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WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS

Department of Philosophy

Philosophy-Neuroscience-Psychology program

Dissertation Examination Committee:

José Luis Bermúdez, Chair

Richard Abrams

John Heil

David Rosenthal

Gillian Russell

Roy Sorensen

## PERCEPTION AND NONCONCEPTUAL APPREHENSION

by

Arnon Cahen

A dissertation presented to the  
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences  
of Washington University in  
partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy

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## *Abstract*

My dissertation articulates and resolves a problem at the heart of debates about how perception guides our actions and deliberations. The problem arises from the independent plausibility but mutual inconsistency of the following theses:

- Some perceptions provide us reasons
- Only belief-like states provide us reasons
- No perception is belief-like

I argue that this problem is deeper than has been acknowledged. Simply rejecting any one thesis leads to serious challenges. Nonetheless, I argue that we can unravel the link between having reasons and having belief-like states in a way that explains the initial plausibility of the first thesis. I provide a formulation of what being a reason-giving state amounts to, which does not require it to be belief-like. I then offer a substantive account of perceptual content that both respects its non-belief-like (nonconceptual) character and explains its ability to provide us reasons.

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## *Introduction: Perception and Nonconceptual Apprehension*

Much of what we do, we do for reasons. We move to a smaller apartment because we can no longer afford the rent on the current one, or because we realize that our work hours have become so extensive that we no longer frequent the large living room that has now been reduced to the status of an abandoned warehouse, or because of any of an indefinitely many other reasons. When asked *why* we decided to move to a smaller apartment, some of these considerations would figure as the *reasons* we would cite for our decision. Our lives are abundant with episodes of such explicitly deliberative decisions.

However, not all cases in which we act on the basis of reasons are ones in which we *can* articulate our reasons. Alternatively, the extent to which we can articulate them, when prodded, is quite limited. Perhaps all we can say in certain cases is that ‘it seemed like the right thing to do at the time’. As in the example above, it seems we act on the basis of a reason, on the basis of how things seemed to us at the time. Unlike the example above, the reason that we are able to provide – its seeming to us the right thing to do – does not make *transparent* the light by which we find performing *that* action, rather than any other, reasonable. It is not particularly illuminating of my reasons to say that I chose the smaller apartment because it seemed to me the reasonable thing to do – i.e., that for which I had reason. We are urged to uncover *what it was about how it seemed to me*, if anything, that made choosing the apartment reasonable in my light.

Arguably, when it comes to our daily activities, this latter sort of case is the norm rather than the exception. A sergeant leading his platoon through the streets of Mosul, Iraq, suddenly feels uneasy. Not sure of the source of his unease, he, nonetheless, immediately orders his soldiers to a halt. Moments later an IED (Improvised Explosive Device) detonates in a nearby car. The soldiers are safe, *seemingly* by a stroke of good luck. The sergeant cannot explain his actions other than noting that ‘something just seemed off’. Nonetheless, the sergeant’s accuracy in making such decisions is well above chance. Similar cases are ubiquitous and usually much more mundane. Transporting a mug of coffee from the kitchen to the office involves many such episodes. We avoid the various obstacles in our path, pick up the coffee mug with the appropriate hand by its handle, return along a similar path, and place it on the table just close enough so as to grasp it easily at some future time, but not too close so as to risk its falling off the table and creating a huge mess, all the while simultaneously lowering ourselves comfortably into the chair. Such snap decisions and fluent effortless actions appear to be our paradigmatic forms of engagement with the world.

In most cases, these actions do not seem to involve any deliberation at all on our part. Yet, it is also clear that we perform them on the basis of certain reasons that we have. We take *that* path to the kitchen because it seems to us the safest and least obstructed path to reach our destination. We pick up the coffee mug with *this* hand, rather than the other, because of how the mug is oriented in relation to our body and the other objects around it. Furthermore, when we *fail* at any one of these activities we hold ourselves responsible. We berate ourselves for stubbing our toe on the table leg, for toppling the coffee mug, for

knocking it over and spilling it on the floor. These are not things that simply *happen* – they are things that we *do* on the basis of reasons, and, at times, do incorrectly.

While there is *an* articulation of the reasons for which we perform these actions, it seems that *in* acting we do not normally deliberate about these reasons in a way that so articulates them. More interestingly, it does not seem that we *must be able* to articulate them in this way for us to act on the basis of those reasons. Even when prodded as to our reasons for acting we are often at a loss for words, and are unable to produce a satisfying explanation. Infants and ‘lower’ animals, too, seem often to act on the basis of reasons, though they purportedly do not, and cannot, articulate those reasons in any significant way. Should we, then, say that these cases that do not involve explicit deliberation are ones in which we are in fact *unaware* of our reasons for acting? Are they cases in which counter-intuitively we *do not have* reasons for acting? Or, perhaps, we should say that these cases illustrate an availability of reasons of an often inarticulable sort – *inarticulable by us having and acting in light of these reasons*. If the latter, what is it to *have* such inarticulable reasons, and how to explain our acting in their light?

This question is especially significant when contrasted with those cases in which our actions are brought about by explicit deliberation. We have available a relatively clear understanding of what is involved in these latter cases. A paradigm of folk psychology is that our actions are the product of a conjunction of various beliefs and desires that we have. When I deliberate about which apartment to rent, I consider what I desire in an apartment and consider what I believe I can afford from among what I believe is available. I can articulate these in a way that makes transparent their rational relations, and can therefore articulate the reasons I have for making the decision that I do. I desire

the most affordable apartment that is walking distance from the university and has hardwood floors. I believe that *this* apartment is the most affordable apartment that is walking distance from the university and has hardwood floors. Therefore, I proceed to rent *this* apartment. Appealing to my desires and to what I believe to be the case shows why my renting *this* apartment rather than another is a reasonable thing for me to do.

This is even clearer with respect to theoretical reasoning. My reason for forming the belief that Socrates is mortal can be made transparent by citing my belief that all men are mortal and my belief that Socrates is a man. It is presumably in virtue of my recognizing the relation between these latter two beliefs and recognizing the validity of the transition to the former belief that I take the latter beliefs as my reason for the former belief. In the case of inarticulable reasons, however, such explanations are unavailable.

This dissertation is an investigation into the possibility of a certain kind of inarticulable reasons that one nonetheless has and in light of which acts as one does. The examples I have given above are in fact highly complex. It is reasonable to presume that the sources of the reasons they exemplify are various and gerrymandered. The reason for which one reaches for the coffee mug *thus* likely appeals to a great many factors. The various perceptible features of the particular mug and its relation to its environment, one's proprioceptive and kinesthetic sense of the position of one's body and body parts, moods, emotions, and various goals, all seem to be relevant to one's having the particular reason one does, and in light of which one performs the action. The scope of this dissertation is much narrower.

My focus is on *perception* (on vision, in particular) and how *it* might contribute to the reasons in light of which perceivers undertake to perform certain actions and in light of which they modify their various beliefs. The motivating thought is that perception is not merely a matter of the world impinging on our senses (though its character commonly depends on such impingements). Rather, perception is primarily a matter of initiating perceivers into reasoned engagements with the world. My perceiving the mug and its surroundings to be a certain way provides my reason to reach for the coffee mug with my left, rather than right, hand. My perceiving the layout of the cluttered room provides my reason to choose *this* path rather than *that* path. And my perceiving the brown table before me provides my reason to believe that a brown table is before me. For it to play this role, perception itself must provide a light by which perceivers deliberate about and engage with their environment as they do. It must, itself, be a reason-giving state.

It is this feature of perception that the notion of ‘apprehension’ in the title of the dissertation is meant to capture. *Apprehending* one’s environment is not merely the passive *having* of sensory impressions, but involves an active *taking* of the environment such that it potentially serves as a reason one has for one’s actions and deliberations. A central aim of the dissertation is to articulate what perception must be like if it is to provide a perceiver reasons for finding some action or belief reasonable, and if the perceiver is to be able to act or form a belief *for that reason*.

This is not a question of how, given one’s perception of the environment, performing certain actions or forming certain beliefs can *be* reasonable for one to do. Rather, it is the question of how one’s perceiving the environment accounts for one’s *finding* certain actions or beliefs reasonable, and pursues them because of thus finding them. What it *is*

reasonable for one to do and to believe, when having a perception, is dissociable and often *dissociated* from what one *finds* to be reasonable for one to do and to believe, when having that perception (though when all goes well, these tend to converge).

The appearance of the term ‘nonconceptual’ in the title of the dissertation (roughly) reflects the fact that, unlike in those cases of explicit deliberative reasoning, perceivers for whom perception provides reasons are not ipso facto in a position to articulate these reasons in a way that makes transparent the light they take them to shed on their various actions and beliefs. And yet they *do* take them to shed such light. A perceiver who knows nothing about volcanoes might nonetheless take the perception of a volcano erupting as providing reason for fleeing. It is the possibly inarticulable (by the perceiver) nature of the reasons that perception provides that proves especially challenging to an account of perception as providing reasons in the first place. It is also a challenge that has a particularly long history within epistemology and the philosophy of mind.

It is with this challenge that the dissertation begins. In the following, opening, chapter of the dissertation, The Reason-Giving Status of Perception, I argue that a deep conflict arises when we attempt to reconcile the claim that perception is a reason-giving state with certain *prima facie* reasonable claims about the nature of reason-giving and about the nature of perception. A standard account of reason-giving is modeled on how beliefs, as paradigmatic reason-giving states, seem to achieve this status. Central is the claim that having a belief entails that the believer is in a position to articulate its contents in a way that makes transparent, to the believer, its rational significance to the believer’s other beliefs and desires (as the examples of explicit deliberation illustrate). However, there is also good reason to think that perception is not like belief in that respect: Perception is

nonconceptual in the sense that having a perception does not entail that the perceiver can articulate its contents in this way. The conflict can be resolved in either of three ways. First, it can be resolved by giving up the notion that perception is a reason-giving state, i.e., that it involves an apprehension in the sense described above. Second, it can be resolved by denying the claims about the nonconceptual nature of perception. Finally, it can be resolved by rethinking the notion of reason-giving. It is this third strategy that this dissertation pursues.

## *Chapter 1: The reason-giving status of perception*

### 1.1 Introduction: An inconsistent triad

What is the problem when considering the reason-giving status of perception? The answer can be formulated as an inconsistent triad:

Perceptual reason – Some perceptions provide us reasons (for beliefs or actions)

Exclusivity – Only beliefs provide us reasons

Bifurcation – No perception is a belief

In this introductory chapter to the reason-giving problem of perception, I argue that a refined version of each of these propositions has significant independent plausibility, though they cannot be simultaneously held. Reflecting on this inconsistency illuminates central concerns at the interface of epistemology and the philosophy of mind. The negation of any member of the triad carries *characteristic* costs that reveal natural cleavages in the literature on the reason-giving role of perception. The least costly strategy involves the rejection or modification of *Exclusivity*, while securing the other two propositions. This is surprising as it is also the one least attended to (which is not to say that it has not been attended to). Finally, I articulate a considerable challenge facing those pursuing this final strategy – one that has not been adequately acknowledged. It is an overarching theme of the dissertation to illuminate the nature of this challenge and to confront it.



*Initial* plausibility for each of the propositions involved in the abovementioned triad can be found by considering the following scenario.

Crossing the road on the way to work, you suddenly spot a car racing towards you. You stop abruptly in your tracks and the jaunty teenagers in the car wave at you jeeringly as they pass you by. Why did you halt? Clearly, you explain, you saw the speeding car approaching and chose life. *Perceptual reason* seems vindicated.

But, simply seeing the speeding car approaching cannot provide you a reason to halt so long as you do not believe that the speeding car is approaching. To establish a conclusion of practical reasoning, there must be a valid argument relating premises to conclusion. Arguments are composed solely of propositions, and you must believe a proposition true in order for it to be *your* reason for establishing the conclusion. The same goes with theoretical reasoning. *Exclusivity* seems vindicated.

Furthermore, you might see the speeding car approaching and not believe *that* a speeding car is approaching. When you believe some proposition it has an immediate impact on your further deliberations and actions. Beliefs are promiscuous. Not so with perception. One may perceive a visual illusion, say, the Müller-Lyer illusion (below), and not for one moment believe that one line is longer than the other. Furthermore, though one might believe many things one sees, one sees many more things than one *can* believe. A picture is worth a thousand words *and immeasurably more*. Not only is perception wondrously rich, it is also finer grained than any of our most precise concepts. *Bifurcation* seems vindicated.

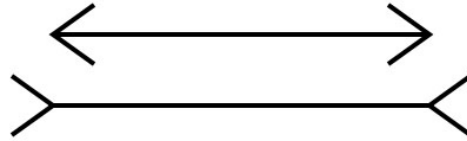


Figure 1: The Müller-Lyer illusion

Although the above three propositions seem plausible, we clearly cannot hold them all simultaneously.

### 1.2 Perceptual reasons

What could have gone wrong with the principle of *Perceptual reason*? It seems that the principle, as stated, is too trivial to be challenged. Perception must play *some* role in providing us reasons for holding particular beliefs and engaging the world appropriately (I will often omit this qualification and merely speak of a mental state's providing us *reasons*). After all, much of our intentional, reason-guided, behavior is a reaction to our immediate environment, and a primary way of making contact with our environment that initiates such behavior, as in the example above, is perception. Perception is *the* input for our reasoned engagements with the world.

However, it might be suggested that the principle obtains its triviality by glossing over a central distinction between different *ways* of providing reasons – between *directly* and *indirectly* providing us reasons (or, immediately and mediately). Perception, it might be thought, enables reason guided activity only *indirectly* by first forming in us a perceptual belief. The ensuing belief is that which provides us reasons *directly*. In the example,

above, seeing the speeding car *causes* in you a perceptual belief that then provides you a reason for halting. This potentially resolves the tension within the triad with which we began.

Nonetheless, appealing to the distinction between directly and indirectly providing reasons does not genuinely solve the problem. We can refine the principle to read:

Perceptual apprehension – Some perceptions provide us reasons *directly*

The notion of apprehension is meant to suggest that nothing additional, *extrinsic to those capacities already employed in having a perception*, is required for one to have reasons for one's actions and deliberations. Clearly, the example presented above does not support this stronger principle. Why, then, should we think it true?

Perhaps the most compelling support for *Perceptual apprehension* is its strong intuitive appeal. Much of our intentional engagements with our environment seem to proceed without the mediation of perceptual beliefs. You take *this* path through a messy room *because* of how the room perceptually appears to you to be organized. You make appropriate fine-tuned adjustments in light of changes in how your immediate environment perceptually appears to you to be as you move through it. You do so fluently and effortlessly; similarly with respect to a wide variety of skilled behaviors, playing tennis, driving a car, drinking the morning coffee, etc.

Furthermore, it seems that perception *must* provide us reasons *directly*, for our perceptual beliefs are themselves often held for reasons grounded in how we perceive the world as being. You believe that a speeding car is approaching *because* of how the car

perceptually appears to you. And you believe that the table before you is brown *because* of how *it* perceptually appears to you. In such cases, an appeal to how the world perceptually appears to you is not in the service of providing a mere *causal* explanation, but an intentional, reason-based, explanation of your beliefs and actions. Perception is very much *not* like being hit on the head with a mallet. You don't merely find yourself saddled with a belief or with an urge to act, not knowing where these came from. Rather, perception opens you to certain *normative* pressures that the environment places on your deliberations and on your other engagements with the world. That is, *you take yourself to have a reason* to act as you do or to believe what you do, in part, by virtue of how the world perceptually appears to you. This is why you cite your perception *as providing your reason* for taking the path you do through the messy room or for holding the belief that a speeding car is approaching.

It is also why we hold ourselves responsible, commendable or blame worthy, when executing such perceptually based activities. When, on occasion, we fail in such activities, e.g., failing to form the appropriate perceptual belief or, when crossing a messy room, stubbing our foot on a table, we berate ourselves. When, on the other hand, while navigating a crowded room we swerve successfully in response to the sudden looming figure of a colleague we might even silently congratulate ourselves for the subtle move. Thus, again, our commonsensical appeal to perception in explaining our forming certain beliefs and performing certain actions aims at articulating not merely a causal explanation but an intentional explanation through and through.

Though I believe we should take common sense seriously, this principle does not obtain its plausibility merely from such phenomenological considerations. The principle is also

at the core of traditional epistemological concerns regarding the epistemic status of our empirical beliefs. If our empirical beliefs are justified by virtue of appropriately related perceptual beliefs, the further question is whether, and if so how, these latter perceptual beliefs are justified. Giving up the notion that perception can provide the perceiver reasons for holding particular perceptual beliefs threatens to cut the cord of justification that runs from the world to our theorizing about it appropriately. As McDowell (1994a) puts it, a view of perception as merely a mode of *causal* rather than *rational* contact with the world leads to a conception of our beliefs as ‘spinning in the void’; hence, not recognizable as genuine *empirical* beliefs at all. It would leave us with the particularly challenging task of showing how, if at all, our beliefs could have any empirical content, how the norms governing these beliefs could be more than mere coherence,<sup>1</sup> and how resolution of conflicting empirical theories could come about.<sup>2</sup> In other words, it seems that denying *Perceptual apprehension* entails that the world places *no normative*

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Martin voices this concern nicely: “When Philippa looks in the drawer [and sees a gun], she acquires the belief that there is a gun in the drawer. Why should she acquire that belief rather than any other at that time? Is there any explanation for this in terms of her other beliefs or mental states? The beliefs she had prior to this surely cannot explain the acquisition of this [particular] belief” (1993, p. 77). If our beliefs are simply ‘spinning in the void’ and make no rational contact with the world, it seems that we have no other way to explain her forming *this* belief except by appeal to how it rationally relates to her other beliefs. The situation is in fact even more severe. If our beliefs are in fact ‘spinning in the void’, there is no clear sense in which Philippa even has a belief with the empirical content *there is a gun in the drawer* in the first place. Indeed, avoiding such consequences is McDowell’s (1994a) central concern.

<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that attempts have not been made to remedy these apparent difficulties. Those who argue against *Perceptual apprehension* must give some account of how considerations of coherence can be sufficient for our beliefs to be genuinely *about* the world – for them to have empirical content. Davidson is perhaps the strongest defender of coherentism, and providing a solution to this problem is one of his primary aims (Davidson 1983).

*constraints* at all on our theorizing about it, and as a consequence it is unclear how our theorizing can be understood as being responsible to how *the world* is.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, suppose that perception were a merely causal antecedent of our perceptual beliefs. If that were the case, it would be mysterious how we could *refrain* from believing everything that we see.<sup>4</sup> Perceiving the Müller-Lyer illusion would invariably result in the false belief that one line is longer than the other. The fact that we don't find ourselves with such false beliefs is evidence that perception provides us *reasons* for the perceptual beliefs that we eventually form. When unfamiliar with the illusion, we find such perceptual reasons compelling, but after having being familiarized with the illusion we now have reasons to believe the contrary; reasons that *overrule* those provided us by perception. A purely causal transaction cannot be overruled by reason.

Finally, whether perception can directly supply the perceiver reasons places constraints on how we should conceive of, and explain, the behavior of infants and those in the animal kingdom lacking the capacities necessary for belief formation. If the capacity for reason guided behavior depends on capacities *extrinsic* to those involved in perception, then creatures lacking these capacities are incapable of such behavior. It seems gratuitous to explain a rat's navigation skills by appeal to its having particular empirical *beliefs*.

Nonetheless, the most illuminating explanation of such behavior often takes the form of

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<sup>3</sup> As McDowell puts it: "The transcendental thought is that we need to be able to see how the spontaneity of the understanding can be constrained by the receptivity of sensibility, if we are to be entitled to the very idea of subjective postures with objective purport. And the constraint [that perception places on our thinking] must be rational, not merely causal, if its presence in our picture is to vindicate a conception of the responsibility of thinking to its subject matter [i.e., the empirical world]." (1998, pp. 364-5)

<sup>4</sup> See Martin (1993) for much elaboration on this line of argument based on what he calls the phenomenon of perception in disbelief.

an intentional explanation – an explanation that appeals to the rat’s representing its environment and ‘figuring out’ its way through a maze.<sup>5</sup> What form of explanation is most appropriate in any given case of animal or infant behavior is, of course, an empirical matter. However, the possibility of such an explanation depends crucially on our ability to attribute to the animal a sensitivity to reasons (independently of its having perceptual *beliefs*). If we are to take such explanations seriously, and there seems to be no reason at the moment not to, we must conclude that the animal or infant is *in fact* responsive to reasons. Thus, the principle under consideration governs both our understanding of the mentality of such creatures – the extent of their epistemic relation to the world – and of the types of explanation that would be appropriate to making sense of their behaviors.<sup>6</sup>

Having given some support for *Perceptual apprehension*, let us analyze the other propositions composing the triad.

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<sup>5</sup> On the possibility, and actuality, of the intentional explanation of animal behavior, see for example the works of José Luis Bermúdez, and Susan Hurley. Of special interest in this regard are Bermúdez (2003), and, in particular, his discussion of the various intentional explanations applicable to the rat’s ‘figuring out’ a route through a maze (circa pp. 98-103). See also Hurley (2001; 2003), who discusses several examples of animal behavior that, she argues, are best explained by appeal to an animal’s sensitivity to reasons, in the absence of its possession of beliefs.

<sup>6</sup> Both points, about the mentality of non-doxastic animals as well as of human beings, demand links between perception and action that are unmediated by beliefs. Though unmediated, these links nonetheless provide the creature in question with reasons for producing an appropriate action. Gibson’s ecological optics has been especially influential in framing the considerations underwriting the need for such perception-action links (Gibson 1979). Indeed, the Gibsonian notion of an affordance seems to be constructed for just such a purpose. Perceiving an affordance already makes manifest the responses one has reason to perform. For example, perceiving the *edibility* of some object already involves an awareness of the object that recommends, provides one reason for, its being eaten. If we follow Gibson in holding that an object’s affordances are directly perceived, rather than inferred, we see that perception already involves an awareness of the world that supplies us reasons in light of which certain actions are appropriate rather than others, from our point of view.

### 1.3 Beliefs and reasons

Perhaps the problem lies with the principle of *Exclusivity*. Since our interest in the previous section was with perception's providing us reasons *directly*, we should evaluate what support we have for the corresponding proposition that *only* beliefs provide us reasons *directly*. It is helpful to begin by looking at the weaker, non-exclusive, claim:

#### Non-exclusivity – Beliefs provide us reasons *directly*

The weaker formulation is not particularly controversial. It is commonly held that providing reasons is *the paradigmatic role of belief*. Beliefs are the traditional denizens of folk psychological explanation. And within folk psychology they are appealed to precisely in order to illuminate the reasonableness of our actions. It is in light of having a particular belief that certain ensuing behaviors are *reasonable* or not *from the point of view of the actor*.

Given that you are a life-loving individual crossing a busy street, a fast approaching car might be a *reason for you* to halt. But, explaining your halting by mere reference to the speeding car does a disservice on two familiar counts.<sup>7</sup> First, you might have stopped crossing the road even if *de facto* the car was not speeding (indeed, even if there was no

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<sup>7</sup> Others have pointed out the issues that arise when simply identifying facts as one's reasons (see, e.g., Pryor (2005), Dancy (2000), and Audi (1986a; 1986b), from whom also much of my terminology about reasons is appropriated). In Audi's terminology, for example, the fact itself can be a *reason for* some subject S *to* perform some action A – the fact that a speeding car is approaching is a *reason for you to* halt. But, there being such a reason is not yet to say that S *has a reason to* A. It is this latter notion of reason that is important for the present discussion as it is only reasons that S *has to* A that can potentially also be *reasons for which* S does in fact A. It is the *reason for which* you stop crossing the street that we are interested in. See also, Schroeder's (2008) recent extensive discussion of the distinction between 'objective' and 'subjective' reasons – reasons *for* S to A, and reasons S *has to* A, respectively.



car at all). In this case, it would be odd to say that your reason for halting was *the fact* that the car was speeding. At most, we would explain your halting by appeal to your having *believed* that the car was speeding. Indeed, if in such circumstances you later came to realize that no threat was present, you too would explain your halting, not by appeal to *the fact* that a speeding car was approaching, but to your having *falsely believed* that such a fact obtained. Second, even if the car was speeding, this fact alone, while it may be considered as a *reason for you* to halt, cannot be *your reason* for anything so long as you are not made appropriately aware of it; presumably, you must also believe the fact to obtain. Without having this belief, it seems, the fact itself is, like the proverbial tree falling in the forest, *epistemically irrelevant* to you. Thus, it is your having a particular belief that supplies you with a reason to act as you do (given, of course, a background of interests, desires, and other instrumental beliefs – e.g., given that you do not want to be run over by a car).<sup>8</sup>

However, merely to say that it is part of our *explanatory practices* to appeal to beliefs for the sake of explicating one's reasons in light of which one's behaviors make sense is clearly no explanation of *how* beliefs can supply such reasons. More so, it provides no support for the claim that *only* beliefs can do so – i.e., no support for *Exclusivity*.

