should we finally understand the nature and definition of contents of perception? In the beginning of this study we had a loose definition of perceptual content as something that

is conveyed in experience. In comparing different views about perceptual content, more definite but also different conceptions of content became apparent. While a loose definition of content such as the one Siegel presents can compass most of the various views of content, it makes it difficult to compare these views, much less evaluate the fittingness of one in respect to the others. Is there then a way to say which conception of perceptual content is primary or do they simply highlight different, equal aspects of perception altogether? It seems that while different conceptions of perceptual content are better at explaining different aspects of our experiences, we could prioritise the aspects that need explaining. Often, the justification of perceptual beliefs is seen as the one of the most important aspects. But I do not agree. Positing something like conceptual content only because it at first seems to be needed in justification is to take a desirable consequence for any view of perceptual content and base a view of perception solely on that consequence. It would be an attempt to justify justification, not describe it. Other aspects of our experiences such as learning of perceptual concepts or seeing aspects are phenomena that actually might need better positive descriptions, not simply justification for their proposed existence.

What should we think of views that are both nonconceptual but in one way diametrically opposing like the views of Peacocke and Crane? We can indeed see both of them as fulfilling different roles of content, but can we posit one of them as superior or fundamental over the other? That depends on how good they are at explaining the phenomena involved in our experiences. Problem here is that, unlike Peacocke's detailed explanations of what kinds of features his content can explain, Crane's descriptions of phenomenological contents stop at the claim that it is the intrinsic representational state or the phenomenological given of experience. Therefore, we can only compare the views by considering the explanations that particular contents could provide, in contrast to abstract contents, for experiential phenomena. This approach does seem to work in furthering our understanding. Consider the phenomenon of aspect seeing. While Peacocke commendably explains seeing aspects in the case of squares and regular-diamond-shapes, is his account understandable in the case of something like the rabbit-duck illusion?

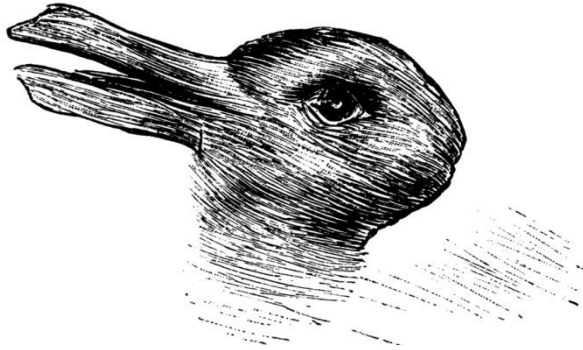


Figure 8: The rabbit–duck illusion¹⁹⁸

Here, the difference between the perceived aspects does not appear to be dependent merely on simple perceived properties, which are included protopositions, but rather it seems to involve something as being either a rabbit or a duck. Peacocke does have his level of conceptual content but is it really a plausible alternative as the content of the aspect? We can conceive of a situation where one is familiar with ducks and rabbits, or just pictures of them, but has never been given the linguistic concepts of either. It seems plausible that one would be able to recognise the rabbit- and duck-shapes in the picture, even if one would not know that they are rabbits or ducks or have any words for them. One would recognise them in some sense of the word. But the content of that experience could not involve proper concepts¹⁹⁹ in Peacocke's view, and explaining the perceived aspect only with protopositions would not be sufficient. Peacocke's abstract contents would thus fail here. Is it possible that Crane's idea of particular contents could be more successful?

If Crane's account presents perceptions and beliefs as not being fundamentally mere relations to abstract contents, we could also see concepts, or the psychological realisations of concepts, as something quite different from abstract concepts. We can only guess what Crane would have to say about such entities, but they might be able to explain phenomena like seeing aspects. In the proposed case of the subject who has no concepts for either a rabbit or a duck,

¹⁹⁸ Picture first published in the 23rd of October 1892 issue of *Fliegende Blätter*. Author unknown. Public domain. Source: Wikipedia.

¹⁹⁹ We should note that, according to Peacocke, demonstrative concepts are not an option for contents since they pick out particulars instead of general ways.

we could see at work the same recognitional capacity as in the case where the subject has those concepts. The recognitional ability would just be incomplete in comparison to the concept-possessing case. Particular concept instances, if they are not determined by abstract concepts, could also admit to degrees of ‘representation’ and at the same time provide us with an account of concept learning. These particular concepts, or conceptions as we could call them, would be the subjects of development in learning, and in deepening our understanding of, a concept. Similarly, these conceptions could help explain aspects of cognitive penetration of experiences.

However, for a view of particular representation to be plausible, it would have to include more substantial explanations about the nature of those particular entities than just positing them as the being ‘the real contents’ or ‘real representations’. This critique is directly applicable to Crane’s account. Of course, the exact nature of such entities would be a complex matter to account for. The account would have to be, among other things, compatible with aspects of perception revealed by psychological or neurological studies about the nature of perception, as well as explain the connection between abstract and particular contents. The issue, nonetheless, clearly deserves more comprehensive study than what can be given here. I believe the gains of positing such a view could outweigh the difficulties one would inevitably face in proposing a view of actual psychological entities.

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