Clearer support for *Exclusivity* is obtained by considering certain commonsensical, though controversial, suggestions linking reasons to justification. To say that X provides

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<sup>8</sup> Note that the above considerations are intended to be neutral with respect to the ontology of reasons in at least the following respect. They are consistent with the claim that *beliefs* are our reasons, with the claim that *facts* are our reasons so long as we believe them to obtain, and with the claim that the *contents* of our beliefs constitute our reasons. There are various difficulties with all these formulations. However, what is crucial for the purposes of this chapter is only that having a belief *makes available to the agent* reasons in light of which certain further deliberations and actions are appropriate *from the agent's perspective*.

reason for the belief that Y, is to say that X contributes to the justification of the belief that Y. A standard way of thinking about the justification relation is as expressing the presence of a valid deductive argument, or some other kind of inference, from a description of the justifier to a description of what is believed to be justified. The fact that Evan loves Mary contributes to the justification of the belief that Evan loves someone, as there is a valid argument relating the proposition *Evan loves Mary* to the proposition *Evan loves someone*. Thus, the fact that Evan loves Mary can be considered a reason *for* believing that Evan loves someone. However, as illustrated previously, there being a reason to believe that Evan loves someone is not yet sufficient for one's *having* a reason to so believe. One must also be *appropriately* aware of the fact. More so, it is one's awareness *as of the fact* that is essential, not the obtaining of the fact. It is one's awareness *as of Evan's loving Mary* (whether or not it is true) that supplies one's reason for believing that Evan loves someone. Finally, for one actually to take the purported fact that Evan loves Mary as one's reason for believing that Evan loves someone (for the former to be, not only a *reason one has*, but also *the reason for which* one holds the latter) one must have the capacity to recognize the validity of the argument that underlies this inference. The inferential relation holding between the two propositions must be *transparent to the subject*. One must, then, be capable of treating the contents of one's awareness as a premise in an argument, and hence must possess the capacity to conceptualize such contents.<sup>9</sup> Beliefs are paradigmatic conceptual states. That is, having a belief presupposes that one possesses all of the concepts appearing in the correct

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<sup>9</sup> Similar arguments to the one presented for what was claimed to be a 'standard way of thinking about justification' are developed, for example, in McDowell (1994a), Brewer (1999; 2005), and Pryor (2005). Pryor, who ultimately wishes to deny *Exclusivity\**, develops a similar argument as his foil when constructing what he calls 'The Master Argument for Coherentism'.

specification of its content. Having the belief that Evan loves Mary presupposes that one possesses the concept loving, Evan, and Mary. As a result, beliefs are perfectly tailored to provide the believer reasons.<sup>10</sup>

The allure of this account, which we may call ‘the inferential account of reason-giving’, is clear. Arguments are designed precisely to show us how one thing can be reasonable in light of another. So, if I am to act a certain way or believe a certain proposition *because* I find acting in that way or believing that proposition reasonable, a straightforward way of understanding *what my finding them reasonable amounts to* is by appeal to my having identified some proposition that I can treat as a premise in an argument of practical or theoretical reasoning. According to this proposal, it is my engaging in some such reasoning, whether consciously or not, that explains my performing that particular action or forming that particular belief.

Are these considerations sufficient for *Exclusivity*? Even if one must be aware of the (purported) fact a description of which justifies holding a given belief, why can’t any old awareness do the trick? This question leads us to the most crucial point. What allows beliefs to supply the believer reasons is that the believer has the capacity to treat the content of the belief as a premise in reasoning (both theoretical and practical). Therefore, we may leave open the possibility that *other* states, sharing this characteristic with beliefs, might equally provide us reasons.

It seems, then, that we have support only for the following, weaker, version of

*Exclusivity*:

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<sup>10</sup> Having reasons for *action* follows a similar path. However, in this case the subject will have to recognize a piece of *practical* reasoning – the conclusion being a description of an action.

Exclusivity\* – Only *belief-like* states provide us reasons directly

The reformulation indicates that it is not necessarily *only beliefs* that can provide us reasons, but any state that has those characteristics in virtue of which beliefs paradigmatically provide reasons. Namely, those states the contents of which the subject is *ipso facto* in a position to treat as a premise in reasoning; states the having of which presupposes that one possesses the concepts specifying their contents.

Let us move to the final proposition.

#### 1.4 Perception and belief

*Exclusivity\** is consistent with the conjunction of *Perceptual apprehension* and *Bifurcation*. Establishing *Bifurcation* will leave open whether perception, though not *the same* kind of state as belief, is sufficiently similar, and is, therefore, able directly to provide us reasons.

Have we, then, resolved the initial inconsistency? Sadly, no. The inconsistency reemerges if the following stronger reformulation of *Bifurcation* is true:

Bifurcation\* – No perception is *belief-like*

Here, as before, the claim that perception is not belief-like indicates that perception differs from belief *in relevant respects* – those in virtue of which *beliefs* provide us

reasons directly.<sup>11</sup> The suggestion would be that, unlike beliefs, having a perception does not presuppose that one possesses the concepts appearing in the correct specification of its content. We can say that perception is *concept-independent* (or, as we shall see in future chapters, *nonconceptual*). As a result, having a perception does not *ipso facto* place the subject in a position to treat its content as a premise in reasoning.

A central, and often cited, consideration in favor of *Bifurcation\** is that how perception represents the world to us seems to be far richer and more fine-grained than we can embrace conceptually. As Evans asks rhetorically: “Do we really understand the proposal that we have as many color concepts as there are shades of color that we can sensibly discriminate?” (1982, p. 229) Evans is pointing to the fact that our capacity for perceptual discrimination far outstrips our conceptual capacities. One can discriminate between shades of red that are one just noticeable difference (JND) apart without possessing the concepts under which these shades fall, say the concepts red<sub>27</sub> and red<sub>28</sub>. And one can perceive the intricate Manhattan skyline from Brooklyn even though one does not possess concepts that would specify its precise shape.<sup>12</sup> (This suggests that, unlike when having a belief, the perceiver is *not* in a position to treat the contents of her perceptions as premises in an argument that would make reasonable from the perceiver’s perspective a certain belief or action.)

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<sup>11</sup> Of course, if *Perceptual apprehension* is true, then perception must be belief-like in a certain *trivial* respect, in that both states provide us reasons directly, however different the explanation of such a fact turns out to be.

<sup>12</sup> A variation of this argument is already present in Dretske (1969). The argument has been developed, reiterated, and elaborated by many philosophers of perception. See, for example, Dretske (1981; 1995), Peacocke (1992; 2001a), Tye (2000), Dokic & Pacherie (2001), Kelly (2001), Coliva (2003), and Bermúdez (2007).

Furthermore, consider, once more, the perception of illusions. We, who are familiar with the Müller-Lyer illusion believe that *the lines are of the same length*. However, we nonetheless persist in experiencing them *as differing in length*. If perception were belief-like, in the relevant respects, we would expect it to be responsive to our background beliefs in the same way as other beliefs are. Given that it is not so responsive, if perception were belief-like our perceiving the illusion would entail our having a *persistent and irreconcilable* contradiction.<sup>13</sup>

Of course, it might still be argued that some *aspects* of perception, are such that we *do* possess the concepts specifying their contents – i.e., that *some aspects of perception are belief-like*. Perhaps we can literally see *that* Manhattan is across the water, or literally see *that* the two objects are red once we come to possess the relevant concepts (Manhattan, water, red, etc). We would then be in a position to treat such ‘seeings that’ as premises in reasoning. However, this would not be sufficient for the claim that perception is belief-like, nor would it resolve the conflict with the other propositions composing the triad. We would still remain with that aspect of perception that is *not* belief-like and yet *is* relevant in this context as it too seems to provide us reasons in light of which we find certain beliefs and actions reasonable; and hence, it is an aspect of perception that conflicts with

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<sup>13</sup> See Crane (1988a; 1988b) for further appeals to visual illusions in the service of securing *Bifurcation\**. Sean Kelly (in conversation) suggests that this might not be particular to perception. He argues that *some* beliefs might also lead to persistent and irreconcilable contradictions. For example, a person who believes in the existence of God might hold on to that belief even in the face of evidence to the contrary. However, this example is odd, as there seems to be no contrary evidence to the belief in the existence of God (though, as far as I can tell, also no evidence in favor of that belief). Perhaps, then, we can imagine a person who believes in God but is also committed to believing only what he has strong supporting evidence for. But, the problem with this reply is that such cases are not ubiquitous as they are in perception. Furthermore, such beliefs, when not compartmentalized, when in fact producing persistent contradictions within a subject’s mental life, lead to a subject that is either *irrational* or, at extreme cases, *pathological*. But, there seems to be nothing irrational or pathological about experiencing visual illusions.

*Exclusivity\**. For example, though we might not have the fine-grained concepts red<sub>27</sub> and red<sub>28</sub>, our perceiving the two shades provides us reason to sort them in certain ways rather than others.

Furthermore, the appeal of this phenomenological argument is *not* that we *cannot* come to possess all the appropriate concepts – though this too is doubtful – but that our representing the world perceptually *does not depend on our antecedently possessing these concepts*.<sup>14</sup> Someone working at the painting station in Home Depot surely has many more color concepts than I do; nonetheless our color perception is the *same*, as are the color discriminations we are in a position to make on its basis (unless, e.g., one of us happens to be color blind). More importantly, our having the perceptual experiences that we do is presumably what *explains* our coming to possess the appropriate (observational) concepts; e.g., our undergoing experiences of the color red<sub>27</sub> *explain* our coming to possess the concept red<sub>27</sub> (if ever we do). If perception is to explain observational concept possession, it cannot be the case, on pain of circularity, that having a perception depends on our antecedently possessing those observational concepts. Having appropriate perceptual experiences precedes possession of appropriate observational concepts.<sup>15</sup> The point then is that our representing the world perceptually does not entail that we possess the concepts specifying the content of our perception, and hence, does not entail that we are in a position to treat such content as a premise in reasoning.

A final consideration worth noting in favor of *Bifurcation\** is that *its denial* seems to over-intellectualize the demands on perception. It entails that non-concept-users, infants

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<sup>14</sup> See, especially, Coliva (2003) and Bermúdez (2007).

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., Peacocke (1992; 2001a) and Ayers (2002). Brewer responds to Ayers in his (2002).

and disadvantaged animals, are excluded from possession of such states. This claim runs counter to common sense, which suggests that animals incapable of beliefs, presumably squirrels, puffins, and spider monkeys, nonetheless perceive the world. Indeed, perception seems to be something we (more or less) share with our ‘relatives’ in the animal kingdom, even though we differ quite markedly from them in our other, more conceptually rich, intellectual capacities. Similarly, infants seem to perceive the world just fine, even though their possible thoughts about it are significantly limited.<sup>16</sup>

One can, of course, deny *Bifurcation\** without over-intellectualizing the demands on perception, but rather by weakening the demands on having a belief. This would be the case, if one thought (as Armstrong, for example, does) that even mere discriminative behavior was evidence for having acquired a belief.<sup>17</sup> In this way, even squirrels, puffins, and spider monkeys, can properly be said to employ beliefs when engaging their environment. However, by weakening these demands we not only trivialize the distinction between perception and belief, but we also risk throwing the baby out with the bathwater. We risk undercutting our explanation of how even beliefs, let alone perception, can play the role of directly providing us reasons.<sup>18</sup> *Bifurcation\** is needed to

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<sup>16</sup> This argument, too, can be traced back to Evans (1982).

<sup>17</sup> According to Armstrong (1968) we form beliefs whenever we receive information. Perception is a way of receiving information, and hence it *is* the acquisition of a belief (by way of the senses). Such a minimal account of belief, as mere acquisition of information, trivializes the issue at hand.

<sup>18</sup> This is so, as the notion of belief that is needed is one that places the subject in a position to utilize its contents as a premise in reasoning. However, puffins don’t do inferences. If we take beliefs to be nothing more than those states implicated in the discriminative behaviors of puffins, e.g., we have abandoned our capacity to explain their implication in inferences. More will be said of this in the chapters to come.



provide a middle-ground between over-intellectualizing perception and under-intellectualizing belief.<sup>19</sup>

### 1.5 The inconsistent triad returns

The arguments presented so far are controversial and open to much further debate. Nonetheless, they provide some support for the individual plausibility of each of the propositions in the following newly formulated triad:

Perceptual apprehension – Some perceptions provide us reasons *directly*

Exclusivity\* – Only *belief-like* states provide us reasons directly

Bifurcation\* – No perception is *belief-like*

Though newly formed, these three propositions are still inconsistent; they cannot be simultaneously held.

What can be done to resolve this inconsistency? The literature on the reason-giving role of perception is largely split between those who are willing to abandon *Perceptual apprehension*, to secure the other propositions, and those who fervently defend it. The former argue that it is precisely because *only* belief-like states can provide us reasons directly (*Exclusivity\**) and because perception differs in the relevant respects from belief

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<sup>19</sup> For strong arguments to this effect see Bermúdez (2007). The literature on the nonconceptual content of perception provides ample arguments in favor of *Bifurcation\**, many of which, for brevity sake, have not been mentioned here. For a review of these arguments and their merits see, e.g., Bermúdez and Cahen (2008), and Toribio (2007).

(*Bifurcation*\*) that perception cannot provide us reasons directly. The staunchest and most familiar supporter of this position is Davidson who argues that “nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief.”(1983, p. 141) And, further, argues that “the relation between a sensation and a belief cannot be logical, since sensations are not beliefs or other propositional attitudes.”(Ibid., p. 143) Perception can, thus, be a *causal antecedent* of a belief, but it cannot be a reason for a belief, since only beliefs provide reasons and perception is not belief.<sup>20</sup> However, as we have seen, denying *Perceptual apprehension* cuts the chain of justification, which is required if the world is to place any normative constraints on our theorizing about it (indeed, it is Davidson’s coherentism that McDowell characterizes as ‘spinning in the void’).<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, since perception is not an *epistemic* mediator<sup>22</sup> between the world and our empirical beliefs,

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<sup>20</sup> See also Davidson (1982). Among other proponents of the view are Dretske (1995), Tye (2000), and Evans (1982), to name but a few. The case of Evans is controversial but the following seems to place him fully in this camp. He says: “In the case of such [concept possessing] organisms... [judgments] are then *based upon* (reliably caused by) these internal states; when this is the case we can speak of the information being ‘accessible’ to the subject, and, indeed, of the existence of conscious experience” (Evans 1982, p. 227). Evans considers the relation between the perceptual and conceptual systems as that of *reliable causation*. We should note that, in all these cases, though we have a denial of *Perceptual apprehension* – a denial that perception supplies the subject reasons directly – it need not be denied that having a perception makes one justified in having the perceptual belief that the perception causes. So, if one is a reliabilist about justification, as many proponents of this strategy are, one might argue that we are more often than not justified in holding the beliefs that we do since our perceptual mechanisms are reliable causal intermediaries between the world and our beliefs (a position made popular by Goldman (1979)). However, this is very different from claiming that the world places a *normative* constraint on our thinking, and very different from claiming that our perception *provides us reasons* for holding particular beliefs or engaging our environment in certain ways. More will be said about this presently.

<sup>21</sup> See my fn. 1 and the text it relates to for more detail of the difficulties here.

<sup>22</sup> Note that in using the term ‘epistemic *mediator*’ I am not suggesting a view of perception as a veil between us and the world, as though what we are aware of when we perceive the world are our perceptions. Perception is a mode of awareness *of the world*. When we form an empirical belief on the basis of how the world perceptually appears to us, we are not engaging in some form of introspection, rather, we are looking out into the world. Whether perception is an epistemic mediator is a question of whether it represents *the world* as making reasonable certain judgments and activities rather than others.

but only a *causal* mediator, it entails the unintuitive proposition that the character of perception is *epistemically inert from the perceiver's point of view*. It entails that we are perpetually mistaken in taking how the world perceptually appears to us as our reason for forming our empirical beliefs and for our engaging with it appropriately. My perceiving the brown table does not, after all, provide me a reason for thinking that the table is brown, and my perceiving the layout of the room does not provide the light by which I find a certain path through it appropriate. We are, further, perpetually mistaken in holding ourselves responsible for our perceptually based engagements with the world – they amount to no achievement at all on our part. Finally, in its rejection of *Perceptual apprehension* this view entails that non-concept-users, animals and infants, are completely blind to reasons. Whether that is a difficulty for the view is, as mentioned, an empirical matter – a question of which forms of explanation turn out most adequately to explain the behaviors of such creatures. For this reason, it is unfortunate to reject *a-priori* the possible sensitivity of such creatures to reasons.

Those defending *Perceptual apprehension*, on the other hand, are generally motivated by epistemological concerns – the need to ground our genuinely *empirical* beliefs in perception.<sup>23</sup> They, therefore, typically deny *Bifurcation\**. If perception supplies reasons for holding particular perceptual beliefs, then having a perception must be *sufficient* for the subject to utilize the content of her perception in inference – to recognize the inferential relation holding between the content of her perception and that for which it supplies reason. However, we have seen that denying *Bifurcation\** is also costly. It leads

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<sup>23</sup> Among proponents of this view are McDowell (1994a), Brewer (1999), and Sedivy (1996), to name but a few.

to an over-intellectualization of what *seems* to be a rather primitive system – one that both human beings and conceptually disadvantaged animals and infants (to a large extent) share. Furthermore, since such creatures are incapable of utilizing the contents of their perception in inference, and given *Exclusivity\**, they are also incapable of acting in the light of reasons. Hence, as in the position previously discussed, it too provides an unattractive view of animal mentality that also undercuts one of the motivations introduced for *retaining Perceptual apprehension* – the possibility of belief independent intentional explanation of animal and infant behavior.<sup>24</sup> Finally, such a position entails that *we must* in fact possess a sufficiently rich and fine-grained repertoire of concepts as enters into the fine-grained specification of our perception, so as to be in a position to utilize the contents of our perception in inference. This claim is both phenomenologically and empirically suspect.<sup>25</sup> And, if there are at least some aspects of perception that are concept-independent, then those aspects of perception are, again, epistemically *inert* from the perspective of the subject.

There is a third strategy that appears not to have received sufficient attention in the literature on perception. It is also the strategy that is most profitable, as it allows us to take seriously the central concerns of both camps just mentioned. We can retain *Perceptual apprehension*, not at the price of rejecting *Bifurcation\**, but by rejecting, or

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<sup>24</sup> McDowell, for example, is quite upfront about this consequence of his position. He claims that “creatures without conceptual capacities lack self-consciousness and—this is part of the same package—experience of objective reality” (McDowell 1994a, p. 114) He further claims that “In mere animals, sentience is in the service of a mode of life that is structured exclusively by immediate biological imperatives. ... [A] merely animal life is shaped by goals whose control of the animal’s behaviour at a given moment is an immediate outcome of biological forces. A mere animal does not weigh reasons and decide what to do” (ibid., p. 115).

<sup>25</sup> See Raffman (1995) as well as the various papers mentioned in my fn. 12.

modifying, *Exclusivity*\*. In this way we can do justice to the relevant differences between perception and belief, to the different kinds of psychological generalizations into which they enter, and to the seeming continuity, phylogenetically and ontogenetically, of the adult human mind with the minds of 'lesser' animals and infants. At the same time we can also hold that a certain sensitivity to reasons is already afforded by those same capacities employed in perception, thus satisfying our phenomenological intuitions, accounting for the presence of normative constraints on empirical thought, and making room for the intentional explanation of animal and infant behavior.

*The* central difficulty with this strategy is making sense of perception's supplying one's reasons when one is unable to utilize the content of perception as a premise in an argument. This is not merely a problem with the 'standard way of thinking about justification', mentioned above. We can retain the notion that the justification relation expresses the presence of an inference of sorts relating descriptions of the justifier and the justified. We can further say that given that Sam perceives the speeding car approaching, Sam's belief that a speeding car is approaching, as well as Sam's coming to a halt, are both reasonable. Considering Sam's background beliefs and desires, arguments of theoretical and practical reasoning can be formulated in which a description of what Sam perceives serves as a premise, and descriptions of his resulting beliefs and actions follow as conclusions. The problem introduced by *Bifurcation*\* is that, in the case of perception, the descriptions subsumed by these arguments are not *available to Sam*. In other words, the reasonableness of Sam's actions and beliefs might be transparent from a third-person perspective, a perspective from which such arguments can be formulated. However, since Sam does not possess the concepts that figure in specifying these arguments' premises,

*Exclusivity\** would suggest that he is ‘blind’ to the reasonableness of his actions and beliefs and, *a fortiori*, cannot act or form a belief *because* of his finding them reasonable in light of his perceptions.

Attempts that have been made at modifying *Exclusivity\** have focused on modifying or replacing our conception of the justification relation. The thought is that doing so will show how a subject’s having a certain perception justifies the subject’s holding a particular perceptual belief or performing a certain action.<sup>26</sup> While there is good reason to be sympathetic to some such modification, stopping at this point misses the mark. The persistent problem is analogous to the one confronted when attempting to explain your halting by appeal to the *fact* that a speeding car is approaching. The mere fact alone might be considered *a* reason for halting. But it cannot be a *reason available to you* – a reason that *you have* – for halting unless you are *appropriately* aware of it. Analogously, your having a certain perception, say a speeding-car-type perception, may make reasonable a certain perceptual belief or a certain action; indeed, it is often a *good* reason as it often accompanies the actual presence of a speeding car in your vicinity. However, it cannot make reasons *available to you* so long as you are not aware of it *as such*; so long as its being a speeding-car-type perception is not transparent to you.

In other words, even if we have an account that clarifies how perception (of a certain type) can be *a de facto reason* for forming a perceptual belief, by appeal to some form of reliabilism,<sup>27</sup> for example, we still have no understanding of how perception can provide

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<sup>26</sup> Some notable examples are Peacocke (2001a), Heck (2000), and most recently Vision (2009) whose account will be explored more fully in the next Chapter.

<sup>27</sup> See also my brief discussion of reliabilism in my fn. 20.

*the perceiver* a reason without her being aware of its contents as a possible premise in an argument. As McDowell puts it in arguing against *Bifurcation\**, and Peacocke's (1992) account of perceptual content in particular, perception understood as concept-independent might figure in an explanation that shows how having a certain belief "...is as it should be from the standpoint of rationality ... [however], this is not *eo ipso* to give the subject's reasons for whatever the explanation explains" (1994a, p. 163).<sup>28</sup>

Summing up, the most important point to note is that the reason that the inferential model underlying *Exclusivity\** has such a grip on us, is not merely that it makes sense of how one thing might be reasonable in light of another (by showing that the former follows the other via some inference). Rather, it is the fact that it has a seemingly plausible story to tell about what the subject's *having a reason* amounts to, what it takes for the subject to find some belief or action reasonable, and to act on the basis of thus finding it. The subject's having a reason is understood, on this account, as his being in a position to treat the contents of his reason-giving awareness as a premise in reasoning. If *Bifurcation\** is true, then the subject is not in such a position with respect to the contents of his perceptions. We then have no alternative account of how having a perception might provide the subject reasons.

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<sup>28</sup> This I believe constitutes McDowell's *central* argument against proponents of *nonconceptualism* about the content of perception (those supporting *Bifurcation\**). It is a point has not been adequately acknowledged by those pursuing this third strategy for resolving the inconsistent triad. Thus, the nonconceptualist might be able to show that having a particular perception with nonconceptual content *p* is a *good* reason *for* the perceiver to form the belief that *p*, perhaps because of a reliable relation between perceptions of the *p*-type and the obtaining of *p*. However, this is not yet to show how having that perception can be the *reason for which* the subject forms that particular belief. It is this latter possibility that must be accounted for if a nonconceptual account of perceptual content (and hence *Bifurcation\**) is to be consistent with *Perceptual apprehension*. This debate between conceptualists and nonconceptualists about the content of perception will be discussed in much greater detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

Modifying or replacing our notion of the justification relation would make a difference to how we understand the claim that one thing is reasonable in light of another, how having a perception might make reasonable having a certain belief or performing a certain action. But, it is a further step to account for *the subject's* being in a position to find these beliefs or actions reasonable. What is required, then, is a *reformulation* of how some mental state can provide reasons *for the subject* – what being a reason-giving state amounts to – even if we can antecedently explain (from some third-person perspective, or as McDowell says, ‘from the standpoint of rationality’) why having a particular perception makes reasonable a subject’s further deliberations and actions.

Developing such a substantive account of the availability of reasons *to the subject* that is compatible with *Bifurcation\**, an account of *nonconceptual apprehension*, is a central goal of the dissertation. At this point we have an initial understanding of what strategies are available for thinking about the reason-giving character of perception and their respective costs. Most importantly, we have a clearer understanding of the challenge that needs to be overcome if we are to take seriously those considerations expressed by *Perceptual apprehension* and *Bifurcation\**, follow the third strategy for resolving the inconsistent triad, and dissolve the grip that *Exclusivity\** has on us.

In the next chapter, I analyze a recent attempt, by Gerald Vision (2009), to resolve the conflict by pursuing this third strategy.<sup>29</sup> Considering this case study will illustrate the continued relevance of the conflict at the center of this dissertation as well as the

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<sup>29</sup> Though I focus on Vision’s attempted solution, his strategy is but the most recent representative of a class of views that we shall encounter throughout the dissertation, and that, for reasons that will become apparent, will receive the title ‘non-epistemicist views of perception’.



inadequacy of resolving it by simply denying the inferential model of reason-giving at the basis of *Exclusivity*\*

## *Chapter 2: Modifying Exclusivity\* - A case study from Vision*

### 2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I argued that making sense of the reason-giving role of perception involves confronting the conflict between the following three independently plausible propositions.

Perceptual apprehension – Some perceptions provide us reasons *directly*

Exclusivity\* – Only *belief-like* states provide us reasons directly

Bifurcation\* – No perception is *belief-like*

I also argued that one way of resolving the conflict, and the one that it is the aim of this dissertation to pursue, is to reconsider what is involved in *Exclusivity\** and how it might plausibly be modified. One suggestion that I argue *misses* the point of the challenge is merely to resist the claim that for a mental state directly to provide one reasons for some belief or action is for there to be an appropriate inference relating the two states.

In this chapter I clarify the challenge by considering a recent attempt by Gerald Vision (2009) to resolve the conflict by modifying *Exclusivity\**. Vision serves as an exemplar of why merely resisting the standard, inferential, model of reason-giving is insufficient for the task of resolving the conflict at hand.

## 2.2 Vision on the problem of perception's evidential role

In his (2009) paper, 'Fixing Perceptual Belief', Vision endorses a version of *Bifurcation\** and of *Perceptual apprehension*. He argues that "non-propositional contents ... must count as the ultimate perceptual or experiential evidence for our beliefs. *What* we believe, on the other hand, is propositional, or near enough" (p. 292). (Unless stated otherwise, all page numbers in this chapter refer to Vision (2009)). Furthermore, Vision is explicit that the relation between the non-propositional notion of perception he discusses and the resulting perceptual belief is not merely a causal relation but an intentional one.

Perception *entitles us* to form the perceptual beliefs that we do.

Vision begins by arguing for the indispensability of, what he calls, objectual perception (or objectual seeing, which he uses interchangeably) to any account of perceptual belief fixation. *Objectual* perception contrasts with *propositional* perception.<sup>30</sup> The former is a state that is accurately reported by a non-propositional noun-clause, such as 'Sam sees the erupting volcano'. In contrast, propositional perception is accurately reported by utilizing a 'that'-clause, e.g., 'Sam sees *that* the volcano erupted'. Vision argues that our most fundamental evidence for belief fixation must be a state accurately reported non-propositionally – a state of objectual perception.

According to Vision, objectual perception is indispensable for this task for two central reasons. First, it is presupposed by, but does not, itself, presuppose, any form of

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<sup>30</sup> For brevity and simplicity of exposition, I will only focus on the paradigmatic form of perceptual propositionalism he discusses, though the following considerations are applicable, *mutatis mutandis*, to other forms. Among the other forms of propositionalism he discusses are: S visually experiences that p, It visually appears to S that p, S sees of x that it is F (which he calls predicational seeing, but argues that is a form of propositionalism nonetheless), S sees O as X, and S sees x to be F.

propositional perception. When saying that ‘Sam sees *that* the volcano erupted’ nothing indicates that the state reported is perceptual. Sam might see *that* the volcano erupted by, e.g., noting the numerous fleeing natives from the village at the mountain’s base, or, as in the recent, 2010, eruption of Iceland’s Eyjafjallajökull, by seeing the airline cancelation notices for transatlantic flights. Indeed, Sam might have no perceptual experiences at all, perhaps he is congenitally blind, and yet he might still see, for example, *that* his marriage was a big mistake. To guarantee that such a report is *truly* that of a perceptual/experiential state, it must presuppose some form of objectual perception. ‘Sam sees *that* the volcano erupted’ counts as a perceptual idiom only if we presuppose that Sam sees the erupting volcano.

“Whenever a state reportable by a sentence of [propositional] form ... is truly experiential, there is an account of what it consists in which includes an objectual seeing. This is what enables us to distinguish the episode as truly sensory.” (p. 296)

In contrast, ‘Sam sees the volcano erupting’ does not presuppose any particular form of propositional perception.<sup>31</sup>

A more serious consideration, he argues, for the indispensability of objectual perception is that perceptual propositionalism, in all its forms, “...does not explain how we arrive at believing from a contentful something more fundamental than belief, or from a different thing which is the evidential basis for the belief.” This is so, since “...the state of *seeing that something is so and so* implies that the subject *takes* the experience in that way, and

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<sup>31</sup> This line of argument should be familiar from Dretske – most explicitly in his (1969). Vision’s notion of objectual perception is analogous to Dretske’s notion of *non-epistemic* seeing (or ‘simple seeing’ as he calls it in his (1979)), whereas Vision’s various formulations of propositionalism are analogous to Dretske’s notion of *epistemic* seeing.

taking something to be so and so is a form of believing that it is so and so” (p. 294).<sup>32</sup>

Objectual perception is indispensable as the ‘contentful something more fundamental than belief’ that can be ‘the evidential basis for the belief’.

Vision clearly sees the grip that the inferential model of reason-giving, underlying *Exclusivity\**, has on us, and considers one of his central aims to undermine it. He argues, that if the state relevant to belief fixation were ‘the state of *seeing that the pencil is on the table*’, then, ‘since the content of the seeing ... is already propositional’, that would put ‘to rest any concerns over a structural transformation of content running *from* that of a perception *to* that of a belief’ (p. 294). However, the two considerations above show that propositional perception cannot be the fundamental contentful something that explains belief fixation. Therefore, “...if we are to make sense of the notion of a perceptual belief arising from a perceptual experience, it must somehow arise from our non-propositional objectual states.” The fundamental question then is, “...how a non-propositional state, objectual seeing, can serve as evidence for a propositional state such as belief” (p. 301). In other words, how can something that is not belief-like directly provide us reasons for our beliefs?

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<sup>32</sup> Note that in saying that the subject ‘...takes the experience in that way’ Vision appears to be misspeaking. Vision is not implying that seeing *that* so and so requires that one be aware of *one’s experience*, rather, various passages throughout his paper suggest that he means to say that one ‘takes the *content* of one’s experience in that way’. Vision clarifies (in correspondence) that “the only taking I’m concerned with is a taking of the content/object of the seeing. Any such taking of something seems to demand a propositional structure.” Furthermore, as we shall presently see, I do not endorse Vision’s claim that ‘taking something to be so and so is a form of believing that it is so and so’. On the contrary, my aim in this chapter is to show that there *must* be a form of ‘taking’ that is *not* belief-like. What matters, for present purposes, is that Vision takes himself to be confronted with the same difficulty that I have detailed above. If perception were belief-like – i.e., if *Bifurcation\** were false – then having a perception would not be able to explain the fixation of belief-like states. We need a contentful something more fundamental than belief for the sake of belief fixation. These are the considerations that lead Vision to endorse *Bifurcation\** and *Perceptual apprehension*.

### 2.2.1 Vision on the pressures of *Exclusivity*\*

Vision entertains and discharges three seeming objections to his suggestion that objectual perception is indispensable for any account of belief fixation. A review of these objections is illuminating. They articulate the pressures (some of which were discussed in the previous chapter) that *Exclusivity*\* places on those pursuing the third strategy for resolving the inconsistency with which we are concerned. Attending to Vision's treatment of these objections, then, reveals the serious difficulty involved in responding to the question with which the previous section ended.

The first objection is that objectual perception is merely a *causal* antecedent of perceptual beliefs, rather than an evidential basis for it. The claim is that for perception to be evidence for our perceptual beliefs, a state of objectual perception must first cause in us a propositionally specifiable perceptual state, and only this latter state can truly be evidence for the belief. However, Vision argues that if objectual perception *merely* played a causal role, it would be unclear how the world could place a normative constraint on which perceptual beliefs we ultimately form. To make sense of the fact that (objectually) seeing the speeding car underwrites our perceptual belief *that the car is speeding*, even if it does so by first causing in us an appropriate propositionally specified perceptual state (e.g., seeing that the car is speeding), it must be the case that the objectual perception also contributes its *content*.<sup>33</sup>

A second objection Vision raises is that objectual perception is extensionally specified; it allows for the substitution of co-extensive terms *salva veritate*. But if this is the case,

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<sup>33</sup> Recall the discussion in Chapter 1 (Section 1.2) in support of *Perceptual apprehension*.

then there are ways of specifying a state of objectual perception that do not correspond to how the subject takes things to be. When Oedipus first confronts his mother, we can truthfully say that Oedipus sees his mother, even though it is clear that Oedipus would object that it is his mother that he is seeing. But then, how can a state accurately reportable by ‘Oedipus sees Oedipus’ mother’ be evidence for Oedipus to form the belief that he is confronted with Jocasta, or the belief that he is confronted with his mother (which he naturally would deny)? Vision’s response is most revealing.

“To get around such cases, I believe a restriction is necessary to specifications that *S* is at the time, and without additional information, in a position to acknowledge what he experienced as what. Not all reports of objectual seeing are candidates for making transparent or explaining the relevant perceptual belief. But that does not mean that a *different kind* of experiential state is needed, in particular, a non-objectual one. It only implies that for this one central role, *viz* that of understanding how perceptual belief is fixed by perception, only certain specifications of the objects of objectual seeing states can be used. The need for restriction on how the objectual seeings are specified is not an argument for altogether omitting this species of seeing from one’s account of belief fixing...”(Vision, 2009, pp. 308-9)

Though there are an indefinitely many third-person specifications of any instance of objectual seeing that do not make transparent the relation between what is seen and the perceptual belief formed, there will be other specifications that do – namely, those the subject is in a position to acknowledge. *These* are the specifications that must be mentioned in an account of belief fixation.

Finally, Vision returns to the question with which the previous section ended. The difficulty hangs on the claim that evidential relations only obtain between propositions. This is so, since only something propositional can be a premise in an argument the

conclusion of which is a proposition. But, objectual perception is non-propositional. So, how *can* objectual perception be evidence for a belief the content of which is a proposition? Vision argues that at the core of this objection lies the assumption that evidential relations track inferential relations. We should be skeptical about such an assumption. Rather, he says, we should broaden the notion of *evidential* relations beyond the confines of *logical* relations. This should not be so unnerving, he says, as we commonly appeal to non-propositional entities as evidence for propositions. For example, the DNA sample found at the crime scene is evidence *that* Sam was involved in the murder. Of course, it might be the case that whenever such entities serve as evidence we can rephrase the bit of evidence into propositional form (e.g., *Sam's DNA was found at the crime scene* might be a proposition from which we can derive the proposition *Sam was involved in the murder*). However, Vision claims that our urge to engage in such rephrasing might be nothing more than a 'habit or convenience' (p. 309).

Terminological differences aside, Vision holds that our perceptions can provide the fundamental evidence for our perceptual beliefs while at the same time fail to be belief-like, as they are states specified non-propositionally.<sup>34</sup> This can be achieved once we recognize that evidential relations need not hold exclusively between states propositionally specified. Vision's proposal amounts to a modification of *Exclusivity\**, while securing *Bifurcation\** and *Perceptual apprehension*, by denying that evidential relations are limited by the inferential model of reason-giving.

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<sup>34</sup> Vision (in correspondence) clarifies that his aim is indeed to show how objectual perception can (and must) make *reasons* for beliefs available to the perceiver.



### 2.3 The propositionalist response: Objectual perception cannot provide reasons

I have argued, in Chapter 1, that this strategy is insufficient for the task at hand. In the following I argue that objectual perception *cannot* provide us evidence for our perceptual beliefs *in any interesting sense*. Vision's argument is inadequate as it does not fully appreciate the challenge that satisfying *Perceptual apprehension* faces and that motivates the class of views he calls 'propositionalism' (according to which only if perception is a kind of state that is accurately specified propositionally can it serve as our evidence for belief).

We have seen in Chapter 1, Section 1.3, that merely citing the speeding car as a reason for halting does an injustice to the explanation of your action. To explain your action it must be the case that you are also *appropriately* aware of the speeding car. Given that having a belief presupposes that one possesses the concepts involved in a correct specification of its content, one is also, *ipso facto*, in a position to recognize the content of the belief as a premise in an argument of practical reasoning. Being in such a position explains one's finding appropriate, or reasonable, the conclusion of that argument. Thus, your having the *belief* that the car is speeding can serve as an appropriate awareness of the speeding car that provides you a reason in light of which you find halting appropriate – a reason for which you eventually halt.

These same considerations apply also in the case of perception and the fixation of perceptual belief. The propositionalist reasons, broadly, as follows:

1. If perception is to provide one reasons in light of which forming a certain perceptual belief is appropriate *from one's own point of view*, one must be able to

treat the content of one's perception as a premise in an argument the conclusion of which is the content of the perceptual belief.

2. Only propositions can be premises in an argument the conclusion of which is a proposition.
3. Hence, perception must be propositional.

While not denying (2), Vision holds that having a reason (or evidence) for some proposition need not be confined to situations in which there obtains an inference between the purported reason and the proposition in question. Evidential relations should be understood as constituting a broader class of relations than the logical ones. Non-propositional entities, too, can be reasons, or evidence, for propositional ones. I am happy to endorse such a claim. However, the crucial element in the propositionalist argument sketched above is (1). In particular, it is the propositionalist's focus on what it takes for perception to be a state that can serve as evidence *from the subject's point of view* for forming a particular perceptual belief.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the inference model at the basis of *Exclusivity\** provides us a way of thinking about evidential relations – about how one thing can *be* evidence for another. But it also allows us to make sense of a subject's *having* this evidence. It is the latter, not merely the former, that lures the propositionalist to the inference model and hence to *Exclusivity\**. That is, the appeal of the inference model underlying *Exclusivity\** is that it provides an understanding of how a subject might come to *apprehend* the world. The propositionalist position applies this same model to

perception and by denying *Bifurcation\** provides a way of understanding how *Perceptual apprehension* can be satisfied.

There is little controversy that the erupting volcano *is* evidence for the belief *that* the volcano is erupting, or that the DNA sample *is* evidence for the belief *that* Sam was involved in the crime. However, the crucial question is whether the subject is aware of the erupting volcano (or of the DNA) *in a way that provides evidence from her own perspective* for forming the appropriate belief. The challenge for an account of objectual perception is to show how, forgoing the inference model and its accompanying commitment to propositionalism, it might account for the subject's being aware of the erupting volcano in a way that supplies *her* reason to form the perceptual belief that the volcano is erupting.

Objectual perception has no resources to meet this challenge. The fact, noted by Vision, that the specification of objectual perception is extensional is no objection to the claim that it can *be* evidence for a perceptual belief – in much the same way that the erupting volcano itself is evidence (regardless of how it is specified) for the belief that the volcano is erupting. And, Vision correctly points out that there will be *some* specification of the object of objectual perception that makes transparent its evidential relations to the particular perceptual beliefs for which it is evidence. But, such a claim is not sufficient to discharge the propositionalist worry that objectual perception cannot provide *the subject* evidence in light of which to think or act. For perception to provide the subject such evidence it is insufficient that there is *from a third-person perspective* some description that makes these evidential relations transparent. These evidential relations must be transparent to the subject, i.e., *from the subject's perspective*.

A notion of perception that does not respect this first-person transparency constraint can be little more than a causal factor in the production of the perceptual belief, albeit a factor that can show how having that belief ‘is as it should be from the standpoint of rationality’.<sup>35</sup> In general, it can be evidence for a belief in the sense that the object of the belief, itself, or anything else that reliably (though, perhaps, not invariably) causally co-varies with it, can be evidence for that belief (e.g., fleeing natives/airline cancellations). The state of a subject’s perceptual system perhaps reliably co-varies with some worldly state of affairs. Hence, it too can *be* evidence for a belief that the state of affairs in question obtains. However, this fact alone is insufficient for it to play the evidential role required by *Perceptual apprehension* – i.e., to provide the subject reasons in light of which performing an action or forming a perceptual belief are appropriate from the subject’s point of view.

Does Vision’s qualification, in the extensive quotation above, that we should restrict our specifications of objectual perception to those that *the subject* is in a position to acknowledge, nonetheless respect this first-person transparency constraint and resolve the difficulty? To explain Oedipus’ forming the belief that he confronts Jocasta, Vision claims we must specify his state of objectual perception by appeal to the singular term ‘Jocasta’ rather than ‘Oedipus’ mother’. Specified in this way, limited by what Oedipus is willing to acknowledge is the case, the evidential relation between his objectual perception and his resultant belief can be made transparent. However, this qualification is of no help. Oedipus’ being ‘at the time, and without additional information, in a position to acknowledge’ what he experiences as what, is *itself* in need of an explanation *of the*

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<sup>35</sup> McDowell (1994a, p. 163).

*same kind* that we seek to provide. His being in a position to acknowledge that it is *Jocasta* that he experiences just is his being in a position to form the perceptual belief that *Jocasta* is before him. Objectual perception is supposed to *explain* how Oedipus could come to be in a position to acknowledge what he experience as what. While the limitation on the specification of objectual perception makes transparent to us how the subject's having a certain perceptual state makes reasonable the belief the subject *actually* forms, it cannot explain the subject's forming this belief on the basis of finding it reasonable by virtue of having such perception. This is so as the limitation on how objectual perception is to be specified does not track any ontologically significant feature of perception; it is *extrinsic* to the nature of the state itself. But then it is clear that this limitation does nothing to *explain how* having such a state of objectual perception provides the subject evidence for the beliefs he forms (or how the subject is in a position to acknowledge what he experiences as what) rather than any other, it can only show *that* these beliefs are reasonable given that the subject is undergoing an objectual perceptual state thus specified.

Furthermore, note that though evidential relations might go beyond logical relations, this is merely to say that entities other than propositions can serve as evidence for the truth of propositions. This claim is not particularly problematic. Still, our urge to rephrase the bit of evidence into propositional form is *not* as Vision claims merely a 'habit or convenience.' It is driven by the need to make these evidential relations *transparent to us*, and is a precondition on that bit of evidence being evidence that we *have*.

Presumably, the DNA sample around the body of Mary Ann Nichols in Buck Row, Whitechapel, London, August 31<sup>st</sup>, 1888, *was* evidence that Jack the Ripper is X. But,

clearly, at the time, it was not evidence that anyone *had*.<sup>36</sup> Suppose it was seen and collected by investigators at the time. In this case, we can, of course, say that in *some* sense the investigators *had* evidence that could identify Jack the Ripper. However, the sense in which they had the evidence is completely insignificant insofar as their investigation is concerned; that is, insofar as its role in guiding their deliberations and actions is concerned. It is only a century later that DNA samples became, not only evidence for the identity of the culprit (which they always were), but also evidence that someone could *have* for the identity of the culprit. What took so long? Apparently, producing the body of theory, in biology and criminology, that allows us to be aware of the evidence *as evidence* is not a trivial matter. Many decades went by before we had the theoretical tools with which to rephrase the bit of evidence into the right *propositional* form that would make *transparent to us* its evidential relations to the identity of a person. This shows that rather than being a mere habit, our rephrasing the evidence into a form that can enter into appropriate logical relations is what allows us to *have* the evidence in a way that can serve *as evidence* for us to act and deliberate appropriately (in a way that, hopefully, tracks its *actual* evidential relations). The obtaining of a logical relation between descriptions of the evidence and that for which it is evidence, and, crucially, our being aware of the evidence by means of such a description, is what *explains* our finding a transition to a certain belief or action reasonable in light of the evidence.

Contrary to Vision's claim, the extensionality of objectual seeing *does* 'mean that a *different kind* of experiential state is needed, in particular, a non-objectual one'. The kind

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<sup>36</sup> A specification of the evidence that made transparent its appropriate evidential relations was not even available from a third-person point of view. Thus, Vision is correct that a thing's status *as evidence* does not depend on *the availability* of such a third-person specification of that thing.

of experiential state that is needed is one whose correct specification makes transparent the reasons that having the state in question makes available *to the subject*. According to propositionalists – who hold that the subject has reason for a perceptual belief *only if* she is in a position to recognize a *premise* in an argument the conclusion of which is the content of a perceptual belief – the only kind of state that could satisfy this transparency constraint is propositional perception. Given that they too hold that perception must supply the foundational evidence for our beliefs (i.e., *Perceptual apprehension*), they deny *Bifurcation\**. To avoid the propositionalist claim, it is not sufficient to broaden the class of evidential relations, and merely reject the claim that only propositions can enter into evidential relations. Vision must also make sense of how objectual perception, as a mode of perceptual awareness *of* the evidence, can provide a light by which the subject finds some transition in thought appropriate. Objectual perception, I have argued cannot provide such a light.

At one point, it seems that Vision *is* attentive to these considerations in favor of some *other* kind of propositional seeing. He says:

“This does not wholly eliminate a role for *seeing to be* [a form of propositional perception]. It might still be an indispensable intermediate step, because ... one can only generate perceptual belief from what one actually discriminates, while objectual seeing permits specifications of its objects which are not ways in which the subject regards them.”(p. 306)

As I have just argued, a sensitivity to how the subject regards the objects of perception is crucial if there is any chance that perception allows the subject to regard these same objects *as evidence* for a perceptual belief. Objectual perception is perception correctly specified in a way that completely abstracts from any such sensitivity, it therefore cannot

serve such evidential role. Rather, it seems that it is the intermediary propositional perception that serves that role. But, if some form of propositional perception, perceiving to be, is *required* as an intermediary between objectual perception and perceptual belief, the role of objectual perception must be to underwrite the transition to this intermediary form of propositional perception. What could the nature of this transition be?

We are faced with a dilemma. The first horn of the dilemma considers the transition from objectual perception to some kind of propositional perception, say, perceiving to be, as a brute *causal* one. But, then, it is perception accurately specified propositionally that is that *contentful* something that provides the perceiver the most fundamental evidence for some perceptual belief. Objectual perception drops out as epistemically insignificant. The other horn of the dilemma considers the transition from objectual perception to perceiving to be as an *intentional* one. It is this horn that Vision is driven to.<sup>37</sup> However, if the transition from objectual perception to perceptual belief, from something non-propositional to something propositional, required the introduction of an intermediary propositional something in the form of perceiving to be, how do we explain the transition from objectual perception to perceiving to be without introducing yet another propositionally specified intermediary? This is a vicious regress if there ever was one. At some point in the regress objectual perception must be introduced as that fundamental something that ‘gets our foot through the epistemic door’, so to speak. But, because objectual perception abstracts away from any sensitivity to how the subject regards the objects of perception, we have no reason to think that it can do so and every reason to

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<sup>37</sup> See p. 307.



think that it cannot.<sup>38</sup> Thus, on either horn of the dilemma, objectual perception turns out to be an epistemically inert factor in the mental life of the perceiver. Contrary to Vision, the need for restriction on how the objectual seeings are specified *is* an argument for altogether omitting this species of seeing from one's account of belief fixation (alternatively, you can keep it in, but it will simply 'sit there' idle). The restriction is driven not by the need to make transparent the evidential relations between perception and perceptual belief, but to indicate an ontologically significant feature of perception that accounts for the transparency of these relations from the subject's perspective.

We can avoid the dilemma altogether while denying propositionalism (that is, while holding to *Bifurcation\**) if we allow that evidential relations are broader than logical ones *and*, most crucially, once we develop a substantive account of perception that shows how it *could* make transparent to perceivers the appropriateness of their ensuing beliefs and actions. It is this latter ingredient that is missing on Vision's account.

I would like to mention one final point. It might be thought that objectual perception and propositional perception, say, perceiving to be, are merely different kinds of *reports* of the *same* perceptual state.<sup>39</sup> As the quotations above indicate, this does not seem to be how Vision regards the situation. Vision is talking about different perceptual *states* and the possibility that a state accurately reported objectually might provide our fundamental evidence for perceptual beliefs or for other perceptual states accurately reported

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<sup>38</sup> See Pitson (1984) for a similar argument advanced against Dretske's (1969) notion of non-epistemic seeing. Pitson argues that some cognitive element must already be present in perception if we are to explain our perceptual discriminations, a cognitive element that non-epistemic seeing, like objectual seeing, is in the business to deny.

<sup>39</sup> Many thanks to José Luis Bermúdez for bringing this possibility to my attention.

propositionally. However, suppose we *are* considering two reports of one and the same perceptual state. If so, then, presumably, the two reports accurately specify two *aspects* of that same state – one aspect accurately specified propositionally, and the other accurately specified objectively. But then, the considerations discussed throughout this chapter are considerations that show that it is perception’s having *that aspect accurately specified propositionally* that *explains* the subject’s having a light by which to act and deliberate appropriately. That aspect of perception correctly reported objectively still remains epistemically insignificant insofar as the subject’s reasons for forming the perceptual belief are concerned.

#### 2.4 Summing up Vision’s challenge

Objectually perceiving the erupting volcano is epistemically irrelevant to the subject, just as the erupting volcano itself is epistemically irrelevant to the subject so long as she is not aware of it in a way that can provide her reasons. That is, so long as she does not, in having the perception, ‘take’ the erupting volcano in any way, her having the perception cannot provide her a reason for anything. Thus, if we are to pursue a strategy that admits both *Perceptual apprehension* and *Bifurcation\** – i.e., if we are to admit that perception provides that contentful something that provides our fundamental evidence for belief while denying the propositionalist position – we must, contrary to Vision, admit that ‘taking something to be so and so’ *is not necessarily* ‘a form of believing that it is so and so’. What’s more, we must provide a *substantive* account of what such non-propositional ‘taking’ amounts to. This is a considerable challenge, but one that must be undertaken if

we are to make sense of how perception can provide the perceiver with reasons, while at the same time acknowledging that belief and perception differ significantly.

In the next chapter I argue that a version of the challenge we have seen in these last two chapters is also at the center of the debate about the conceptual or nonconceptual contents of perception; a debate that blossomed in response to Evans (1982). Given the heavy reliance that proponents of *Exclusivity\** place on the conceptual nature of the content of a reason-giving state (as a precondition on the subject's treating it as a premise in reasoning), this convergence of concerns should not be surprising. I argue that the challenge developed above serves to illuminate the central challenge that nonconceptualists face when attempting to account for the reason-giving role of perception. Furthermore, attending to the debate about the nature of perceptual content directly will also provide us the theoretical tools with which potentially to resolve the original challenge.

*Chapter 3: The reason-giving problem of perception and the nonconceptual perceptual apprehension of the world*

3.1 Ambiguous figures – different aspects in view

Originally introduced in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century by the crystallographer Louis Necker, the Necker cube (Figure 2) is now found practically in every introductory textbook on perception as the paradigmatic ambiguous figure.

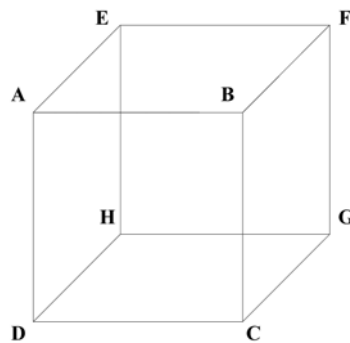


Figure 2: The Necker Cube

Looking at the Necker cube, one’s experience abruptly switches back and forth between perceiving it as a cube whose front plane is ABCD (as facing down and to the left) and perceiving it as a cube whose front plane is EFGH (as facing up and to the right).<sup>40</sup>

This has struck various philosophers as reason to think that perception cannot be merely a matter of receptivity, a passive ‘taking in’ of what is presented. Most famously, perhaps,

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<sup>40</sup> With some effort it can also be seen as a variety of other more complex figures. For example, consider B and H as the opposite corners of a small square, projecting out of the page, the other two corners being the intersection of BC and HG as well as AB and EH.

Hanson (1958) argues that the perception of ambiguous figures illustrates the theory-laden character of perception. Remarking on the Necker cube, Hanson claims that when asked ‘what is it that one sees?’ we are led to an ambiguous answer. On the one hand, one simply sees a two-dimensional line drawing, but on the other hand, what one sees is a cube in a particular orientation. Given that which orientation the Necker cube is experienced as having cannot be captured merely by reference to what is being seen in the first sense (a two-dimensional line drawing), an analysis of such experience requires something in addition – some interpretive aspect. This is not a two step process, he contends, first a perception and then an interpretation of that perception. Rather, the interpretation is already part of how the figure is presented.

Hanson proceeds to argue that *all* perception involves the same ambiguity manifest most clearly in the case of ambiguous figures. When a freshman and a physics professor both look at an X-ray tube they are, in one respect, seeing the same thing – they both have an experience *of* the X-ray tube. However, “the *ways* in which they are visually aware [of the X-ray tube] are profoundly different” (1958, p. 15). Similarly, upon hearing a symphony, “...we may not hear that the oboe is out of tune, though this will be painfully obvious to the trained musician. (Who incidentally, will not hear the tones and *interpret* them as being out of tune, but will simply hear the oboe to be out of tune...)” (ibid., p. 17). Though both the layman and the expert will have an experience *of* the out-of-tune oboe, only the latter will experience it *to be out-of-tune*, or, as it is sometimes put, experience it *as out-of-tune*.

It appears, then, that how one apprehends the world through perception cannot be captured merely by mentioning *what* one’s perception is *of*. After all, the layman and the

expert undergo *different* perceptions of the *same* object. Rather, Hanson suggests, one must be sensitive to the perspective from which the world is apprehended, where this is more than a merely *geometrical* perspective but requires us to take into account the *theoretical* perspective that the particular perceiver ‘brings with him’ to the act of perception. How one apprehends the world through perception is, at least in part, a function of what one *knows* about the world.

Such a claim is a thorn in the side of philosophers of science. If *all* perception is theory-laden, then it seems perception cannot be a ground for resolving empirical disagreements among different theories. One of Hanson’s (1958) familiar examples concerns Tycho and Kepler. The former holds a geocentric theory of astronomy whereas the latter a heliocentric one. When looking at the sun change its angle in relation to the horizon they are both perceptually aware of the sun above and the ocean below. But, given their different theories of planetary motion, he claims, their experiences of this scene differ significantly. As a result, the disagreement between their respective theories cannot be resolved by appeal to some more fundamental uninterpreted something, a theory-neutral observation, to which both have equal access. There is no such theory-neutral observation to appeal to. Blurring the distinction between observation and theory is, thus, risky business for realists about science.

In large part as a reaction to this looming threat to science, various philosophers have argued that perception *must* be insulated from theory – it must be independent of whatever background beliefs one has. One example is Fodor (1984), who argues for the necessity of at least some level of theory-neutral observation, so that “...given the same stimulations, two organisms with the same sensory/perceptual psychology will quite

generally observe the same things, and hence arrive at the same observational beliefs, *however much their theoretical commitments may differ*” (pp. 24-5). These observational beliefs can then adjudicate among competing theories. Similarly, Dretske (1969; 1979; 1991) argues that a central motivation for his introducing a distinction between *epistemic* and *non-epistemic* seeing,<sup>41</sup> is to resist “...a mistaken conflation of perception and conception ... to preserve the distinction between sentience and sapience ... to isolate and describe a way of seeing ... that is distinct from, but nonetheless fundamental to, an organism’s higher level cognitive and conceptual activities” (1979, p.1). Such a conflation must be resisted if there is any hope of providing a fundamental something in light of which we can evaluate our empirical theories, and resolve empirical disputes.<sup>42</sup> Similar concerns we have seen arise in Chapter 1, and in Chapter 2 when discussing Vision’s arguments in support of ‘objectual perception’ *as that contentful something fundamental* in light of which our perceptual beliefs can be evaluated.

Putting these historical antecedents, and the possible threat they pose to science, to the side, there seems to be something nonetheless right about the insight that perception ought not to be thought of as *mere* receptivity. *Prima facie*, at least insofar as we are concerned with the familiar ambiguous figures, how one apprehends the world through perception cannot be captured merely by mentioning *what* one’s perception is *of*. *What* you perceive when looking at the Necker cube is simply a two dimensional line drawing. However, perceiving it *as such* is a matter that requires training. Rather, the figure is

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<sup>41</sup> Which was mentioned in previous chapters and about which more will be said in the following.

<sup>42</sup> Dretske is arguing most explicitly against those who have it that perception is essentially tied to belief, e.g., Armstrong (1968), and Heil (1991). See also Dretske (1991). Argument to the contrary abound of course. See, most explicitly in this context, Runzo (1982).

immediately perceived *as a three dimensional object* in one of the two configurations mentioned. Which configuration the figure is perceived as having involves a very distinct phenomenology. A full articulation of *how* one apprehends the figure requires mentioning more than merely *what* one apprehends.

Furthermore, which configuration the figure is perceived as having recommends, makes appropriate or reasonable, distinct engagements with the figure. This is so both with respect to the judgments that the perceiver would make about *what* she is seeing, and with respect to the actions (including verbal reports) that the perceiver would be disposed to perform. Perceiving the figure as facing up and to the right, for example, makes reasonable from the perceiver's perspective a judgment to the effect that before her stands a cube facing up and to the right – a judgment that would be further manifest in her verbal, and otherwise, behavior.<sup>43</sup>

Whether or not we appeal to differences in the background theory being exploited in the act of perception to explain the differences in phenomenology and in cognitive/epistemic role that the different experiences involve, these differences nonetheless constitute an explanatory burden that philosophers of every stripe must bear.<sup>44</sup> So that if Hanson's

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<sup>43</sup> Though both ways of perceiving the cube makes reasonable from the subject's perspective a certain set of judgments and engagements with the cube – namely, those relevant to its being a cube (of whichever orientation).

<sup>44</sup> In fact, it is quite unlikely that the differences between our experiences of the Necker cube *are* a function of the differential exploitation of anything close to a robust theory of the world. One reason to think that it cannot be so arises from developmental research that shows that children of a very young age are already sensitive to Gestalt switches (see for example, Gopnik and Rosati 2001). Yet, it would be highly suspicious to attribute to them any sophisticated *theoretical* understanding of the world (a point argued for by Macpherson (2006)). As we shall see, a more amenable proposal on similar lines takes the case of ambiguous figures to illustrate that perception is not purely receptive but involves the exploitation of different of the perceiver's conceptual capacities.



recommended strategy is deemed misguided, it is nonetheless upon us to provide some different answer to the question: what must perception be like so as to explain such phenomena?

Note that this is *not* a question about what mechanisms a cognitive scientist or a neuropsychologist might allude to in explaining the occurrence of Gestalt shifts. This, too, is an important and interesting question that keeps cognitive scientists busy. Rather, it is a question about a personal-level phenomenon that requires a personal-level explanation. How we apprehend the figure, by having a perception of it as having one of its two standard configurations, involves a distinctive phenomenology, directs us to think about the figure differently, and provides us reasons to act upon it differently. The challenge facing a theory of perception regards the nature of this perceptual apprehension, such that perception can be a mode of awareness of the world that provides us the appropriate resources for such activities.

In the following I present another aspect of the reason-giving problem of perception with which this dissertation began, and in relation to which ambiguous figures will serve as a test case (Section 3.3.1).

### *3.2 Perceptual reason-giving and the specification of mental content*

In previous chapters I argued that perception can provide reasons *for* the perceiver to act and deliberate appropriately about her environment. Yet, I also argued that for the sake of explaining a subject's intentional actions and deliberations, we must focus not on what

reasons there are *for* the subject to act or deliberate in a certain way, but on what reasons the subject *has* to do so.<sup>45</sup> The former can figure in an explanation of why an agent's actions are right, justified, or in some other sense appropriate, from the standpoint of rationality (as McDowell (1994a) puts it). But, it is only reasons that the subject *has* that can figure as that in light of which the subject's actions and further deliberations are appropriate *from her own point of view*, and hence can potentially figure into the reasons *for which* she acts.

Snow White bites into a poisoned apple and falls into a slumber. The *reason for which* she bit the apple is, presumably, that the apple looked pleasing to her. She *had* a reason to bite into the apple and she acted on the basis of that reason. But, of course, there was no *reason for her* to eat the apple. The apple was poisoned by the evil queen, and so there was no reason for Snow White, being the life loving person that she is, to bite into the apple; indeed, there was reason for her not to do so. The aim of intentional explanation of deliberation and action is articulating the reasons *for which* she acts and deliberates as she does. Hence it aims at illuminating the reasons she *has*, irrespective of what *reasons there are for her* to do so.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> As noted in previous chapters, see Audi (1986a; 1986b) as well as Schroeder (2008) for extensive discussions of this distinction.

<sup>46</sup> As Dancy (2006) reminds us, intentional explanation, unlike causal explanation, *need not be factive*. This is so, since the aim of intentional explanation is "to reveal the favorable light in which the action presented itself to the agent. ... All that is required for explanation of this sort is that we come to see how the agent could have found something about the action that led him to think it worthwhile." Furthermore, "[t]here is just no pressure to insist that where an agent acts for a reason, his reason must be something about which he is not mistaken."(pp. 126-127)

Just as there are cases in which an agent *has* a reason to act in the absence of reasons *for* the agent to act, so there are cases where there are reasons *for* the agent to act without the agent's *having* any reasons to act.

A particularly interesting instance of the latter is the case of blindsight. Blindsight is a phenomenon associated with lesions to the primary visual cortex, as a result of which the patient is, by his or her own admission, unaware of stimuli presented in a portion of the contralesional side. Though the blindsight patient reports having no awareness of presented stimuli, when prodded, he is nonetheless able to guess, with an accuracy well above chance, a variety of features of the presented stimuli (e.g., orientation, direction of motion, color). In fact, blindsight patients are even susceptible to semantic priming by primes presented in their 'blind' field.<sup>47</sup> In such cases, a patient's responses are, more often than not, *de facto* appropriate to what is presented to him (thus, they are responses there is *reason for him* to perform, given that he aims to please the experimenter).

Nonetheless, such cases are precisely ones in which the subject *does not have* reasons for his behaviors. Whatever information about the world *is* being registered and processed is not information made perceptually available *to the patient*, nor is it information that *could be* made perceptually available to him. The patient's responses are completely arbitrary *from his own point of view* – they are responses he *has* no reason to perform.<sup>48</sup> It is this feature that makes blindsight such an interesting phenomenon. In explaining the blindsight patient's behavior we have no hope of articulating the *reasons for which* he

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<sup>47</sup> For a detailed examination of blindsight see Weiskrantz (1986).

<sup>48</sup> There is no correlation between the patient's confidence levels in his responses and his successful performance (Ibid.).

acts, as there are no such reasons. The question of interest is how *normal, conscious, perception* is to provide reasons that the subject thereby *has*.

I argued, further, that a seemingly straightforward way of making sense of a subject's *having* a reason considers the subject as being in a position to treat the content of her purported reason-giving state as a premise in an argument (henceforth, I will speak of reason-giving states to cover only those states of the subject, the having of which, is *sufficient* to provide the subject reasons, in the sense of reasons that the subject *has*). This suggests that the subject must possess concepts that articulate the content of such purported reason-giving states. Beliefs, as paradigmatic conceptual states – states the having of which depends on possession of concepts articulating their content – are, hence, paradigmatic reason-giving states. However, given that perception differs dramatically from belief in that having a perception does not depend on possessing all the concepts articulating their contents (i.e., given *Bifurcation\** = No perception is *belief-like*), the plausibility of conceiving of perception as itself a reason-giving state, *in the same sense* (i.e., the plausibility of *Perceptual apprehension* = Some perceptions provide us reasons *directly*), is in jeopardy.

To overcome this difficulty, our central concern must be to supply a substantive account of a subject's *having* a reason that *does not depend* on the subject's possessing the concepts articulating the contents of her purported reason-giving state (i.e., deny *Exclusivity\** = Only *belief-like* states provide us reasons directly).

Since the main difficulty confronting the attempt to include perception in the class of reason-giving states<sup>49</sup> is the nonconceptual character of perception (the claim that perception is concept-independent, so that one can undergo a perceptual experience without possessing concepts articulating its contents), it is unsurprising that this same difficulty has been the center of attention in the debate about the content of perception. The problem is the central battleground between those who think that perception must involve conceptual contents, and those denying this claim (those denying *Bifurcation\**, and those defending it, respectively). Analyzing the problem as it emerges in this literature – the traditional debate between conceptualists and nonconceptualists about the content of perception – can, therefore, provide us insights into its possible resolution.

Indeed, as mentioned in Chapter 1, the central motivations against *Bifurcation\** are epistemic in nature. If perception involves nonconceptual content, it is difficult to see how one would be able to utilize such content as premises in reasoning and hence it is unclear how perception could provide one reasons in light of which one's engagements are appropriate (or not) from one's own point of view.

The traditional debate about the content of perception can shed light on the problem formulated in the previous chapters, and, similarly, the discussion in the previous chapters can shed light on the debate about the content of perception. In this chapter I present what I find to be the central difficulty with the notion of nonconceptual content. A better understanding of the problem in terms of the debate about the content of perception will pave the way to a solution of the original difficulty identified in Chapter

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<sup>49</sup> I.e., incorporating perception into the 'realm of reason' (McDowell 1994a).

1. In particular, it will illuminate the real threat that eliminating *Exclusivity\** poses to those attempting to hold both *Bifurcation\** and *Perceptual apprehension*. I will argue that this threat is not merely that considering perception as nonconceptual makes obscure how perception might be a reason-giving state in any interesting sense, because it entails that subjects are not in a position to treat the content of their perception as premises in reasoning. Rather, it is the more sinister threat that considering perception as nonconceptual *seems* to make perception completely epistemically *inert* from the perceiver's perspective – *as nothing* for the subject. This more sinister threat runs counter to both the purported epistemic/cognitive role that perception purportedly plays (especially if holding to *Perceptual apprehension*) and to our commonsensical notion that there is something it is like *for us* to undergo a perception with a given content, something in light of which perception plays these roles. The fact that nonconceptualism encounters this threat of epistemic inertia is not to say that it cannot overcome it. On the contrary, my central aim in this chapter (and in the next) is to illuminate the nature of this threat in such a way as would allow us to see how it can ultimately be overcome.

### 3.2.1 Difficulties of nonconceptual content

The notion of nonconceptual content was explicitly introduced by Evans (1982).<sup>50</sup> He argues that, unlike propositional attitudes, the having of which is contingent on possessing all the concepts mentioned in the canonical specification of their contents,

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<sup>50</sup> Though there are hints of the notion already in earlier writings. See in particular, Dretske (1969; 1981), Burge (1977), and Stich (1978).

having a perception does not so depend on concept possession.<sup>51</sup> For one to *believe* that a volcano is erupting one must have some knowledge of volcanoes and eruption. But one need not have any such capacities to *perceive* a volcano erupting; presumably, even Icelandic squirrels and puffins do the latter. One merely needs to look in the right direction, in favorable conditions, and from a safe distance. Indeed, it is presumably in part by experiencing volcanoes (pictures of volcanoes, and such) that we come to possess the concept volcano. Hence, it cannot be a precondition on having such an experience that one possesses the concepts articulating their contents.<sup>52</sup>

Since Evans' introduction of the notion of nonconceptual content, it has been applied more broadly and has become the topic of controversy in epistemology, the philosophy of

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<sup>51</sup> Recently, several authors have argued that the (non)conceptual content debate is ambiguous. The claim originates in a remark made by Heck (2000), although it is already present in Stalnaker (1998a; 1998b). Since then others have discussed various formulations of the ambiguity. See, Speaks (2005), Byrne (2005), Tye (2006), Crowther (2006), and Heck (2007). The statement of the notion of nonconceptual content, it is argued, has little to do with the *content* of the mental state but rather only with the conditions a subject must satisfy in order to have such states. So, while it may be the case that certain mental states, such as beliefs, are concept-dependent – in that having beliefs depends on the possession of appropriate concepts – whereas other states, perhaps perception, are concept-independent, this fact alone says nothing about the nature of the *content* of the respective states. I will not be concerned in this chapter with such arguments, for two reasons. First, our interest in this chapter is the traditional debate about the content of perception and how perception might be able to provide reasons to the perceiver. For these purposes, the supposed ambiguity is irrelevant. Second, I believe that the traditional proponents of this debate ignored this ambiguity for good reason, since considerations of concept-(in)dependence are precisely considerations having to do with the content of the mental state in question. That is, I find arguments about the ambiguous notion of nonconceptual content unconvincing. See Bermúdez (2007), Bermúdez and Cahen (2008), and Toribio (2008).

<sup>52</sup> Hence, the priority of states with nonconceptual content over states with conceptual content. This form of argument for the nonconceptual content of perception can be found in various places, see, e.g., Peacocke (1992), and Ayer (2002).

mind, and cognitive science. Given the topic of the dissertation, in this chapter I focus only on the traditional debate about the (non)conceptual content of *perception*.<sup>53</sup>

The debate about the (non)conceptual content of perception can be seen as surrounding the following set of propositions:

- Perspectival constraint<sup>54</sup> – The canonical specification of a mental state’s content articulates how one apprehends the world in undergoing (having, or being in) that state
- Conceptual constraint – One’s apprehension of the world is determined as a function of one’s conceptual repertoire
- Nonconceptual content (definition) – The content of a mental state is nonconceptual iff one *can* undergo (have, or be in) it without possessing the concepts mentioned in the canonical specification of its content

It is evident that the conjunction of the first two propositions implies the negation of the possibility of states with nonconceptual content. If the canonical specification of mental content is to articulate how one apprehends the world in having that state, and how one apprehends the world is determined as a function of one’s conceptual capacities, it

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<sup>53</sup> In particular, I mean to address the literature on nonconceptual content that has emerged from the work of Gareth Evans (1982). Among others, I have in mind such authors as Peacocke (1983), McDowell (1994a), Brewer (1999), Sedivy (1996), and Noë (1999) who have, in some form or other, denied the possibility of *Nonconceptual content*, and Evans (1982), Crane (1992), Peacocke (1992), Dretske (1995), Bermúdez (1998), Heck (2000), and Tye (1995), who have fervently defended it. For a review of the debate about nonconceptual content and its various contemporary applications see Bermúdez and Cahen (2008).

<sup>54</sup> This proposition is adapted from Bermúdez (2009), in which he defines it as the claim that “In specifying the content of a representational state one aims to be faithful to how the thinker or perceiver apprehends what is being represented” (p. 461).



follows that the canonical specification of mental content will be limited to mentioning *only concepts one possesses*. This is a direct denial of the possibility of states with nonconceptual content – mental states the canonical specification of which *can* mention concepts that the subject having that state *does not in fact possess*. Therefore, if the notion of nonconceptual content is to have any applicability, one of these three propositions must go.<sup>55</sup>

### 3.2.2 The Perspectival constraint and intentional explanation

Though the *Perspectival constraint* is controversial, traditional proponents of the debate with which we are concerned regard it as essential. Nonconceptualists, as the name implies, target the *Conceptual constraint*; insisting that at least with respect to *some* mental states how the subject apprehends the world *does not* depend on her conceptual repertoire. As Bermúdez (2009) says:

“Non-conceptual content, if there is such a thing, is content specifiable in a way that respects the perspectival constraint without being constrained by the conceptual capacities of the thinking and perceiving subject.”(p. 462)

The *Perspectival constraint* arises from a commitment to a particular notion of mental content. This is a notion of content the individuation of which is essentially governed by considerations having to do with the intentional explanation of deliberation and action.

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<sup>55</sup> Note that there may be room for *sub-personal* ascriptions of content in which case it will not be a requirement that the ascription is sensitive to the way *the subject apprehends the world*. Such appeals to nonconceptual content at the sub-personal level are prevalent in cognitive science (see, e.g., Bermúdez 1995). In the case of sub-personal ascriptions of content, the *Perspectival constraint* is omitted and we, therefore, find less resistance to the applicability of the notion of nonconceptual content (see, e.g., McDowell (1994a; 1994b)).

Intentional explanation is reason-explanation. It aims to articulate the *reasons for which* a subject acts or forms a belief; to illuminate *that in light of which* a subject finds a particular action or belief appropriate, and on the basis of which acts. The following principle explicates this motivation:

- Personal-level reason explanation – Content attribution articulates how one apprehends the world, in having a contentful state, *such that it can serve as that in light of which one's actions and deliberations are reasonable from one's own perspective*

That such a principle does in fact motivate proponents (on *both* sides) of the traditional debate about perceptual content to insist on the applicability of the *Perspectival constraint* is revealed by their insistence on a Fregean treatment of *belief* content (with which perceptual content is either assimilated or contrasted). In considering belief content, coarse-grained, purely truth-conditional, accounts of content are rejected. These accounts are adequate for the sake of correctly supplying a belief's truth-conditions. However, in important respects, their specification is insensitive to how the believer apprehends the world.

The point is a familiar one. Consider Oedipus's belief that Jocasta is available for marriage. The belief will be true if Jocasta is available for marriage, but also if Oedipus' mother is available for marriage. After all, Jocasta *just is* Oedipus' mother.<sup>56</sup> That which makes Oedipus' belief true can be specified in a variety of truth-equivalent ways,

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<sup>56</sup> And identity is necessary (Kripke, 1980) has shown. Hence, all states of affairs involving Jocasta are identical with those involving Oedipus' mother. Similarly, the set of possible worlds in which Jocasta is available for marriage is identical with the set of possible worlds in which Oedipus' mother is available for marriage.

specifications true in all and only the same possible worlds.<sup>57</sup> However, it is only a certain specification of truth-conditions that is privileged in that it fully articulates how Oedipus apprehends the world when having the belief – how his belief represents to him the world as being – and hence, it is a specification that illuminates the reasonableness of his actions, from his own point of view.

Holding the *Perspectival constraint* as a constraint on the specification of belief content derives from the notion that the *content* of a belief embodies one's epistemic orientation to the world – it constitutes how one 'takes' the world to be. How one 'takes' the world to be, in having a belief, can then rationalize, *from one's own point of view*, the intentional actions and deliberations one consequentially performs.

When specifying Oedipus' belief as the belief *that Jocasta is unmarried* we are marking the fact that he thereby *has* reasons to engage his mother in ways that are appropriate, *from his point of view*, to the truth of that proposition. Which engagements he has reasons for clearly differ from those he would have had had he believed *that his mother was unmarried*. In particular, it is unlikely that he would have *had* reason to marry Jocasta, and the ensuing tragedy would have likely been averted. If the *content* of a belief is to account for the intentional explanation of one's deliberations and actions, its specification must be sensitive to how one apprehends the world as being in having the belief – its specification must conform to the *Perspectival constraint*.

Indeed, it is this sensitivity to how the subject apprehends the world as being, *an apprehension that potentially provides the subject reasons*, which gives *sense* to our

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<sup>57</sup> In this sense it is often said that neo-Russellian and possible worlds accounts of mental content are *coarse-grained* accounts of content.

seeking a *canonical* specification of the belief's content. A purely truth conditional account of content does not yield a *canonical* specification of content in this same sense. And it is for this reason that truth-conditional accounts are commonly considered inadequate for the aims of intentional explanation.

This is not to suggest that considerations in favor of the *Perspectival constraint* with respect to belief content are infeasible. Various philosophers have argued that belief *content* need not be sensitive in this way to how one apprehends the world. The explanation of one's intentional behaviors can be formulated by appeal to factors *extrinsic to the content* of the belief in question.<sup>58</sup> Nonetheless, I put such alternatives to the side. Proponents of the views with which we are concerned *do* find compelling the notion that the individuation of content at the level of belief cannot proceed irrespective

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<sup>58</sup> Among proponents of some form of neo-Russellian account of *belief* content see, for example, Salmon (1986), Soames (1987), Salmon and Soames (1988), Perry (1980), Fodor (1987; 1990). Among those holding a possible worlds account of *belief* content see, for example, Stalnaker (1984; 1998a), and Lewis (1979; 1986). They all have some explanation of a subject's intentional action and deliberation that appeals to factors *extrinsic to the content of the belief* – a guise, a functional role, or some such thing. Furthermore, though on such coarse-grained accounts the specification of belief *content* is insensitive to the *Perspectival constraint* this is not to say that certain *descriptions* of that content would not be preferable over others.

For example, Salmon argues (1986) that we must appeal to a *guise* by which the content of the belief is presented to the subject. The content of the belief is a Russellian proposition, hence it directly involves the object which it concerns, but the object might be presented to the subject under a particular guise. According to Salmon it is the particular guise by which the content is presented that explains the subject's behavior. Nonetheless, the guise is extrinsic to the content of the belief. On Salmon's account, to say that Oedipus believed that *Oedipus' mother is available for marriage* would not be to state a falsehood, but merely to be misleading, in that when we formulate a belief report we normally wish to convey not only the content of the person's belief, but also the guise under which the person apprehends that content.

of how one apprehends the world; hence, a canonical specification of belief content must be sensitive to such a perspective.<sup>59</sup>

Thus, insisting on the applicability of the *Perspectival constraint* to the specification of mental content is driven by an emphasis on the *reason-giving status* of the mental; on how having a given mental state provides the subject reasons for engaging the world appropriately. The specification of content in accordance with the *Perspectival constraint*, then, aims to articulate those reasons the subject *has* for engaging the world by virtue of undergoing (having or being in) a particular mental state.

If the notion of mental content *in general* is to articulate how the subject apprehends the world, in specifying the content of a mental state we are, trivially, limited to mentioning those capacities the subject has for so apprehending it. A canonical specification of the content of a mental state will be limited to the subject's capacity to 'take' the world to be a certain way. According to conceptualists – proponents of the *Conceptual constraint* – these capacities are exhaustively conceptual. If this is the case for the notion of content *in general*, then it follows that mental content *just is* conceptual content.

However, as we have seen, when saying that the content of some state is nonconceptual we are saying that the canonical specification of that content *need not* appeal only to concepts possessed by the subject (indeed, the subject might possess no concepts at all).

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<sup>59</sup> In other words, traditional proponents of the debate, mentioned in my fn. 53, above, hold a neo-Fregean, fine-grained, account of belief content. Furthermore, though I shall not argue for it here, analogous questions to the ones that will concern us here about the content of perception arise for those who ascribe to coarse-grained, merely truth-conditional, accounts of belief content. The difference is that these questions will arise at the level of guise, in Salmon's case, for example, rather than at the level of content (see, e.g., Forbes' 1987 review of Salmon's 1986). I will return to discuss a version of the neo-Russellian account of content in Chapter 5 when I analyze in detail the reason-giving status of beliefs.

Essentially, a specification of a fully nonconceptual content is from a *third-person* perspective, utilizing concepts not necessarily possessed by the subject.

The crucial question then, is: *In what sense does a canonical specification of nonconceptual content capture how the subject apprehends the world?* If we think, as the conceptualist does, that all apprehension involves conceptualization, the nonconceptualist position implies the absurdity that we can attribute to the subject a way of apprehending the world that transcends the subject's capacities of apprehension! Having denied the *Conceptual constraint* in the case of perceptual content, how do nonconceptualists propose to satisfy the *Perspectival constraint*?

It is one thing to argue for, and perhaps accept, the actuality of states with nonconceptual content. There are familiar arguments to this effect (some of which we have seen in Chapter 1, Section 1.4, in discussing the merits of *Bifurcation\**). For example, one can appeal to arguments from the perceptual capacities of nonconceptual creatures, infants and 'lower' animals, or perhaps to arguments from the priority of perception to concept possession, or one might note the fact that our perceptual discriminations outstrip our conceptual capacities.<sup>60</sup> Such arguments suggest that one can undergo an experience without possessing the concepts utilized in the canonical specification of the content of that experience. However, it is quite a different thing to provide a diagnosis of *how*, having eliminated the *Conceptual constraint*, the *Perspectival constraint* is satisfied.

That is, supposing that having a perception is concept-independent, it is yet unclear

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<sup>60</sup> Many of these arguments, in support of the nonconceptual content of perception, can be traced back to Evans (1982).

- a) in what sense the specification of perceptual content *is* sensitive to how subjects apprehend the world, and
- b) how such nonconceptual apprehension accounts for subjects' *having* the reasons that they do by virtue of undergoing a perceptual state with such content.

### 3.3 Nonconceptual apprehension

If, as Bermúdez says, nonconceptual content ‘...is content specifiable in a way that respects the perspectival constraint’, the nonconceptualist must provide some *substantive* account of a subject’s *nonconceptually apprehending* the world. Such an account is to do justice to the original motivation underlying the *Perspectival constraint*; that which motivates both sides of the debate to abandon a purely truth-conditional account of *belief content* (i.e., a commitment to *Personal-level reason explanation*). It must illuminate how apprehending the world in such a nonconceptual way provides the subject reasons in light of which *she finds reasonable* certain engagements with the world rather than others.

As noted, it will not do merely to show how having a perception with a given nonconceptual content provides a *de facto* reason *for* the subject to engage the world in a certain manner – just as an erupting volcano provides a *reason for* nearby tourists to flee. Rather, the tourists, themselves, must *have* reasons for certain engagements with the world by virtue of having the perception (they need to be aware of the volcano *in some appropriate way* for them to *have* a reason to flee). In this way, an appeal to perceptual states with such contents can enter the intentional explanation of these engagements as

providing the reason *for which* subjects thus engage the world (either in action, or in which perceptual beliefs they consequentially form).

Frege cases, such as the Oedipus example above, *illustrate* the inadequacy of merely truth-conditional accounts of belief content. Similarly, *perceptual analogues* of Frege cases serve an analogous function. They reveal the importance of a sensitivity to how a perceiver apprehends the world when providing the canonical specification of *perceptual content*. Reflecting on such cases is also the most obvious way to illuminate the nature of the challenge that an appeal to the *Perspectival constraint* is meant to resolve and the notion of apprehension that it purportedly involves.

### 3.3.1 Nonconceptual apprehension of ambiguous figures – A case study

In the introductory section I discussed the case of the Necker cube. There are many other ambiguous figures that have been discussed at length, e.g., the old/young Parisian woman, the vase/two-faces, and Jastrow's familiar duck/rabbit (popularized by Wittgenstein). Though focusing on any one of these would be equally illuminating, I will focus here on a slightly less well know (and perhaps less exciting) ambiguous figure. This, for two reasons. First, as we shall see, it is the simplest of forms, and, as such, its analysis allows us to sidestep certain difficulties that plague the more complex examples. Second, and more importantly, it is the example most recently and extensively discussed in the particular context with which we are concerned.



I will be focusing on the Mach figure (Figure 3).<sup>61</sup> The figure is a simple tilted square that at times is perceived *as a-tilted-square* and at times *as a-regular-diamond*. These perceptions are phenomenologically distinct. Furthermore, when perceived *as a-tilted-square* the subject has reason to believe there is a square before him, whereas when perceived *as a-regular-diamond* he has reason to believe there is a diamond before him. Similarly with respect to the subject's actions. Given two piles, one of squares another of diamonds, the subject's perceiving the figure *as a-tilted-square*, but not *as a-regular-diamond*, provides him reason for, and hence *explains*, his placing the object in the 'square', rather than in the 'diamond', pile.

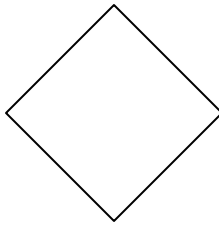


Figure 3: The Mach Figure

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<sup>61</sup> The original example is from Mach (1914/1996). Though it will not concern us in this chapter, it is interesting to note that Peacocke initially introduced this example (1983) as an argument for the claim that the way the world appears to the subject in perception cannot be fully captured by appeal merely to its representational properties. Rather, it requires in addition an appeal to irreducible sensational properties. The argument is as follows: when perceiving the ambiguous figure there is a clear change in phenomenology when seeing the figure *as a square* vs. seeing it *as a diamond*. However, there is also some aspect of the phenomenology that is consistent throughout the aspect shift. Given that, at the time, Peacocke argued for a *conceptualist* account of representational content, he argued that the change in the way things appear to the subject as being can be explained by appeal to the different concepts employed in having the different perceptions of the figure. The stable aspect of the experience, Peacocke argued, could not be explained by appeal to such contents and demanded a notion of sensational properties as well. Peacocke has, since then, altered his views on the nature of the representational contents of perception (see, e.g., 1992). He has not, however, abandoned his commitment to the claim that sensational properties of perception are theoretically ineliminable. E.g., in his (2001b), he says: "If two experiences in a given modality can be the same in respect of their representational properties, yet be subjectively different, it follows that not all their subjective properties are representational. That is a valid form of reasoning, whether or not representational content is wholly conceptual. ... For the record, I do still hold that every perceptual experience has sensational properties."(p. 612) See also Peacocke (2001a; 2008).

As in the case of the Necker Cube, merely appealing to *what* is represented when specifying the content of perception, *prima facie*, does not do justice to the dual-phenomenology involved in perceiving such figures or to the notion that the *content* of perception is to explain the subject's having perceptual reasons for one set of intentional engagements rather than another. It does not do justice to the notion that the attribution of content is to articulate that in light of which the subject finds reasonable a certain set of engagements rather than another (i.e., it violates *Personal-level reason explanation*). *What* is represented is the tilted square. But, the presence of the tilted square *itself* provides equal *reason for her* to form the belief that she confronts a square as the belief that she confronts a diamond. Similarly with respect to the sorting behaviors mentioned. Presumably, what explains the subject's differential engagement with the figure is the fact that, in having the different perceptions, *she apprehends the selfsame figure differently*. How she apprehends the figure, then, provides her reasons for a certain set of engagements rather than another. What does this apprehension amount to?

The conceptualist is in a position to offer *some* substantive account of the nature of the apprehension involved in such cases. When one perceives the object *as a-regular-diamond*, say, one is exploiting in perception one's concept diamond rather than one's concept square. The fact that different conceptual capacities are actualized in different instances of perceiving the figure explains their differences, both in terms of their phenomenology and in terms of their epistemic/cognitive role – providing the subject reasons for different engagements with the perceived object.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> As discussed in Section 1, above, similar insights motivate Hanson's treatment of perception.

Much more needs to be said about how the differential exploitation of concepts in perception accounts for the differences mentioned between the perceptions. The picture according to McDowell, a prominent supporter of the *Conceptual constraint*, is that when a concept is exploited in an experience

“... the rational connections of the concept enter into shaping the contents of the appearance, so that what appears to be the case is understood as fraught with implications for the subject’s cognitive situation in the world...” (1994a, p. 32)

And, according to Brewer (2005):

“On the conceptualist account ... entertaining a conceptual content is a matter of grasping its truth condition on the basis of the way in which this is systematically determined by the semantic values of its components and their mode of combination, which are in turn precisely what determine its inferential relations with other such contents. Thus, a person’s actually being in a sense experiential state with a conceptual content requires her grasp of that content in just the way which grounds its reason-giving status.”(p. 228)

The actualization of different concepts in the two perceptions of the figure *explain* the subject’s finding appropriate different sets of intentional engagements with the figure.<sup>63</sup>

There are, of course, further questions to be asked about this purported solution. But, for the moment we need not involve ourselves too deeply with how these questions might be resolved. The conceptualist account of content has, at least, *prima facie* plausibility.

Whether or not we find it satisfactory at the moment has no bearing on whether a satisfactory nonconceptual account of content can be formulated. And, it is the aim of this chapter to evaluate the reason-giving challenges as they apply to the nonconceptualist

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<sup>63</sup> This was also the solution originally proposed by Peacocke in his (1983). See my fn. 61, above.

account of perceptual content as it is the overarching aim of the dissertation to show how these challenges can be overcome.<sup>64</sup>

Given that the nonconceptualist wants to deny the applicability of the *Conceptual constraint* to perception, the purported solution above is no longer available. What alternative notions of a subject's apprehension of the world are available that could explain these differences?

One, unsatisfactory, but revealing, reply might be that the relevant capacities the differential exploitation of which explains the abovementioned differences are simply the subject's different representational capacities. In perceiving the Mach figure *as a-regular-diamond*, say, the subject is exploiting a capacity to represent diamondhood rather than tilted-squarehood. It is the differential exploitation of these capacities that explains the phenomenal difference between the perceptions and that makes reasonable, from the subject's point of view, different beliefs about, and engagements with, the figure.

However, this suggestion will not work. Being a regular-diamond and being a tilted-square are, presumably, the selfsame property. As a result, the capacity to represent tilted-squarehood and the capacity to represent diamondhood collapse into the selfsame capacity. Clearly, then, an appeal to the capacity to represent that property cannot explain

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<sup>64</sup> Thus, even if the conceptualist faces a variety of difficulties, a *tu quoque* on behalf of the nonconceptualist will not do here (if ever it does).

the phenomenal differences and differences in epistemic/cognitive role between the two perceptions. We require a difference in *how* the selfsame *property* is represented.<sup>65</sup>

To bypass this complication, one might claim that the different perceptions involve different capacities to represent the selfsame property – a capacity to represent things *as a-tilted-square* and a capacity to represent things *as a-regular-diamond*. But, leaving the explanation at this point is trivial and uninformative. The difficulty the nonconceptualist faces is precisely that of providing a substantive account of the nature of such representational capacities. The conceptualist agrees that the subject's apprehension of the figure involves the exploitation of different representational capacities on different occasions of viewing the figure. However, she adds that these representational capacities are *conceptual* capacities. An analogous *substantive* account of what these representational capacities amount to is required on the part of the nonconceptualist; an account that nonetheless retains the notion that perception directly provides the perceiver reasons in light of which she engages the world as she does.

Michael Tye recognizes the difficulties introduced by the Mach Figure, and provides a solution consistent with his general neo-Russellian account of nonconceptual content. Considering Tye's proposal helps clarify the core of the conceptualist complaint against nonconceptualism. It also reveals how this complaint misses its target, and so reveals

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<sup>65</sup> Of course, if we think that it is the same representational capacities that are involved in both perceptions we *can* explain the relevant differences between the perceptions in terms *extrinsic* to the *content* of perception. However, such an account would be problematic for the same reason that coarse-grained accounts of belief content are problematic – it would be a violation of the motivations underlying the *Perspectival constraint*. In addition it would violate an even more fundamental insight that in the case of perception content attribution should do justice to the phenomenology of experience. It is not clear how factors *extrinsic* to perceptual content could account for differences in phenomenology.

what it would take for a nonconceptual account of content to avoid it. In particular, there is a natural, but misguided, way of understanding the nonconceptual position as *entailing* externalism about content individuation. I argue that such externalism has no hope of providing a substantive account of perceptual apprehension. Ultimately, it is this tendency – to couple nonconceptualism and externalism about the individuation of perceptual content – that must be avoided, if a substantive account of nonconceptual perceptual apprehension is to be developed.<sup>66</sup>

According to Tye, the differences between the two perceptions of the Mach Figure can be accounted for by appeal to differences in which *relational* properties are represented as holding of the figure when it is perceived in either of the two ways. In perceptually representing the object one represents *not only* its being square,<sup>67</sup> but also a host of other relational properties. He says:

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<sup>66</sup> In the following I focus on Tye's account, as his externalist commitments bring out most clearly the source of the (misguided) tension between proponents of the (non)conceptualist debate about perceptual content. It is worth mentioning, however, that Peacocke, who introduced the Mach figure into this debate (see my fn. 61), discusses it in his (1992) as presenting a difficulty to his account of perceptual content as, what he calls, 'positioned scenario content'. Briefly, such content is "...individuated by specifying which ways of filling out the space around the perceiver are consistent with the representational content's being correct" (p. 61). In both the case of perceiving the square *as a-tilted-square* and the case of perceiving it *as a-regular-diamond* the positioned scenario content is the same – the ways of filling out the space around the observer are the same (they both involve having a four sided closed figure with four internal right angles at the same distance and orientation relative to the observer's body). However, there is nonetheless a phenomenal difference between these two ways of representing the tilted square. Peacocke explains the differences in how the figure is perceived by appeal to an additional layer of nonconceptual content he calls 'protopositional' content. This content "...contains an individual or individuals, together with a property or relation. When a protoposition is part of the representational content of an experience, the experience represents the property or relation in the protoposition as holding of the individual or individuals it also contains" (p. 77). See also Peacocke (2001a).

<sup>67</sup> A property that, since it is identical with being a diamond, Tye agrees, a representation of which would not be sufficient to account for the differences between the two perceptions. Interestingly, Tye's current position is in contrast with his earlier work (2003) in which he argued

“If  $X$  looks square,  $X$  looks to have an inclined base.  $X$  then looks tilted. If  $X$  looks diamond-shaped,  $X$  looks upright. So, when  $X$  looks square,  $X$  is represented as having the property of being tilted; this property is not represented as belonging to  $X$  when  $X$  looks diamond-shaped.”(2006, p. 527)<sup>68</sup>

The suggestion is that differences between the perceptions are captured by differences in *which properties* the figure is represented *as having*. However, if this is understood as the claim that perceiving some object *as a-regular-diamond*, say, involves representing it *as upright*, we find ourselves with the same difficulty with which we began. Given that the subject does not possess the concepts involved in a specification of this relational property, we have not proceeded one inch in understanding how it amounts to a specification of the way *the subject* apprehends the figure.

The conceptualist might agree that the differences between the perceptions of the figure consist in which relational properties the figure is represented as having. However, she would add that representing the figure in these different ways amounts to the actualization of different *concepts* under which these different relational properties fall and that the subject possesses. When perceiving the figure *as upright*, one’s concept of

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that squareness and diamondness are in fact different shape properties the perception of which explains the different respective experiences of one and the same figure.

<sup>68</sup> As Tye mentions in the same paper, the solution is analogous to the one given to a familiar argument against a purely representational account of content. Briefly, the argument proceeds by pointing out the different experiences associated with representing one and the same property in different modalities – e.g., visually perceiving a cube is phenomenally very different from touching a cube. Since in both modalities the same property is represented, and yet the experience phenomenally differs greatly it cannot be the case that the way things phenomenally appear is accounted for purely in terms of the experience’s representational properties. The familiar response is that, though in both modalities the shape property of the ball is represented, the difference between the experiences of the ball in different modalities is accounted for by the fact that the different experiences represent very different *other* properties – most clearly, in the visual case colors are represented as well as the shape of the ball, whereas in the tactile case it is texture that is represented. This solution, Tye argues, generalizes to the Mach figure, but also to all cases where it *seems* that we have one property represented in two or more different *ways*.

being-upright is actualized. Given the nonconceptualist's assertion that the subject *need not* possess the concepts involved in a specification of this relational property in order to undergo the appropriate experience – in order to apprehend the figure in this way – we have not proceeded one inch in understanding how the nonconceptualist proposal amounts to a specification of the way *the subject* apprehends the figure.

We require a substantive account of what it is for the subject to represent the figure *as being-upright* (or *as being-tilted*, as the case may be). Generally, explaining one's perceiving some O *as X* by appeal to one's representing O *as Y* provides no explanatory advantage.

An elaboration, in line with Tye's account, holds that perceiving the figure *as diamond*, say, is just for the property being-upright to be represented, rather than the property being-tilted. The fact that one undergoes a representation of the property being-upright, rather than of the property being-tilted, makes sense of the claim that, though one may not possess any *concepts*, nonetheless, the *canonical specification* of the content of one's perception is *as diamond-shaped*. Presumably, it is this same fact in virtue of which the subject *has* a reason to engage the figure in ways appropriate, from her point of view, to something's being a diamond rather than a square (what I shall henceforth call square-appropriate ways).

Note further that, if this is the case, the differences between the experiences of the Mach figure are not particularly surprising, as the experiences are, in an important sense, *of* different things. Both are experiences of the same *shape* property but they differ with respect to which *other* properties they are also experiences *of*. Ambiguous figures are,



then, *not* perceptual analogues of Frege cases. Their perception is not significantly more theoretically interesting than the perception of any other figure or object with multiple perceptible properties, e.g., a cone perceived from different orientations (when its base is facing the observer vs. its side).<sup>69</sup> The intuition, which we have seen emerge in Section 3.1, that perception must be more than mere receptivity – that a full articulation of how one apprehends the figure requires mentioning more than merely *what* one apprehends – is, on this account, shown to be false.

### 3.3.2 Is externally individuated nonconceptual apprehension any apprehension at all?

It appears that an appeal to differences in represented *properties* can mark *a* difference between perceiving the figure *as a tilted-square* and perceiving it *as a regular-diamond*. However, leaving the explanation at this point amounts to the abandonment not only of the *Conceptual constraint* but also of the *Perspectival constraint*, at least as originally motivated (a qualification to which I return in Chapter 4). This is so, as the difference between the representations – the difference that is purportedly significant to what the perceiver finds reasonable to think or do – is captured by differences in *facts about the representations* that the subject knows nothing about.<sup>70</sup> The fact that the one perception involves a tilted-square-type representation and the second perception a regular-diamond-

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<sup>69</sup> See also my previous fn. 68 in relation to Tye's explicit endorsement of this sentiment.

<sup>70</sup> Presumably, there are a multitude of *other* facts about our perceptual representations that we know nothing about. For example, we are completely ignorant of the many properties of their particular neural realizers: their identity, color, shape, quantity, location, etc. But *this* ignorance is trivial, as none of these features purport to individuate the content of our representations and, hence, none of these features purport to explain our having the reasons that we do for engaging the world in thought and in action.

type representation<sup>71</sup> is a fact that is simply not available to the nonconceptual subject. It is, therefore, *not* something in light of which the subject could find reasonable some set of engagements with the figure rather than another.

Perhaps the clearest evidence for this grim situation is that the specification of a purely externally individuated content is *extensional*; it allows for the substitution of co-extensive terms *salva veritate*.<sup>72</sup> I submit that in saying that a given perception involves a *tilted-square*-type representation rather than a *regular-diamond*-type representation (where this is explained by appeal to different represented properties) we are, in effect, doing more than merely indicating which properties of the figure are being represented. We are smuggling a particular description of these properties that we, as possessors of the concepts tilted-square and regular-diamond, would be disposed to employ had we been in the perceptual situation that our nonconceptual subject is in. In doing so we are giving the *false impression* that there is nothing particularly surprising, nothing more to explain, about how perception can supply the subject reasons to engage the world in tilted-square-appropriate ways, when undergoing a tilted-square-type representation. What better explanation of the subject's forming a belief that there's a tilted-square before him than the fact that he is undergoing a *tilted-square*-type representation?

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<sup>71</sup> According to Millar's "an experience in the modality of *M* is (*F* [as perceived ... ])-type if and only if it satisfies the following condition: in suitable environmental conditions an *F* would produce an experience of that type in an observer who is suitably positioned and oriented, whose sense of *M* is normal, and who via *M* is perceiving an *F* ..." (1991, p. 29). In the following I will often utilize Millar's helpful typology, though, as in the current case, I will omit his qualification, appearing in the square parenthesis, which is meant as a stand-in for a specification of the specific conditions under which the subject perceives *F*.

<sup>72</sup> Recall that a similar difficulty was raised in Chapter 2 in relation to Gerald Vision's (2009) account of objectual perception.

This tendency has masked the main difficulty with extensional specifications of mental content, and, in particular, their conflict with the *Perspectival constraint*. Since the specification of content is extensional, we can replace talk of tilted-squares, regular-diamonds, and those relational properties that purportedly constitute the representational content of perception with *any* other systematic notation we like. Once we do so, sustaining the illusion that nothing more is needed becomes less compelling.

Consider an even simpler example than the Mach figure. Sam is a taxonomist who, for whatever reason, introduces a new system of notation for all perceptible properties for which we have concepts. His notation is systematic in that each perceptible property is uniquely numbered. After several months of diligent work he finally has a table listing *all* perceptible property-types with their corresponding number. A miniscule portion of his table can be seen below (Figure 4).

Number	Property
...	...
1284	Bulky
1285	Bumpy
1286	Burgundy
...	...
5439	Red
...	...
9893	Square

Figure 4

Sam presents a burgundy colored ball to Samantha. He correctly remarks that, given that Samantha is a normal subject looking at the ball in normal viewing conditions, she is undergoing a normal perception of the ball – she perceives the ball *as 1286*. She is

undergoing a 1286-type representation. Furthermore, given that it is a ball that she perceives, and assuming all is working normally, she is *not* having a 9893-type representation. All this may be perfectly true. If Samantha is given the task of sorting all the objects on a table before her either into the ‘Red’ pile or into the ‘Square’ pile, she will have no problem placing the burgundy ball into the correct pile. Sam will predict this correctly.

However, in what sense does the specification Sam provides of the perception Samantha undergoes articulate what reasons *she has*? Given that *we* possess the concepts burgundy and red it is transparent to us that having a burgundy-experience provides a reason for red-appropriate engagements. But, this transparency is lost once we specify the experience in Sam’s terms (though it might nonetheless be transparent to Sam). Crucially, such a specification is *completely opaque to Samantha* who’s reasons for acting as she does we are supposedly in the business of articulating by appeal to how she perceives the world.

This is not merely a terminological point. The fact that, according to the account presented, the content of perception is individuated purely by reference to *which properties are represented* leads to an essentially extensional specification of such content. But this means that there is no principled reason for us, as theorists, to select one specification of content over any co-extensive other. A specification of the content of Samantha’s perception utilizing concepts such as burgundy, and ball, appears to us more immediate and natural, and justifiably so, as it makes transparent what reasons she seems to have when undergoing the perception. *But*, on a purely externally individuated account

of content there is no *principled* reason to prefer such a specification over Sam's co-extensive one. Convenience, perhaps.<sup>73</sup>

This brings to the fore a particularly uncomfortable consequence. If there is no principled reason to prefer one specification of content over any of an *indefinitely many* other co-extensive specifications, we completely lose touch with the notion that there is a canonical specification of perceptual content in the first place. Rather, there are an indefinitely many *equally adequate* specifications of content. After all, any appropriately systematic notation, as in the example of Sam above, provides *some* such specification. But it appears that such an account, then, violates the *Perspectival constraint* – the canonical specification of perceptual content is *not* sensitive to how the subject apprehends the world as being (at least as originally understood, by parity with considerations governing the specification of *belief* content – a caveat that will be of great significance in the next chapter).

Tye (2000) is particularly explicit about this aspect of his account. When specifying the content of one's perception of a red ball, we appeal to 'the redness of a ball', but, he claims, we could equally well have substituted that description with 'the ball's disposition to reflect light in a certain way'. Of course, it seems odd to say that this latter description of the content of perception captures the way the world appears to one. The ball does not look *as though* it is disposed to reflect light in a certain way. However, the sense in which the ball does not 'look *as though* ...' is merely the epistemic/conceptual sense of 'look'. This is to say that one would not *come to believe*, on the basis of having a

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<sup>73</sup> In this regard, see my fn. 58 on the neo-Russellian account of belief content.

perception with such content, that the ball has the disposition to reflect light in a certain way.<sup>74</sup>

However, it is exactly for the sake of articulating what having a perception with a particular content provides the subject reasons to do or to believe that we have insisted on the *Perspectival constraint*. The fact that perceiving the red ball provides the perceiver a reason to believe that the ball is red *but not* that the ball has the disposition to reflect light in a certain way *is*, therefore, relevant to the specification of perceptual content – at least insofar as we aim to satisfy the *Perspectival constraint*.

### 3.4 General insights on nonconceptual apprehension

The point generalizes. So long as the individuation of perceptual content is based on considerations independent of the subject's epistemic capacities,<sup>75</sup> we have no hope of providing a specification of content that articulates how *the subject* apprehends the world in having the perception. We might say, with Tye, that a perceptual representation has the content that it does in virtue of the fact that it is a token of a representation type that co-varies with instances of a given property.<sup>76</sup> Alternatively, as, for example, Dretske argues, we might say that the content of perception is determined by the evolutionary

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<sup>74</sup> In this he is utilizing Dretske's (1969) distinction between epistemic and non-epistemic seeing, or, more recently, Dretske's (1995) phenomenal and doxastic notions of 'look'. As Tye says: "This admittedly sounds strange ... But, as Fred Dretske has pointed out to me, the case is parallel to that of seeing John Smith, a policeman, without seeing him to be a policeman. In seeing John Smith, one sees a policeman; one simply fails to recognize *that* he is a policeman ... Likewise, I suggest, in the above case of phenomenal appearances." (2000, pp. 55-56)

<sup>75</sup> Or as Sedivy (1996) says, 'considerations having nothing to do with the mind'.

<sup>76</sup> E.g., Tye (1995; 2000). See also Fodor (1990).

history of the perceptual system. As such, a perceptual representation has the content that it does in virtue of its being ‘designed’ by evolutionary pressures in the organism’s phylogenetic history to *indicate* the presence of particular properties.<sup>77</sup> However, this makes the specification of perceptual content uncomfortably extensional. As such, we have no principled reason to prefer one canonical specification of content over another – hence, it is a notion of content the specification of which is not appropriately constrained by how the subject apprehends the world as being.

More seriously, such facts about what content a given representation has are not facts available to the subject. Insofar as the nonconceptual subject is concerned, there is no difference between a perception *of* one property and a perception *of* another. Though the subject may be, as a matter of fact, in different representational states, it is a difference that from the subject’s point of view *makes no difference*. Hence, it is also a difference that cannot account for differences in which reasons the subject *has*.

Now, certainly, the fact that one is undergoing a burgundy/1286-type representation places a normative constraint on what it is appropriate for one to do, a constraint that differs significantly from that which a square/9893-type representation places.

Samantha’s engaging with the burgundy ball in burgundy-appropriate ways (e.g., placing it in the ‘red’ pile or, when prodded, reporting that she is seeing a red ball) can be seen as reasonable from the standpoint of rationality. After all, burgundy/1286-type representations just are those representations that purport to represent burgundy colored things in our environment (whether this is because they reliably co-vary with the property

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<sup>77</sup> E.g., Dretske (1986; 1995).

of being burgundy, or because they have the phylogenetic function of indicating the presence of burgundy, for example). However, it is not clear what about such a story allows us to think of the subject herself as *open* to what normative constraints her having a perception with such content places on her.

Yet, it is crucial for perception to play its purported reason-giving role that which normative constraints are placed on one's deliberations and actions is a matter that one is epistemically open to. After all, it is *the subject* that must find reasonable some set of actions or beliefs rather than another. It will not do to show that some such set of actions or beliefs *is* reasonable. Our actions are appropriate or not in light of our perceptions *and*, crucially, whether or not they *are* appropriate is something that we are open to and on the basis of which we act and deliberate as we do. It is only in this way that our perceiving the Mach figure *as a tilted-square*, say, can both provide a reason *for* us to engage it in tilted-square appropriate ways, *and* that it provides a reason we *have*, which potentially *guides us* in engaging it in these ways.

The source of this conundrum seems to be the fact that, according to the externalist position presented by Tye, the norms governing the individuation of perceptual contents need not be available to the subject. Perceptual content is individuated completely externally, and requires no reference to any of the subject's epistemic capacities.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> This appears to be Sedivy's (1996) main complaint against Peacocke when she points out that "[l]ike all content, nonconceptual content is individuated by its correctness conditions. Unlike conceptual content, nonconceptual content is determined simply by its correctness conditions, those conditions do not need to be understood by the thinker as well" (p. 419). Though having a state with such contents can show how a given judgment is justified (that *there are good reasons* to judge them), this is not enough for perception to provide reasons for judgments: "the believer him or herself must *have* those reasons in an *epistemic* sense: she must be aware of them as good reasons and must be able to make use of them as such." (p. 427)



Clearly, the subject does not have access to the theoretical apparatus that underlies the individuation of the contents of her perceptions. Indeed, to demand that she must have such access if she is to undergo the appropriate perception would be absurd. Very few of us would have any perceptions, given that very few of us have any idea of what our perceptions co-vary with, or what they have been evolutionarily ‘designed’ to indicate, for example.<sup>79</sup> However, without having a certain understanding of the norms governing the individuation of the contents of her perceptions, it is unclear how these contents can be anything *for her*. The difference, then, between a tilted-square-type representation and a diamond-type representation (or even between a burgundy-type representation and a square-type representation, for that matter), is no difference at all *for the subject*. Since the subject does not have access to the norms governing content individuation, she has no access to that in virtue of which one experience differs from another, and, hence, no access to *whether they differ at all*.

Similar misgivings have been directed towards Peacocke’s nonconceptual account of perceptual content by Sedivy (1996). She says:

“Nonconceptual contents clearly do not *figure in* experience at the first person perspective since at that perspective they are without use, the thinker by definition has no capacities with respect to them. ... From a theoretical perspective, we can posit that there are nonconceptual contents that perform an explanatory role. We can also posit that such contents are individuated completely independently of the person’s understanding. But then does it not seem that we need to posit such contents at the *nonexperiential* or *subpersonal level*?”(p. 428)

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<sup>79</sup> It would be very mysterious if the subject had some form of access to her phylogenetic history, could determine the systemic functions of her own states, and *only in virtue of so doing*, could determine what reasons she has for action and deliberation.

And, Dennett (1994) seems to have a similar complaint in mind regarding Dretske's non-epistemic account of perception, when he says:

“There is no important difference--no difference that makes a difference--between things non-epistemically seen (e.g., the thimble in front of Betsy's eyes before she twigs) and things not seen at all (e.g., the child smirking behind Betsy's back).”(p. 511)

### 3.5 Conclusions and a point about terminology

I have said that a specification of nonconceptual content is essentially from a third-person perspective. Having eliminated the *Conceptual constraint*, the nonconceptualist holds that whichever concepts we, as theorists, utilize in providing a canonical specification of content need not be possessed by the perceiver. This might tempt us to think that *any* of an indefinitely many co-extensive specifications will do equally well. However, if nonconceptualists wish to hold the *Perspectival constraint*, and the principle of *Personal-Level Reason Explanation* gives us good reason to think they should, then these various *possible* specifications of content must be constrained – perhaps not by which conceptual capacities the subject possesses, but nonetheless by how the subject apprehends the world as being. A purely externalist account of content cannot satisfy this constraint.

The main difficulty the nonconceptualist faces is that denying the *Conceptual constraint* leaves mysterious how a specification of perceptual content is sensitive to how the subject apprehends the world. Either the nonconceptualist must abandon the *Perspectival constraint*, or supply an alternative notion of apprehension that satisfies the motivations underlying the *Perspectival constraint* – to provide reasons that can potentially be those

*for which* an agent acts and deliberates. I have suggested that externalist accounts of perceptual content, (wrongfully) favored by nonconceptualists, are inadequate for this task – they leave us with a notion of perception that is *nothing for the subject*.

Finally, a central upshot of this chapter is that nonconceptualism about content is logically independent from the more substantive claim that content is to be individuated purely externally. The former is merely a denial of the *Conceptual constraint*, leaving open whether and if so how the *Perspectival constraint* might be satisfied. The latter, is a sub-class of nonconceptualist positions that I argued fails to satisfy this constraint. The virtue of identifying this independence is that it suggests that objections to nonconceptualism along the lines presented in this chapter, and as are expressed in the quotations from both Sedivy and Dennett, above, are limited in scope. To the extent that these arguments are effective it is *only* against an important *sub-class* of nonconceptualist positions, though the challenge, from which they arise, of satisfying the *Perspectival constraint*, is a general one. Therefore, an important terminological point is in order. In the following I reserve talk of nonconceptualism to refer to the general claim that the content of some mental state is such that one *can* undergo it without possessing the concepts mentioned in the canonical specification of its contents. A different term should be assigned to that sub-class of nonconceptualist positions targeted in this chapter. Given that these positions hold that the individuation of perceptual content is independent of the subject's epistemic capacities, it is appropriate to call such positions *non-epistemic*

accounts of perceptual content, and those who advocate them *non-epistemicists* about perception.<sup>80</sup>

As its title suggests, in the next chapter, *The Perspectival Constraint under Fire: Objections on Behalf of the Non-Epistemicist*, I attend to several possible responses to the worries presented in this chapter on behalf of the non-epistemicist. Ultimately, I will argue that there might be some *minimal* sense of the *Perspectival constraint* that a specification of perceptual content as advanced by Tye satisfies. However, I will also argue that this minimal sense in which a specification of perceptual content *is* sensitive to how the subject apprehends the world as being is not one that allows us to make sense of the possibility that perception is a reason-giving state – a denizen of the realm of reasons.

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<sup>80</sup> As should be clear at this point, the allusion to Dretske's (1969) non-epistemic notion of perception is no coincidence.

*Chapter 4: The Perspectival constraint under fire – Objections on behalf of  
the non-epistemicist*

*4.1 The non-epistemicist objects: Revisiting the Perspectival constraint*

The discussion in the previous chapter assumed that nonconceptualists accept the *Perspectival constraint* (= the canonical specification of a mental state's content articulates how one apprehends the world in undergoing that state) as a general constraint on the specification of mental content. The rationale behind the constraint was derived from considerations applicable to the specification of *belief* content, accepted by both conceptualists and nonconceptualists about perceptual content. However, nonconceptualists hold that perception is in important respects not belief-like. The non-epistemicist might, then, object that the highly critical conclusions of the previous chapter are the result of our unjustifiably overextending the analogy with belief. Though a specification of perceptual content *is* governed by the *Perspectival constraint*, we should not appropriate wholesale an understanding of this constraint from considerations stemming from the specification of *belief* content. Considering the 'important respects' in which perception and belief differ might urge us towards an alternative understanding of the *Perspectival constraint* that *is* satisfied by perception. Such an alternative, tailored to the case of perception and respecting its 'important differences' from belief, might then reveal it unproblematic that co-extensive specifications of perceptual content are on equal theoretical footing, and show why a purely externalist individuation of content is, in fact, appropriately sensitive to how a perceiver apprehends the world.

## 4.2 Developing a minimal perspective

One suggestion as to how the non-epistemicist might think about the *Perspectival constraint*, tailored for the case of perception, starts from the observation that, if we are to do justice to how perceivers experience their environment, it will not do merely to mention *what* in their surroundings they are thereby aware *of*. One need not look as far as ambiguous figures, as we did in the previous chapter, though they *illustrate* the point nicely. Rather, it is a *general* and rather common observation that (with very few exceptions) one and the same object can be the object of many *different* perception-types<sup>81</sup> (e.g., a table seen from different positions/orientations, or by organisms endowed with sufficiently dissimilar sensory systems), and contrariwise, different objects (e.g., twins) can be the objects of the *same* perception-type.

Furthermore, as Searle (1990; 1992) puts it, perception, like other mental states, necessarily has aspectual shape; it involves representing objects under certain *aspects*.<sup>82</sup> According to Dretske (1995), this follows from the fact that our perception of objects is *parasitic* on our perception of a variety of their perceptible properties. He says:

“Experiences are *of* objects, yes, but one cannot experience an object without experiencing it under some aspect. This follows immediately from the fact that the experienced object is simply that object, if there is one, whose determinable properties

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<sup>81</sup> Where perception here is typified by phenomenological indiscriminability.

<sup>82</sup> “Aspectual shape is most obvious in the case of conscious perceptions: think of seeing a car, for example. When you see a car, it is not simply a matter of an object being registered by your perceptual apparatus; rather, you actually have a conscious experience of the object from a certain point of view and with certain features. You see the car as having a certain shape, as having a certain color, etc. And what is true of conscious perceptions is true of intentional states generally.”(Searle 1992, p. 157). The notion of aspectual shape was originally introduced in Searle (1990).

the sensory system represents. One cannot, therefore, see, smell, or taste an object without experiencing it *as having determinate properties.*”(p. 31, emphasis added)

Mentioning the aspects under which an object is represented is, then, ineliminable from a full specification of perceptual content.<sup>83</sup>

A specification of perceptual content that captures those aspects under which perceivers represent objects in their environment *is* a specification of perceptual content satisfying the *Perspectival constraint*, properly understood. It is a sensitivity to how *the perceiver* apprehends an object as being. Furthermore, such sensitivity provides a straightforward sense in which a specification of perceptual content is *not fully extensional*. The perception *of objects* is necessarily a perception of them *as being certain ways* rather than others – *as having certain properties* rather than others.

Consider the following illustration. If two perceivers simultaneously view the same Rubik’s Cube, their perceptions of the cube will differ depending on their *perspectives* (Figure 5). If they *also* differ with respect to the nature of their sensory apparatus, their

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<sup>83</sup> In fact, Dretske’s position is stronger than this. The way things look to a subject, in the phenomenological sense (in contrast with what they look to be, i.e., the doxastic sense of ‘look’), is *exhausted* by those properties of the object the presence of which it is the systemic function of the organism’s sensory system to indicate (Dretske, 1995). So, an exhaustive specification of the content of perception requires reference only to those properties the organism represents in virtue of which an object is perceived. A valuable summary of Dretske’s position on the matter is provided in the following quote from his (1999): “The phenomenology of perceptual experience is determined by the totality of qualities one is p-aware of [i.e., property-aware of]. Object and fact awareness contribute nothing. Phenomenally speaking, one can be aware of different objects (e.g., twins) while having exactly the same (type of) experience. Likewise, different people (or the same person at different times) can be having the same experience while being aware of quite different facts: one person is aware that the flower he sees is a geranium, the other is aware of the same flower – it looks the same to him – but he is not aware that it is a geranium. Same object and property awareness, different fact awareness. Object awareness has to do, not with the qualities of one’s experience, but the causal relations of the experience to objects in the world. Fact awareness has to do, not with the qualities of one’s experience, but the kind of knowledge these experiences give rise to.”(p. 108) Tye follows Dretske on these issues (see in particular, Tye 1995; 2000).

respective perceptions will differ even more dramatically (suppose one is a human being whereas the other is a common mole, say).<sup>84</sup> These factors enter into determining *which properties of the cube* the cube is represented to them *as having*. Since these factors may differ, so may their perceptions.

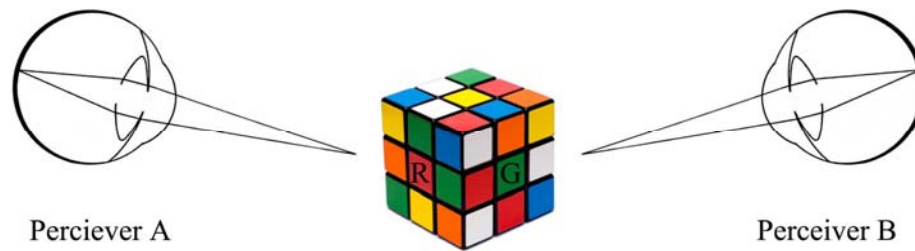


Figure 5: Rubik's Cube

Though in specifying the content of perception we need not be limited to mentioning only concepts possessed by the perceiver (as per nonconceptualism), the *Perspectival constraint* does urge a sensitivity to certain perceiver-specific factors, namely, the abovementioned perspectival factors. A sensitivity to *how* the perceiver apprehends the world when having a perception amounts to a sensitivity to which properties in the environment *the perceiver* is perceptually sensitive to, given *his/her/its perspective* and *sensory apparatus*, rather than to what *we* perceive, given our perspective, or to what a differently equipped organism *would* perceive, given the particular circumstances in which the perception is had. Which properties an organism is *capable* of perceiving is a brute function of the organism's sensory system. Which properties the organism *actually* perceives is a subclass of the former and depends on the particular circumstances under

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<sup>84</sup> Of course, relevant differences of this kind are not limited to cross-species comparisons. Significant differences exist also between the sensory systems of individuals belonging to the same species (e.g., color blind individuals).



which the perception is had. In specifying the content of perception by appeal to those properties perceivers perceptually represent we are *simultaneously* doing justice to their perspective and to the sensory systems that are employed in perceiving their surrounding environment.

It is worth spelling out in some more detail what this perspectivalness amounts to and how it might enter into the *explanation* of a perceiver's actions and deliberations.

Peacocke's (1992) account of content in terms of nonconceptual positioned scenario content is particularly well suited to provide a systematic account of this kind of perspectivalness. It will serve us well, then, to focus for a moment on his account.

Peacocke's notion of nonconceptual positioned scenario content is content that is "...individuated by specifying which ways of filling out the space around the perceiver are consistent with the representational content's being correct" (1992, p. 61). In order to specify this content, we first select an origin and axes corresponding to the location of the perceiver's body and to the modality by which the perceiver represents the environment (in our case, vision). For each point-type, a location specified relative to the previously determined origins and axes, we then specify whether it is occupied by a surface and, if so, proceed to specify the surface's various characterizing perceptible (via the appropriate modality) properties. In the case of vision, for example, if there is a surface at a given point-type, we specify its texture, hue, saturation, brightness, solidity, orientation, and various other properties (*ibid.*, p. 63). Doing so for all point-types amounts to a specification of a set of ways the space around the perceiver could be filled. If the space around the perceiver is, in fact, a member of the specified set, we have a case of veridical perception.

For simplicity and brevity of exposition let us examine the veridical perception of the Rubik's Cube's labeled tiles (R and G). Assume three orthogonal axes originating at the center of the perceiver's head, one horizontal (x), another vertical (y), and one crossing front to back (z). A specification of perceiver A's perceptual representation of the cube would involve mentioning (among many other things) the presence of *red* on a surface perpendicular to the ground and to the point of origin at a point three feet away at the center of gaze and 15 degrees below the horizon. A specification of perceiver B's perceptual representation would be similar in many respects, given his similar distance and 90 degrees horizontal shift in orientation relative to the cube.<sup>85</sup> However, it would also differ in many respects. In particular, it would involve mentioning the presence of *green* on a surface perpendicular to the ground and to the point of origin at a point three feet away in the center of gaze and 15 degrees below the horizon. The representational content in each case will be correct iff there is, in fact, at the specified point-type (three feet away at the center of gaze and 15 degrees below the horizon), a surface characterized by the perceptible properties respectively mentioned. Furthermore, it is nonconceptual content since the perceivers need not possess any of the concepts utilized in specifying the contents of their perceptions.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> This, of course, also assumes that both perceivers possess a normally operating sensory system in relation to which redness and greenness are *perceptible* properties.

<sup>86</sup> As Peacocke says: "There is no requirement at this point that the conceptual apparatus used in specifying a way of filling out the space be an apparatus of concepts used by the perceiver himself. Any apparatus we want to use, however sophisticated, may be employed in fixing the spatial type, however primitive the conceptual resources of the perceiver with whom we are concerned. This applies both to the apparatus used in characterizing the distances and directions, and to that employed in characterizing surfaces, features and the rest." (1992, p. 63)

The machinery of positioned scenario content is capable of providing the *correctness conditions* of both perceivers' perceptions in a way that respects the differences that hold between them. It is appropriately sensitive to the *perspective* of each perceiver.

Furthermore, it appears fully adequate for the sake of providing an *explanation* of the reasonableness of the respective actions and deliberations of each of the perceivers.

Given that perceiver A's perception of the cube is correct just in case at the specified relative location there is a surface characterized by the specified perceptible properties, we have available norms by which to establish the in/appropriateness of the range of judgments and actions that A might perform.<sup>87</sup> Most importantly, this will be in/appropriateness *from A's perspective, not* from B's perspective, or from our own perspective as external theorists engaged in specifying the content of A's perception (utilizing whichever conceptual apparatus we deem appropriate). Given that A is undergoing a perception of the type specified above, a judgment of the form 'the center of the cube is red', for example, would be appropriate from A's perspective, but not from B's perspective.<sup>88</sup>

The non-epistemicist can, thus, argue that an appeal to represented properties *fully* accommodates all the perspectival factors *relevant* to determining how the world appears to perceivers *and in light of which they act and deliberate as they do*. It allows us to

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<sup>87</sup> Taking into account a background of A's various other concurrent mental states.

<sup>88</sup> As Peacocke (1992, p. 80) remarks, not only does the perception-type A has (but not the perception-type B has) provide A a reason for said judgment, it seems it would also be a *good* reason, since under normal conditions, as in the example above, the perception A has would be correct – the center of the cube actually would be red. Note, though, that whether it provides a good reason or not is *not* our concern here. The concern is how to make sense of its providing the subject any reasons at all – what needs to be the case for perception to have reason-giving status. The concern of this dissertation is a *precondition* on perception's providing *good* reasons.

articulate all the relevant differences between A's perception of the cube and B's perception of the cube in a way that sheds light on the different contributions that their respective perceptions make to the reasons they have for engaging with the cube.

Perceiver A perceives the cube's central tile (tile R from A's perspective) *as red* whereas perceiver B perceives the cube's central tile (tile G from B's perspective) *as green*.

So, what is the problem with this sort of view? What is missing from the non-epistemicist's account of how the *Perspectival constraint* is satisfied in the case of perception?

#### 4.2.1 Where the belief/perception analogy breaks: Degrees of intensionality

The non-epistemicist makes room for what appears to be a *minimal* intensionality – whereby content is specified in terms of the aspects under which *objects* are represented (or the environment more generally). In point of fact, though, such minimal intensionality amounts to *no* intensionality at all. An intensional context is one in which substitution of co-extensive terms *could* change the truth value of an expression. But, according to the non-epistemicist, the only substitution in the *supposedly* intensional context (the property term position) that *could* change the truth value of the content attribution is of terms referring to *different* properties. The minimal intensionality purportedly involved in the specification of perceptual content, therefore, reduces to an *extensional* specification of content. This is what I have argued in the previous chapter is missing. For the *Perspectival constraint* to be satisfied we need a canonical specification of *these properties* – an articulation of how *the perceiver* apprehends these properties that would

make a principled distinction among different co-extensive specifications. An adequate specification of perceptual content must, then, be *fully*, and *irreducibly*, intensional.

It is at this point, though, that the non-epistemicist objects. Why, after all, is a specification of how an *object* is apprehended not sufficient, so long as we are concerned with the specification of *perceptual* content? Perhaps when specifying belief content something more is needed, but perception *is not* belief. Demanding anything stronger than this minimal, pseudo-, intensionality, when specifying *perceptual* content, is precisely where the analogy with *belief* content does us a disservice.

In particular, the non-epistemicist might claim that in the case of *belief* our demand for a finer-grained perspectivalness – involving a sensitivity to *how* the subject apprehends represented *properties*, rather than simply a sensitivity to *which* properties are represented – is fueled by the recognition that in having a *belief* it is possible for one to apprehend the selfsame object *and the selfsame property* in a variety of different ways. In the case of belief, the *Perspectival constraint* aims to articulate the *particular* way, in contrast with possible others, that one apprehends an object *or property*.

The non-epistemicist would object that it is precisely this feature of belief that comprises the ‘important respect’ in which it differs from perception. Though we always apprehend *objects* under particular aspects (i.e., as having particular properties), there are no different ways of *perceptually* apprehending a given *property*. Perceptual content is more coarse-grained than belief content.<sup>89</sup> Having indicated (by whichever means) the

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<sup>89</sup> Note the possible confusion that is involved when speaking of the *grain* of perceptual content. In previous chapters I have argued that we have reason to consider the content of perception to be *finer-grained* than the content of belief. This was one reason to preserve *Bifurcation\**. The sense

perceptible properties in virtue of the representation of which one perceives one's environment, it makes no sense to insist further on a canonical specification of *these properties*.<sup>90</sup>

This is precisely the kind of response we find. Tye (2006), for example, argues that

“...it is a mistake to model our awareness of qualities on our awareness of particulars. When we see particulars, they look various ways to us but the qualities of which we are conscious in seeing these particulars do not look any way. Our awareness of the relevant qualities is direct. It involves *no* mode of presentation” (p. 525, fn. 20).

According to Tye, the fine-grained representational capacity of beliefs makes a specification of their content *hyperintensional* (see esp. Tye, 2000, p. 54). Unlike belief, perception involves *coarse-grained* Russellian contents, by which he means that perception “... (unlike representations having conceptual contents) cannot represent the same particulars, properties, and relations arranged in the same possible object-involving states of affairs or the same properties and relations involved in the same possible existential states of affairs and yet differ in content” (Tye 2006, pp. 508-509). The

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in which it is *finer*-grained is that its capacity to represent the world far outstrips the perceiver's capacity to conceptualize the world. Perception allows one to make *finer distinctions among perceptible properties* – for example, perceptually to discriminate among shades of colors one has no concept of. On the other hand, the claim that perceptual content is *coarser*-grained relative to belief content expresses the proposition that perception, unlike belief, *cannot involve different ways of representing one and the same property*. In discussing the grain of perceptual content, I will specify which sense of the notion is being used.

<sup>90</sup> Dretske holds a similar view. As mentioned above, he argues that perception of necessity represents *objects* under some aspect rather than another. Given a properly developed sensory system, the question of how the world is represented to the organism as being (how it phenomenally looks to the organism, as he says in his 1995) boils down to identifying those properties of the environment (the presence of which it is the phylogenetic function of the sensory system to indicate) the organism is in causal contact with, and in virtue of which the environment is perceived. Since Dretske promotes a causal/informational notion of perceptual content, it is not surprising that we find that a specification of perceptual content is extensional. See also Fodor (2008, esp. pp. 179-180), who likewise considers perceptual representations in informational terms, and argues that their specification is, as a result, extensional.

intensionality of perception, as we have seen, then, is pseudo-intensionality.<sup>91</sup> It is *exhausted* by the fact that perception of necessity represents *objects* under some aspects rather than others. In order to satisfy the *Perspectival constraint* in the case of perception, the perspective that one must be sensitive to is merely the *minimal* perspective discussed above.

#### 4.3 Reclaiming the belief/perception analogy

As stated, the non-epistemicist's objection, stemming from the purported disanalogy between perception and belief, misses the point that the analogy with the specification of belief content is meant to illustrate. It misunderstands the notion of a *way* of apprehending the world that is of interest, both in the belief case, and by parity, in the perceptual case. The notion of a *way of apprehending the world*, as it appears in the previous few paragraphs, is a *contrastive* notion.

The non-epistemicist's objection appears to be that it is *only* in virtue of the possibility of different ways of apprehending the selfsame entity that it is meaningful to appeal to a *way* of apprehending it in the first place.<sup>92</sup> It is the possibility of apprehending a certain

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<sup>91</sup> Given the discussion in this section it is perhaps superfluous to introduce Tye's notion of *hyperintensionality*. The contrast is with the intensionality he claims is involved in perception. However, we have seen that this amounts to not more than pseudo-intentionality.

<sup>92</sup> Incidentally, according to Dunlop (1984), Wittgenstein held a similar account of 'seeing as' in his *Philosophical Investigations*. Though Wittgenstein thought that all seeing was an instance of seeing as ..., where the '...' stands in for the concept the object seen in brought under, he also held that the locution 'see as' was essentially contrastive. It is applicable only in those circumstances in which there could be different ways of seeing one and the same thing. If, as Tye insists, perception cannot represent the selfsame property in different ways, it seems that

shape property *as triangular* or *as trilateral* (in *thought*) in virtue of which it is sensible to say that one apprehends it *as triangular*, say. If in the case of perception there is no possible contrast in how *properties* are represented, then there is no sense in saying that one apprehends a given property P *as an X* rather than *as a Y* (where ‘X’ and ‘Y’ are co-extensive); though it is perfectly sensible to do so when speaking of perceived *objects*.

Thus, the demand that a specification of perceptual content be sensitive to *how* the subject apprehends a given property loses its hold. Given that there are no different ways of perceptually apprehending the selfsame property, there is also no relevant distinction that one particular specification of content *rather than* any co-extensive other would serve to indicate.

However, the appeal to how one apprehends a property through perception *does not* depend on there being *different* ways of apprehending that property – just as the appeal to a sense, or mode of presentation, in the belief case, *does not* depend on there being *different* modes of presentation of the selfsame entity. While it is useful to look at Frege cases to *illustrate* the need for a sensitivity to how the subject apprehends the world when specifying the contents of a belief, this need does not *arise* from the possibility (or actuality) of Frege cases.

In the case of belief, we have seen that reflection on Frege cases urges us away from purely truth-conditional accounts of content. Such accounts fail to satisfy the *Perspectival constraint* because of their failure to satisfy what in the previous chapter was called the principle of *Personal-level reason explanation* – the claim that content attribution

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Wittgenstein would agree with him that there is no sense to demand a canonical specification of these properties.



articulates that in light of which one finds appropriate certain intentional engagements with the world rather than others. Adherence to this latter principle is driven by an emphasis on the reason-giving role of the mental. It is what gives *sense* to the notion of apprehension that is of interest. One's apprehension of the world is such as potentially to contribute to the *reasons for which* one acts and deliberates as one does.

The appeal to a mode of presentation as constitutive of belief content aims to satisfy this principle. A mode of presentation is the way one apprehends an entity, in the relevant sense. It partially constitutes one's epistemic orientation in relation to the world, and serves as that in light of which one finds appropriate certain engagements with the world, rather than others. It is these that a full specification of belief content must articulate if it is to shed light on the reasons for which a person acts and deliberates as she does.

Though I might *think* about a particular shape property *as triangular*, or *as trilateral*, a specification of the content of my thought that is sensitive to this distinction is not required in order to disambiguate the two thoughts (though, of course, it *does* disambiguate them). Rather, it is required to articulate how the particular way I am aware of the figure contributes to my finding certain engagements with the world rather than others appropriate. When attributing to me the belief that before me lays a triangular figure, we are specifying an aspect of my particular epistemic orientation in relation to the figure. It is an orientation on the basis of which, *ceteris paribus*, I would find appropriate, *by my own lights*, a judgment to the effect that there is something triangular before me, while at the same time possibly withhold judgment as to whether there is

something trilateral before me.<sup>93</sup> Regardless of whether or not there are other possible ways of thinking about the figure, it is a specification of content utilizing the concept triangular, rather than any co-extensive other, that fully articulates the particular contribution that my thinking about the figure has, from my own point of view, to my intentional actions towards, and deliberations about, the figure.

These same considerations apply equally well to perceptual content and *its* specification. So long as we are committed to the explanatory role that an appeal to content is to play, as expressed by the principle of *Personal-level reason explanation*, we are also committed to a notion of apprehension that potentially contributes to the perceiver's finding appropriate certain engagements with the world rather than others. Given that our aim, throughout the dissertation, is to show how perception, though nonconceptual, might nonetheless be a reason-giving state, it is clear we cannot abandon this commitment. The demand expressed by the *Perspectival constraint* – to provide a specification of *how* one apprehends a given *property* in perception – is the demand that such a specification sheds light on the character of this contribution to the reasons for which a perceiver acts and deliberates as she does. This demand is independent of whether or not there are multiple ways of representing a given property that such a specification would also serve to disambiguate.

In other words, if perception is to be counted as a reason-giving state, whatever 'important respects' distinguish perception from belief cannot be such as to negate the applicability of the principle of *Personal-level reason explanation* to perception. Hence,

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<sup>93</sup> This is an application of Frege's Criterion of Identity for Senses.

they cannot negate the requirement that a canonical specification of perceptual content articulates the contribution that perceiving the property makes to the reasons the perceiver thereby has. Though we have reason to suspect that the nonconceptual nature of perception makes a difference to the *character* of this contribution, it is the claim that perception makes *some* such contribution that underlies the need for an irreducibly intensional specification of perceptual content.

As a result, even if we grant Tye's claim that perception is coarser grained than belief, in that it *cannot* represent the selfsame property in various different ways, it simply does not follow that a specification of perceptual contents should not be sensitive to how a property is, in fact, apprehended by the subject. Contrariwise, to say that we need *not* be sensitive to how a subject perceptually apprehends a given property is to say that we need *not* be sensitive to how the subject's representing this property might contribute to the subject's reasons. I suggest that such an account is appealing only if we think that a subject's perception of a property *does not* contribute in such a way to his engagements at all – if we deny the principle of *Personal-level reason explanation* in relation to perception – if we think of perception as being epistemically *inert* from the perceiver's perspective. However, this abandons the view of perception as a reason-giving state (and, *ipso facto*, abandons the principle of *Perceptual apprehension* from Chapter 1, i.e., the claim that perception directly provides us reasons for our intentional engagements with and deliberations about the world).

#### 4.3.1 Extending the non-epistemicist's objection

Perhaps the previous section was somewhat too hasty in its conclusions. There *is* something odd about the claim that, regardless of whether or not one can apprehend one and the same entity in a variety of different ways, a specification of this apprehension is to be so fine-grained as to make a principled distinction among different co-extensive specifications. Say that S's apprehending P *as a Y* makes a contribution  $Z_1$  to the reasons S *has*. Furthermore, say that there is no *other* way W ( $\neq Y$ ) for S to apprehend P such that it makes a contribution  $Z_2$  ( $\neq Z_1$ ) to the reasons S *has*. In what sense, then, would mentioning Y in a canonical specification of S's apprehending P be more illuminating of the contribution  $Z_1$ , than specifying P in any other way?

In the case of belief, there are different ways that apprehending the selfsame property might contribute to the reasons the believer thereby has. As a result, a purely extensional specification of belief content fails to articulate fully how the subject's having the particular belief contributes to the reasons the subject has. The specification of belief content must then be, as Tye says, hyperintensional (or as I say in my fn. 91, simply, intensional).

In contrast, in the case of perception, the non-epistemicist's claim that there are no different ways of representing the selfsame property can be understood as the claim that there are no different contributions that apprehending said property might make to the reasons a perceiver thereby has. Contrary to what was argued in the previous section, the non-epistemicist need not deny that S's representing P (where P is a perceptible property) contributes to the reasons S has. Nor need she deny that a specification of perceptual

content aims to articulate the nature of this contribution. (She need not deny the principle of *Personal-level reason explanation*, or the *Perspectival constraint*, in the case of perceptual content.) On the contrary, the non-epistemicist simply holds that *all co-extensive specifications are equally illuminating of this contribution*. As such, there is no *explanatory advantage* in preferring some particular specification of perceptual content over any co-extensive one. A fine-grained specification of such apprehension as I have required is therefore *explanatorily superfluous*.

To make these claims somewhat more concrete, consider the following example. When *thinking* about the shape of a triangle, the contributions that our thinking about it might make to the reasons we have are various. Consider two possible contributions  $Z1$  and  $Z2$  ( $Z1 \neq Z2$ ). It is possible that  $Z1$  involves a contribution to the reasons one has for judging that there is something triangular ahead, but not a contribution to the reasons one has for judging that there is something trilateral ahead.  $Z2$  involves the contrary contribution.

The differences between  $Z1$  and  $Z2$  are, then, best captured by the intensional differences between the concepts triangular and trilateral. This is why when one's thinking about the shape makes a contribution  $Z1$  to the reasons one has, the canonical specification of the content of the thought appeals to the former concept rather than the latter. It is the exploitation of the concept triangular in one's thinking about the shape of the figure that explains why one's thinking about the shape makes the contribution  $Z1$  to one's reasons.

But, whatever contribution  $Z3$  that *perceiving* the shape of a triangle makes to the reasons one has,  $Z3$  involves an *equal* contribution to the reasons one has for judging that there is something triangular ahead as it does to the reasons one has for judging that there is something trilateral ahead. The intensional differences between the concepts triangular

and trilateral are, then, insignificant when it comes to articulating Z3. Crucially, this is *not to say* that perceptually apprehending a given property makes *no* contribution (Z3) to what reasons one has for engaging with and deliberating about the object characterized by the property. It is merely to say that whatever this contribution amounts to, it is not as fine-grained as to involve different contributions to the reasons one has for intensionally distinct engagements with the figure perceived (most clearly, judgments that differ in intension only). The non-epistemicist position can then be seen as consistent with the *Perspectival constraint* as initially formulated, while nonetheless entailing that *all* co-extensive specifications of perceptual content are on the same theoretical footing. Specifying perceptual content by appeal to the concept triangle and specifying it by appeal to the concept trilateral are equally illuminating specifications of the contribution that perceiving the triangle makes to the perceiver's reasons.<sup>94</sup>

#### 4.3.2 Responding to the non-epistemicist's reinforced objection

Perhaps it is implausible to demand a theoretical distinction between a specification of perceptual content utilizing the concept triangular and one utilizing the concept trilateral.

Such a distinction implies that the one articulates the contribution that having the

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<sup>94</sup> If we are considering the specification of perceptual content on the lines of Peacocke's positioned scenario contents, neither concept will appear in its specification. As we have seen, specifying the positioned scenario contents of perception is merely specifying the properties that characterize different point-types around the perceiver. However, the same considerations just discussed hold equally well with respect to the concepts utilized in specifying these properties. Specifying the color property characterizing the point-type identified in our example as three feet away at the center of gaze and 15 degrees below the horizon by appeal to the concept red is equally illuminating as any other specification utilizing a co-extensive concept, e.g., the complex concept having a disposition to reflect light in way<sub>R</sub>, where way<sub>R</sub> is just that way that red things are disposed to reflect light.

perception makes to the reasons the perceiver has better than the other. However, the difficulty with the non-epistemicist position is not that it implies that *some* co-extensive specifications of perceptual content might be equally adequate, but that *all* co-extensive specifications of content are.

This stronger position, however, seems wrong. The previous chapter ended with the example of Sam the taxonomist who constructs a novel systematic taxonomy for all perceptible properties (Section 3.3.2). The aim of the example was to show that a purely externally individuated account of perceptual content has the counterintuitive consequence that there is no principled preference between Sam's specification of Samantha's perception of a burgundy ball and a specification employing our ordinary color concepts. In the previous section, I have suggested on behalf of the non-epistemicists that this might not detract from their view. There is nothing 'lost in translation' when we move from specifying the contents of Samantha's perception utilizing our common sense color concepts to utilizing Sam's taxonomy. They are equally illuminating of the contribution that Samantha's representing P makes to what reasons she has (though pragmatic considerations might urge us to choose some specifications rather than others).

The following simple example shows why this is not the case. It provides grounds for the intuition that our common sense color concepts more adequately articulate the contribution that Samantha's perceiving the color of the ball makes to the reasons she has for engaging it. It also serves to foreshadow some of the considerations that in Chapter 6 will guide the proper, *epistemic*, development of a nonconceptual account of content.

Say that Andrei perceives three balls that are indistinguishable in all respects with the exception of their color. One is red, the second orange, and the third green. Assuming all else is normal, i.e., that Andrei is a normally functioning human being and that the lighting conditions are adequate, it seems that by virtue of perceiving the balls he is in a position to judge the first two as more similar to each other than each is to the third. If asked to line them according to their similarity, he would have reason to place the second, orange, ball in the middle position.

Let us label each of the color properties, redness, orangeness, and greenness, as  $P_1$ ,  $P_2$ , and  $P_3$ , and the objects that they characterize,  $object_1$ ,  $object_2$ , and  $object_3$ , respectively. Furthermore, let us label the contribution that Andrei's perceiving each of these properties makes to the reasons he *has* for engaging with and deliberating about the object that each property characterizes  $Z_1$ ,  $Z_2$ , and  $Z_3$ , respectively. The *Perspectival constraint* states that the canonical specification of the content of Andrei's perception of the balls aims to specify  $P_1$ ,  $P_2$ , and  $P_3$ , in a way that articulates their respective contributions.

There is an interesting overlap between  $Z_1$ ,  $Z_2$ , and  $Z_3$ . This overlap can be exemplified by indefinitely many examples. For example, perceiving any of  $P_1$ ,  $P_2$ , or  $P_3$ , makes the *same* contribution to the reasons Andrei has to judge that a *colored* object is before him. Put in the context of a game of billiard and assuming he is playing stripes, knows the rules of the game, and wishes not to be penalized, his perceiving any of these properties makes the *same* contribution to the reasons he has to avoid hitting the object it characterizes with the cue ball. Examples of their overlap are legion.



However, there are also important differences between  $Z_1$ ,  $Z_2$ , and  $Z_3$ . Most trivially, they differ with respect to the reasons Andrei has for judging that there is a *red* ball before him. Perhaps of greatest interest, though, is the contribution that perceiving each of these properties makes to Andrei's reasons for judgments of similarity and difference – say, to a judgment that one object is more similar to another than it is to the third. Perceiving  $P_1$ , for example, contributes to the reasons Andrei has for judging that object<sub>1</sub> is more similar to object<sub>2</sub>, than to object<sub>3</sub>. The same holds in relation to a host of Andrei's potential actions. Consider a normal traffic light. Andrei's perceiving  $P_1$  contributes to the reasons he has to hit the brakes. Andrei's perceiving  $P_3$  contributes to the reasons he has to continue driving. What of his perceiving  $P_2$ ? It seems that the contribution that his perceiving  $P_2$  would make to the reasons he has for hitting the brakes or continuing driving will be more similar to  $Z_1$  than to  $Z_2$ . (Given that the function of the 'caution light' is to ready the driver to hit the breaks, perhaps it is no surprise that the current universally accepted choice for this light is  $P_2$ ).<sup>95</sup> These are contrived examples and there are an indefinitely many others that are just as easily manufactured.

To make a potentially very long story much shorter, let us leave examples aside and turn to the central point they illustrate. Our aim is to specify  $P_1$ ,  $P_2$ , and  $P_3$ , in a way that best articulates their respective contributions  $Z_1$ ,  $Z_2$ , and  $Z_3$ . One implausible way of articulating  $Z_1$ , for example, is by listing all the possible ways that representing  $P_1$

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<sup>95</sup> This is, of course, only a hypothesis, as very little experimentation has actually taken place in choosing the intermediary caution light. Perhaps the point I am making is so intuitive that no one has actually considered using a blue caution light. An interesting experiment that might lend some support to this hypothesis would involve presenting subjects with a randomized sequence of color displays and requesting that they indicate the presence of a red display by pressing a button. The aim would be to compare reaction times to red displays when different colors immediately precede it. The hypothesis would gain support if subjects have faster reaction times when presented with the sequence orange-red than when presented with blue-red, for example.

contributes to the potential reasons Andrei has for engaging with whichever object it characterizes. This would clearly be an interminably long list.<sup>96</sup>

A more plausible way of articulating  $Z_1$  is by noting the similarity and difference relations that it bears to  $Z_2$ ,  $Z_3$ , and, indeed, to the contributions made by the perception of other color properties. Conveniently, our common sense color concepts track these similarities and differences among the contributions that perceiving  $P_1$ ,  $P_2$ , and  $P_3$ , make. The concept red is applicable to those things that when perceived make a contribution to the perceiver's reasons that is more similar to the contribution made by the perception of things to which the concept orange applies, than to the contribution made by the perception of those things to which the concept green applies. In other words, a specification of  $P_1$  that best articulates  $Z_1$  utilizes our common sense color concept red.

It will not do, for example, to specify  $P_1$ ,  $P_2$ , and  $P_3$ , utilizing concepts from micro-physics, call them microstructure R (whatever organization of matter the surface of the ball has in virtue of which it is disposed to cause in normal observers a red-type experience), microstructure O, and microstructure G, respectively. Though these concepts adequately refer to the same represented properties, they do not articulate the relevant similarities and differences that hold among  $Z_1$ ,  $Z_2$ , and  $Z_3$ , and hence, they do not articulate the light by which Andrei finds his actions and judgments appropriate. These concepts track *different* contributions that  $P_1$ ,  $P_2$ , and  $P_3$  make to the reasons one has.

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<sup>96</sup> It is akin to attempting to specify a property by appeal to all the possible ways that it might contribute to the behavior of the object that it characterizes. For example, the property of weighing 5 pounds contributes to the object's making an indent of such and such a shape in a block of wax of such and such a consistency. It also contributes to the object's making a slightly different indent in a pile of sand. The list goes on indefinitely, since the contribution that a property makes to the behavior of an object it characterizes depends on which other properties the object has as well as its environment.

After all, it is fully plausible that at the micro-level  $P_1$  is more similar to  $P_3$  than to  $P_2$ . As a physicist, to specify my apprehending  $P_1$  in terms of the concept microstructure R is to articulate how my apprehending  $P_1$  contributes to my reasons for finding object<sub>1</sub> more similar to object<sub>3</sub> than to object<sub>2</sub> (which is clearly not how *Andrei* apprehends the objects).<sup>97</sup>

Different ways of specifying these properties, utilizing different concepts to refer to them, serve not only to pick them out (a task for which Sam's alternative taxonomy is *equally* satisfactory), but also to illuminate which dimensions of similarity and difference that hold among these properties are relevant for our thus picking them out.

The problem that the non-epistemicist faces is that not all co-extensive specifications of content articulate the relevant dimensions of similarity and difference that hold among perceptible properties – those dimensions of similarity and difference that are relevant to the guidance of the perceiver's perceptually-based engagements with the world. The properties themselves,  $P_1$ ,  $P_2$ , and  $P_3$ , bear indefinitely many different relations of similarity and difference, only some of which are relevant. Of particular importance are those similarities and differences that hold among their respective contributions to a perceiver's epistemic relation to the objects they characterize. It is a specification of Andrei's perception of object<sub>1</sub>'s color utilizing the concept red that articulates how Andrei apprehends the color of the ball. Such specification makes transparent the *relevant* similarities and differences that hold between  $P_1$ ,  $P_2$ , and  $P_3$  – those similarities and differences that hold between their respective contribution to the reasons Andrei has,

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<sup>97</sup> This holds to an even greater extent if we utilize Sam's taxonomy of perceptible properties from the previous chapter.

and on the basis of which he deliberates and acts as he does (e.g., by utilizing the concept red, we are specifying  $P_1$  in a way that articulates the contribution that his perceiving  $P_1$  makes to his judging  $object_1$  more similar to  $object_2$  than to  $object_3$ ).

Andrei need not possess the concepts red, orange, and green, to have a full and normal experience of the balls and their respective colors. Nor does he need to possess these concepts in order for his perception of the balls and their respective colors to contribute to the reasons he has for deliberation and action. Nonetheless we have reason to utilize *these* concepts rather than co-extensive others when specifying the content of his perception.<sup>98</sup>

#### 4.4 Conclusions for non-epistemicism about perception

There are an indefinitely many co-extensive specifications of perceptual content (indefinitely many sets of terms can be used to pick out the properties perceived). If we respect the principle of *Personal-level reason explanation* then each such specification articulates the contribution that having the perception makes to the reasons the perceiver has. Some such specifications will be tailored to track certain similarities and differences among perceptible properties, for example, specifications in terms of microphysical structures. Other such specifications, for example, Sam's arbitrary notation from the

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<sup>98</sup> Of course, it is open to us to construct an artificial system of concepts that would have the same expressive power that our common sense color concepts have, and would, hence, serve to specify the content of Andrei's perception equally well. However, in such a case, these concepts would not only be co-extensive with our color concepts, but also co-intensive.

previous chapter, will gloss over *any* similarities and differences that might hold among perceptible properties.

To say that *all* co-extensive specifications are *equally* illuminating of the contribution that perceiving a perceptible property makes to the reasons the perceiver thereby has is, then, to say that for any given specification of content the *particular* similarities and differences that it is tailored to track are epistemically insignificant insofar as the subject is concerned. After all, a specification of the color properties utilizing our common sense color concepts purports to be equally illuminating of the contribution that perceiving them makes to reasons the perceiver has for engaging the objects they characterize as is a specification that glosses over *any* of the properties' similarity and difference relations. Yet, such a claim seems absurd.

The example of Andrei, above, is not a particularly contrived one, it is commonplace. If the non-epistemicist were correct, having a perception of the three objects would provide Andrei *equal* reason to sort them in any way whatsoever, or, equivalently, *no* reason to sort them in any particular way. The contribution made to the reasons he has would be indifferent among different sortings. But then the contribution that having this perception would make to the reasons he thereby has for engaging the objects he perceives would be unable to account for Andrei's sorting the objects as he does. Not only is this clearly not the case (as is manifest in his actual behavior), but perceiving the three objects *does* contribute to Andrei's reasons to engage the objects in a specific way, one that reflects a *particular* dimension of similarity and difference that holds among their perceptible properties, *rather than others*. Perhaps *some* co-extensive specifications will be equally adequate for articulating the nature of this contribution, but clearly not *all* (as the

availability of even one co-extensive specification that is completely insensitive to *any* similarities and differences among perceptible properties makes clear).

So long as we are committed to *Personal-level reason explanation*, a specification of content is to articulate the contribution that having a given perception makes to the reasons a perceiver thereby has. Sorting is the paradigmatic explanandum in the case of perception. If perception contributes anything to the reasons a perceiver has for engaging the world it must, at the very least, be a contribution to the reasons the perceiver has for sorting the objects perceived in some particular way rather than another.

Since the non-epistemicist position entails that the contribution that perception makes to the reasons a perceiver has is indifferent among different sortings, it is mysterious what sense can be made of the thought that perception makes *any* contribution at all to the reasons the perceiver has. It appears that the only way non-epistemicists can hold the position that *all* co-extensive specifications of perceptual content (*including Sam's*) are *equally* illuminating of the contribution that having a perception with such content makes to the reasons a perceiver *has*, is if they deny that having a perception with such content makes *any* such contribution at all. That is, if they deny the principle of *Personal-level reason explanation* and hold that perception is *epistemically inert from the point of view of the perceiver*.<sup>99</sup> (Considering the inconsistent triad with which the dissertation began, the non-epistemicist can then be seen as denying *Perceptual apprehension* – the claim that perception provides us reasons *directly*.)

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<sup>99</sup> As should be clear at this point in the dissertation, such an account of perceptual content, a specification of which is indifferent among co-extensives, still contributes to *our* understanding of the reasonableness (or not) of the perceiver's engagements. I return to this point below.

We are now in a position to say what is missing from the non-epistemicist's account of how the *Perspectival constraint* is satisfied in the case of perception. We have seen that a minimal perspectivalness – a sensitivity to *which* properties a perceiver represents objects as having, as a function of the perceiver's perspective and sensory apparatus – gives us an accurate specification of the correctness conditions of the perception. This, we have said, provides norms by which to establish the in/appropriateness of a range of actions that the perceiver might perform. Given perceiver A's perception of the Rubik's Cube, a judgment of the form 'the center of the cube is red' is appropriate (as well as a host of other judgments and activities). The perception had by perceiver B does not contribute to the appropriateness of this same judgment. The difference between the contributions that each perceiver's perception makes to the in/appropriateness of that perceiver's judgment can be made transparent by certain specifications of the correctness conditions of their respective perceptions. The former represents the surface of the center tile *as red* whereas the latter represents the surface of the center tile *as green*.

However, if such a specification is in fact only pseudo-intensional, as is the case for the non-epistemicist, then co-extensive specifications of these correctness conditions are equally illuminating of the contributions made by their respective perceptions to the reasons each perceiver *has*. The only way that *all* co-extensive specifications of these correctness conditions *can* be equally illuminating is if the perceptions they serve to specify *make no such contribution*. The picture then is one according to which A's perception of the cube makes no contribution to the reasons he *has* for a judgment of the form 'the center of the cube is red' (though, of course, it will contribute to the reasons

there *are* for the judgment, and perhaps also to the reasons *why* he made the judgment).<sup>100</sup>

Now, there is something nonetheless correct about the claim that a judgment of the form ‘the center of the cube is red’ is appropriate *from A’s perspective*, rather than *from B’s perspective*. Given that A has a properly functioning sensory system, and given A’s geometrical perspective in relation to the cube, A, but not B, is undergoing a state whose correctness conditions are satisfied by the presence of a red surface at the center of the cube. However, the discussion above indicates that such a claim involves an overly literal and unsatisfying understanding of the notion of *perspective*. The perspective we are interested in is the perspective of *A’s reasons*. We are looking for appropriateness not from the standpoint of rationality, but appropriateness from the standpoint of *A’s rationality*, i.e., from the standpoint of *the reasons A has*. A purely correctness conditions account of perceptual content (just like a purely truth-conditional account of belief content) can satisfy the former, but not the latter.

I believe that much confusion stems from this possible mistreatment of the notion of perspective. Heck (2000), for example, considers a correctness conditions account of perceptual contents, along the lines of Peacocke’s scenario contents, as sufficient for the

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<sup>100</sup> The above should recall the discussion in Chapter 2 of Vision’s (2009) notion of objectual perception as that contentful fundamental something that is to explain belief fixation. I argued that objectual perception cannot play that role. We have seen that there are an indefinitely many co-extensive specifications of objectual perception, only a subset of which might make transparent the appropriateness relation between the perception and the belief formed (or action undertaken). The objection to Vision’s position was that his account cannot explain how some such appropriateness relation could be *transparent from the perspective of the subject*. At this point, this should not be surprising as objectual perception just is a form of non-epistemicism about perception (following Dretske, 1969).



justification of belief.<sup>101</sup> He argues that the conceptualist's central complaint against the nonconceptualist is the latter's denial of the *Conceptual constraint*. Discussing McDowell, he says: "...if perception is to justify belief, then my enjoying a particular perceptual experience must give me a *reason* to hold a certain belief; and, or so he [McDowell] claims, *only something with conceptual content can be (or provide me with) a reason*. ... But we have yet to uncover any argument for this [latter] premise..."(p. 505)

However, once we recognize that a *merely* correctness conditions account of perceptual content can at most reveal a sensitivity to A's *minimal* perspective, we find that the real challenge is not with the claim that only something conceptual can contribute to what reasons A has. We can presume for the moment that such claim is false. Rather, it is the deeper and more sincere problem that limiting ourselves to such an account of A's perception entails that it makes *no* contribution to what reasons A *has*.<sup>102</sup> In other words, the problem is not that *only* something conceptual can contribute to what reasons we have, but that something non-epistemic *cannot* so contribute.

In this respect, Heck, McDowell, and others engaged in this debate, are potentially missing the most crucial point. Heck takes issue with McDowell's insistence on the claim

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<sup>101</sup> He says: "If, for example, the information carried by a given perceptual state is a scenario, a set of ways in which the space around the observer might be arranged, as on Peacocke's view, there will be no bar whatsoever to perceptions' standing in semantic relations with beliefs: Some beliefs about how space is arranged will be inconsistent with its being arranged in one of the ways the scenario includes; others, required by it; others, made probable by it; others, in the context, could be reliably inferred from it; and so on."(Heck, 2000, pp. 504-5)

<sup>102</sup> An important caveat is expressed by my qualification that such a result follows only if we are 'limiting ourselves' to such a specification. There is no reason to deny that correctness conditions enter into a correct specification of perceptual content. But, if a specification of the content of perception is to follow the *Perspectival constraint* the appeal to correctness conditions must be supplemented. In particular, these correctness conditions must be specified in a way that is sensitive to how *the subject* perceptually apprehends the world as being, how he 'takes' the world to be.

that *only* conceptual contents contribute to the reasons a perceiver (or thinker) has. He correctly complains that we have seen no argument to support this exclusivity claim. But the insistence that something nonconceptual can *also* contribute to a perceiver's reasons, is merely a description of what needs to be explained. A correctness conditions account of perceptual content fails to provide such explanation. These correctness conditions are established by a sensitivity to a minimal perspective, and can show that certain judgments/actions are appropriate or not from that perspective. But this is not yet an elucidation of appropriateness from the perspective of *the perceiver reasons*. McDowell, on the other hand, misconstrues the nonconceptualist position as *entailing a correctness conditions only* account of perceptual content, which is not adequately sensitive to the *relevant* perspective of the perceiver – the perspective of the perceiver's reasons. It is conceptual or bust, according to McDowell.<sup>103</sup>

However, as we have repeatedly seen, nothing about nonconceptualism *itself* entails an account of perceptual content that stops short of providing a substantive account of a subject's perceptual apprehension of the world – one that *does* make sense of the potential of perception to provide the perceiver reasons. Once more, we see why the debate that has waged for the last few decades between conceptualists and nonconceptualists about the *Conceptual constraint* is in fact only a proxy to the debate about the potential satisfiability of the *Perspectival constraint*. It is only if we conflate nonconceptualism with non-epistemicism that issues regarding the *Conceptual constraint* take center stage.

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<sup>103</sup> McDowell (1994a) is explicit about this. To demand a notion of perceptual content that is short of *conceptual* content but nonetheless purports to be reason-giving is to fall into the Myth of the Given. It's either conceptual content or no content at all.

In the next chapter I develop a general formulation of what being a reason-giving state amounts to. As we have seen, the differences cited by nonconceptualists between belief and perception need not have an impact on *whether* perception is a reason-giving state but at most on the *character* of its contribution to the reasons a perceiver thereby has. Given that, insofar as the purposes of this dissertation are concerned, the analogy between belief and perception stands, I will proceed to develop the analogy with belief, as the paradigmatic reason-giving state, in constructing this general formulation. Having this formulation in hand will provide a better understanding of the allure of the conceptualist position. But, more importantly, it will allow the construction of a notion of *nonconceptual* perceptual content that is consistent with perception's being a reason-giving state. Hence, it will allow for a notion of perception that potentially respects both *Bifurcation\**, and *Perceptual apprehension*, as expressed in Chapter 1.

## Chapter 5: Reason-giving, belief, and concept possession

### 5.1 Introduction: Stepping into the realm of reason

Mount Tungurahua in central Ecuador erupts. Lava sputters out of its mouth slowly flowing towards the villages at its base, and a mixture of smoke and hot ash rises several miles into the air eventually to descend on an inhabited area some 40 miles in diameter. The eruption is a highly significant event for those many thousands of life-loving residents of the nearby town, Baños, much of which is damaged by thick layers of ash.<sup>104</sup> Though such an event is of momentous significance to inhabitants of the area, it does not follow that Tungurahua's eruption provides them reason to alter in any way their normal daily activities. Trivially, for the people of Baños to interrupt, and appropriately alter, their daily activities they must be *appropriately* aware of Tungurahua's eruption. It will not do that they *entertain* the possibility of its eruption, nor that they *desire, wish, or hope*, that it erupts.<sup>105</sup> They must be aware of its eruption *in a way that potentially makes transparent to them* its detrimental significance to the pursuit of their personal goals. Paradigmatically, they must *believe* that mount Tungurahua is erupting.

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<sup>104</sup> Mount Tungurahua erupted most recently in 2006, resulting in the evacuation of nearly half of Baños' residents, the complete destruction of several villages, as well as the premature death of several villagers.

<sup>105</sup> Of course, this is not to say that their having any of these attitudes towards Tungurahua's eruption has no impact on their actions. It is merely to say that the actual eruption of Tungurahua will have no impact on their actions, if these are the *only* attitudes they have towards its eruption.

Furthermore, though having this belief potentially provides them a reason for halting their previous activities and evacuating the area, it is not sufficient for their attempting to do so. Whether it is evacuation that people find appropriate in light of Tungurahua's eruption depends on much else that they believe and desire. The early natives of the area might have seen the eruption as a sign of a furious mountain god in need of sacrificial appeasement. As a result, their belief that Tungurahua is erupting might have provided them their reason for preparing the next virgin maiden for offering (and likely provided reason for some measure of panic to every virgin maiden in the area). Furthermore, it is clear that having this belief might provide the believer reason for *many* (indeed, an open-ended amount of) undertakings, some of which might conflict. Likely, many of those early natives were conflicted as to what their belief that Tungurahua is erupting gives them most reason to do, to flee or to execute an innocent maiden. Evacuation (preparing a sacrifice, panicking, etc.) seems the appropriate thing to do only on a background of certain further beliefs and goals, and it will seem to a particular native the appropriate thing to do only given that the native *has* these further desires and beliefs. Putting to the side such background considerations for the moment, the belief that Tungurahua is erupting provides a light by which those who have it potentially adjust their actions their desires, hopes, and beliefs. Beliefs, we can say, are paradigmatic reason-giving states.

The aim of this chapter is twofold: first, to consider what a belief's reason-giving status amounts to, and, second, to consider what it is about beliefs in virtue of which they have this special status. This chapter builds upon much that has been said in previous chapters. In particular, I will develop the claim that the reason-giving status of a belief is an expression of the fact that having a belief involves a *particular kind of contribution* to the

subject's *epistemic orientation* towards the world (or towards the purported object of the belief more particularly. I will often omit this qualification and speak of one's epistemic orientation simpliciter). The notion of an epistemic *orientation* is relatively intuitive and seemingly straightforward. However, it is a metaphor that is in need of unpacking. One's epistemic orientation can be understood as individuated in terms of one's epistemic dispositions, where these involve, at the very least, dispositions to make certain inferences and to recognize the potential satisfiability of certain of one's desires. The contribution that having a given belief makes to one's epistemic orientation can then be understood in terms of the contribution that having the belief makes to the set of epistemic dispositions one has.

Furthermore, I will argue that the reason-giving status of belief is a function of, and can be explained by, the exploitation of certain of the believer's epistemic capacities in having the belief. The *particular* contribution to one's epistemic orientation that having a given belief makes is determined as a function of, and is explained by appeal to, which of the *conceptual* capacities one possesses are exploited in one's having the belief.

Not all accounts of concepts *explain* the reason-giving role of belief. It is, thus, a central aim of this chapter to articulate what these conceptual capacities must be like if they are to provide an appropriate explanation. In particular, I will consider the schism between neo-Cartesian and Pragmatist accounts of concepts,<sup>106</sup> and argue that the former, but not

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<sup>106</sup> As Fodor (2004a; 2008) characterizes it. Fodor is pointing to a long standing division in philosophy that is most clearly expressed in Ryle's (1949) Behaviorist reaction against Cartesian, or Intellectualist, accounts of the mind, according to which theorizing is prior to acting – knowing *that* is prior to knowing *how*. Ryle argued that we have no hope of accounting for the intelligence of our actions by appeal to the antecedent intelligence of our theorizing (about how to act). Theorizing itself is an activity that can be done intelligently or not. But, then, some prior

the latter, is lacking in much the same ways as neo-Russellian accounts of perceptual content (as argued in Chapters 3 and 4). Conceptual capacities according to the neo-Cartesian are *not* appropriate *epistemic* capacities.

Considered within the broader context of the dissertation, this chapter reflects a shift in focus relative to its predecessors – from a largely expository and challenging perspective to a positive, constructive, one. Recall that a central difficulty for resolving the epistemic problem of perception, explored in Chapter 1, was the principle of *Exclusivity\**. The principle states that only belief-like states can be reason-giving states. The central rationale supporting this principle was that it is only in the case of belief-like states that the subject having them is in a position to treat their contents as premises in an argument of practical or theoretical reasoning. It is only belief-like states the having of which makes reasons for action and deliberation transparent to the subject. The challenge, when thinking about perception as significantly unlike belief, is to identify how it too can be a reason-giving state – in the sense of making reasons *available* to the perceiver – without thereby implying that the perceiver is in a position to treat its contents as premises in reasoning. We have already seen that non-epistemic accounts of perception, appealing to purely externally individuated contents, fall short of meeting this challenge. Nonetheless, it was suggested that an epistemic, yet nonconceptual, account of perceptual content may provide a notion of perception as contributing to the reasons a perceiver has, albeit a

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theorizing would need to be in place so as to account for the intelligence of the theorizing itself. Therefore, he argued, a Cartesian account of our intelligent engagements with the world forces us either into an infinite regress, or to accept them as brute causal transactions, i.e., no intelligence at all. Ryle's concern is also illustrated nicely in Lewis Carroll's (1895) parable about Achilles and the Tortoise. A similar worry is presumably at the core of Wittgenstein's (1953) contemplations about rule following (see Kripke 1982). Fodor attempts a re-inversion of this picture of the mind; to regain the Cartesian conception according to which theorizing is prior to action (see, most explicitly, his 2008).

contribution that may differ in kind from that which beliefs make. What is required is a clearer understanding of what being a reason-giving state amounts to and what conditions must be in place if a given mental state is to have such status.

The analysis undertaken in this chapter, of what a belief's reason-giving status amounts to and how it depends on the conceptual capacities of a given subject, is an analysis of what a subject's treating the content of the state as a premise in reasoning consists in. It articulates the nature of the contribution that having a belief makes to the believer's reasons. It shed light on what it is in virtue of which having the belief that Tungurahua is erupting is a mode of apprehending the world that makes transparent to people in the area the significance of Tungurahua's eruption to their actions and deliberations. Such an analysis will also clarify the attractiveness of the conceptualist position about perceptual content (the idea that perception, in relevant respects, *is* belief-like).<sup>107</sup> But, more importantly, it will give us the means by which to develop a *concept-independent* notion of reason-giving; a concept-independent notion of apprehension. Such a notion is

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<sup>107</sup> Recall that in Chapters 3 and 4 the initial difficulty uncovered with the notion of nonconceptual content was that its specification was insensitive to the conceptual capacities possessed by the subject. However, we took it for granted that a specification of content that *is* constrained by the subject's conceptual repertoire, as is the case with the propositional attitudes, illuminates how perception can amount to a reason-giving awareness of the world. We have assumed, with the conceptualist about perceptual content, that exploiting a concept in representing the world entails that the subject apprehends the world in such a way that the subject *has reasons* in light of which to engage the world appropriately. With this *assumption* in hand, the conceptualists appeared to have some advantage that served to challenge the nonconceptualist, by requiring a *substantive* account of apprehension; a challenge that I have argued cannot be met by purely externalist accounts of content individuation. However, it is precisely the aim of this chapter to articulate what concepts must be like if their exploitation in representing the world is to provide the subject reasons for engaging the world appropriately. In other words, the aim here is to elucidate how the appeal to the exploitation of concepts in having a mental state is supposed to provide a substantive account of apprehension; i.e., how conceptual capacities are capacities for apprehending the world.



required if there is to be any hope of articulating what perception must involve if it too is to count as a reason-giving state.

Corresponding to the aforementioned goals of this chapter, the position I will argue for is a composite of two separable claims, which I will take up in turn:

1. S's having a belief that *p* makes a *unique* contribution, *Z*, to S's epistemic dispositions in relation to the world (it shapes S's epistemic orientation in a certain unique way).
2. The contribution, *Z*, that having a belief that *p* makes to S's epistemic dispositions is a particular function of, and is explained by appeal to, the concepts exploited in having the belief (and, hence, possessed by S).

### 5.2 The reason-giving status of belief

The first claim (1) I wish to argue for is relatively straightforward. As we have seen in previous chapters, the *claim* that beliefs are reason-giving states, i.e., that they make a distinct contribution to the reasons a believer has, follows directly from their paradigmatic role within common sense (folk) psychological explanation of deliberation and action. Hence, *that* they are reason-giving states should be accepted by anyone who takes such explanations seriously. In particular, beliefs are called upon to illuminate the reasons for which we form (and revise) judgments about the world and for which we initiate action towards it in a way that is sensitive to our desires and our other beliefs (and, when all goes well, to the way the world is).

When we attribute to Sam a belief that *p* we normally do so on the basis of some piece of Sam's overt behavior, verbal or otherwise, the reasonableness of which is best seen in light of *p*. When Sam actively seeks out every town-hall meeting on healthcare reform in the country and screams at the top of his lungs various obscenities at its proponents, it is a safe bet that Sam believes that reform is somehow a bad thing. But, attributing to Sam this belief does not merely provide us a rationale for his *current* behavior by articulating the lights by which Sam finds such behavior appropriate. It also serves as a reliable predictor of his future behaviors. We expect that were we to ask what he thought about healthcare reform, he would give voice to this belief and provide an answer along the lines of its being a bad thing for government to enact. If we were to point out to him the various benefits of reform we expect that he would resist our argumentation, perhaps citing further claims the belief in which provide him reason to hold the belief that reform is bad (e.g., the claim that it would create a greater tax burden on the middle class, that it violates an individual's right to self-governance, or even that it is 'un-American'). Then again, perhaps none of these would be the case. An alternative scenario might be more subtle. When confronted with the benefits of reform, Sam might concur, but nonetheless be recalcitrant to enacting it, citing as his reason the need for full bipartisan support for a reform of such significance.<sup>108</sup>

The upshot of this short narrative is that, though attribution of particular beliefs is always open to revision in the light of new evidence, *what counts as evidence* for such

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<sup>108</sup> Perhaps Sam would answer that he is in fact a strong proponent of reform but suffers from turrets syndrome. He *has no reason* for shouting obscenities (though the reason *why* he shouts is his having the illness). The distinctions employed here among different 'reason' locutions should be familiar from the previous chapters.

modifications are various manifestations of the subject's epistemic dispositions. These are most clearly his voiced assertions that we take to be sincere articulations of his beliefs, but also the actions we assume he takes himself to have reason to perform.<sup>109</sup> The guiding assumption in attributing a particular belief is that having that belief gives particular shape to the subject's epistemic orientation to the world. It contributes to the epistemic dispositions the subject has. When a piece of behavior violates our expectations as to the epistemic dispositions we take the subject to have, we are urged to modify our belief attribution accordingly. Sam, contrary to initial appearances, *does not* believe that healthcare reform is somehow a bad thing. Rather he believes that the process of leading the reform violates certain principles involved in his conception of a just democracy. The former belief would have provided him reason to resist the benefits of reform, which according to the final scenario described he does not. The latter belief, on the other hand, better explains the various actions, verbal and otherwise, that Sam manifests. Having this latter belief would contribute to his reasons for being vocal at the town-hall meetings, *and* would be consistent with the reasons he has by virtue of believing that reform has many important benefits.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> I am here giving expression to the now familiar account of belief attribution most eloquently and extensively discussed by Davidson. As he notes, such attributions are made under the assumption that Sam is a rational agent. All attributions of folk psychological attitudes must make some assumptions of rationality about the person to whom these attitudes are attributed as well as assumptions about the extent to which the person is knowledgeable of the world. These assumptions are continuously open to modification. See, e.g., Davidson (2001a; 2001b; 2001c), as well as Dennett (1971; 1987), and Fodor (1987).

<sup>110</sup> Of course, we are not *compelled* to revise our initial belief attribution. The process of belief attribution, as Davidson argues, is a holistic one, driven by principles of charity and rationality. It might turn out that such principles favor attributing to Sam some further beliefs or desires while retaining our initial attribution to him of the belief that reform is somehow a bad thing.

Frege cases, which were briefly discussed in the previous chapters, provide a special challenge for belief attribution. They introduce the threat of simultaneously attributing to a person two contradictory beliefs. Extending such cases to the scenario above, we might be initially tempted to say that Sam at once believes that reform is a positive thing *and* believes that reform is a negative thing. But having both beliefs simultaneously would make contradicting contributions to the reasons Sam has. He would have equal reason to tout for reform as he would to act against it. He would have reason to do neither. *De facto*, his epistemic dispositions towards reform, and his epistemic orientation to the world in general, would be no different were he to have neither belief. Thus, whatever motivation we might have for attributing to him these contradictory beliefs is also motivation for attributing to him neither belief.<sup>111</sup> The fact that, nonetheless, we can attribute to Sam what, *on the face of it*, appear to be contradictory beliefs is an indication of the fine-grained nature of belief attribution, but more importantly *it is an indication of the fine-grained nature of the contribution that having a belief makes to the reasons one has*.

Considered abstractly, say that *p* and *q* are complete declarative sentences sharing all their constituent terms with one exception: the singular term P in *p* is replaced in *q* with the singular term Q, where P and Q are co-extensive. That it is possible, and is often required, that we attribute to S the belief that *p* rather than the belief that *q*, is indication of the fact that there exist certain differences between the contributions that each belief

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<sup>111</sup> With the exception that proceeding with the former violates a central precondition on the possibility of belief attribution – the principle of charity – it treats Sam as irrational (see Davidson, *ibid.*).

would make to S's epistemic dispositions the manifestation of which our belief attributions are sensitive to.

Sam's belief that reform is a positive thing *does not* contradict his belief that reform is a negative thing. Both beliefs are *of*, or *about*, the same thing or process – namely, about healthcare reform – but in having each of these beliefs he is thinking about reform in different *ways*. In the first he is thinking of reform as a modification to a broken healthcare system, whereas in the second he is thinking of reform as a legislative/political act. The belief that reform [as a modification to a broken healthcare system] is a positive thing makes a different contribution to the reasons Sam has for acting, i.e., to his epistemic dispositions, than the contribution that the belief that reform [as a legislative/political act] is a positive thing (had he had this belief) would make to his epistemic dispositions.

It is a sensitivity to just these differences upon which successful belief attribution rests. It is a fine-grained sensitivity to how a belief shapes the epistemic orientation of the believer – how it contributes to the epistemic dispositions that the perceiver has.

Furthermore, claim (1) states that this contribution is *unique*. That is, the belief that *p* and the belief that *q* make contributions  $Z_1$  and  $Z_2$  (where  $Z_1 \neq Z_2$ ), respectively, to S's epistemic orientation. Indeed, if having the belief that *p* and having the belief that *q* made *the same* contribution to S's epistemic dispositions (i.e., if  $Z_1 = Z_2$ ), there would be no principled reason to attribute to S the belief that *p* rather than the belief that *q*. This is so since the roles that the attribution of each belief would play in the prediction and explanation of S's deliberations and actions would be identical. As far as folk psychology is concerned, and as far as we are concerned in discussing the reason-giving status of

belief, it would be more appropriate to say that the belief that *p* and the belief that *q* are in fact one and the same belief.<sup>112</sup>

It is important to keep in mind the distinction between *which epistemic dispositions S has* by virtue of having a given belief, and the *contribution* that having that belief makes to S's epistemic dispositions. Nothing in the above entails that having a belief that *p* makes a unique contribution *of* epistemic dispositions to S. Rather, the claim is that having a belief makes a unique contribution *to* S's epistemic dispositions. The early natives of Ecuador and the current residents of Baños could both have *the same* belief (type) that the volcano is erupting, but, as mentioned, the contribution that having that belief makes to their epistemic dispositions may eventuate in vastly different epistemic dispositions. Contrariwise, two people could have *different* beliefs but possess *the same* epistemic dispositions. It is a familiar point that S<sub>1</sub> and S<sub>2</sub> could differ markedly in which beliefs and desires they have and yet possess *all the same (extensionally specified) epistemic dispositions*; they might have the same total epistemic orientation to the world. As a result, the manifestation of these dispositions would not provide a principled reason to attribute them one set of beliefs and desires rather than another. As Quine and Davidson point out, the totality of evidence leaves interpretation, or attribution, indeterminate.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> There may be reasons *extrinsic* to the concerns of folk psychology that might lead one to claim that two beliefs that are identical in terms of the contributions they make to S's epistemic orientation are nonetheless distinct belief types. However, I am skeptical about the utility of such a proposal.

<sup>113</sup> See Quine (e.g., 1960; 1969) and Davidson (2001a, esp. his (1973a; 1974) in that collection; 2001b, esp. his (1973b); and 2001c, esp. his (1997)). Quine, of course, was primarily concerned with language and meaning. He argued that since there are an indefinitely many extensionally equivalent translations (i.e., translations that account for all the behavioral evidence) there are no meanings. Davidson was concerned with interpretation, the attribution of beliefs and its dependence on meaning. Contrary to Quine, Davidson holds that "[i]ndeterminacy of meaning or translation does not represent a failure to capture significant distinctions; it marks the fact that

This could be problematic if we thought that the belief that *p* must provide the subject having it a *unique* set of epistemic dispositions. This is not the case. The claim is that having the belief that *p* makes a unique *contribution* to the subject's epistemic dispositions. Different subjects (or the same subject at different times) could have different epistemic dispositions in virtue of having one and the same belief, involving one and the same contribution *Z*. It is the contribution to one's epistemic dispositions, not the epistemic dispositions themselves, we care about when attributing the belief that *p*.<sup>114</sup>

For illustration purposes, we can think of the relation between the *contribution* that having a belief makes to a subject's epistemic disposition and the subject's actual resultant epistemic dispositions as analogous to a certain way of thinking about the relation between the *contribution* that having a given property makes to an object's dispositions and the object's actual resultant dispositions. When we say that two objects have the same (or exactly similar) property, say, a mass of 50kg, we are not suggesting that the two objects thereby have the same (or exactly similar) dispositions. We are

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certain apparent distinctions are not significant. If there is indeterminacy, it is because when all the evidence is in, alternative ways of stating the facts remain.”(1974, p. 154). Or, as he says in his (1999) reply to Quine: “...what a speaker means is what is invariant in all correct ways of interpreting him.”(p. 81)

<sup>114</sup> Though we attribute to Sam a given belief on the basis of the manifestation of certain epistemic dispositions, e.g., the disposition to scream obscenities at a town-hall meeting about healthcare, the attribution is not atomistic. It is made on the basis of additional assumptions we have of Sam's mental life – that he is rational and that he has mostly true (by our lights) beliefs. We hold that insofar as possible Sam has the same beliefs and desires we do. When we attribute to Sam a belief on the basis of his action, we attribute to him that belief the contribution of which would provide *us* reason to act as he does were we to have it. The attribution of a particular belief is made concurrently with the attribution of a whole slew of other beliefs and desires that provide the background in relation to which the unique contribution that the belief attributed would make to Sam's epistemic orientation involve dispositions to act as Sam manifestly does. This is the first step into the process of interpretation. To quote a fitting metaphor from Quine's (1960) discussion of the process of Radical Translation, it is a “way of catapulting oneself into the jungle language by the momentum of the home language” (p. 70).

suggesting that the presence of the property makes the same contribution to the object's dispositions. Having a mass of 50kg disposes both objects to resist an upwards force with a contrary force of 490.3 Newton (on Earth). But, in the case of a (very thin) 40m<sup>2</sup> triangular sheet of titanium, having a mass of 50kg disposes the object to make a very slight triangular indentation in a wax surface, whereas in the case of a titanium ball, having a mass of 50kg disposes the object to make a deep concave indentation in that same wax surface. This follows from the fact that which dispositions an object has depends also on which *other* properties characterize it.<sup>115</sup> Nonetheless, in saying that both objects have the same (or exactly similar) property we are suggesting that the same *contribution* is being made to their respective dispositions (whatever else we might be saying as well).

Summing up, the treatment of the example above follows from taking seriously the role that beliefs play in folk psychological explanations. We make reference to Sam's belief that reform is somehow a negative thing in our explanation of his actions because we take his having this belief to contribute in particular ways to the inferences he is disposed to draw and to the desires the satisfiability of which he is disposed to recognize. Thus, that belief involves a contribution to the subject's epistemic dispositions follows from a very wide range of theories about the nature of propositional attitudes. It follows whether one takes the truth makers of propositional attitude attributions to be appropriately tokened

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<sup>115</sup> Note that the mass of the titanium ball also *contributes* to its disposition to make a very slight *triangular* indentation in the same wax surface, only that this disposition in the case of the ball but not in the case of the triangular titanium sheet, is blocked or defeated by the former's shape property. As a result, the *ball* will not be disposed to make a triangular indentation so long as its shape property is unaltered.



sentences in an internal ‘language of thought,’ as does Fodor.<sup>116</sup> But it also follows from an instrumentalism about propositional attitudes that takes their truth makers to be whatever allows for the correct interpretation of the rational behavior of certain systems, as does Dennett in taking the intentional stance.<sup>117</sup> Whatever beliefs turn out to be, the reason that an appeal to beliefs in the explanation of our rational deliberation and action is useful is because beliefs play an essential role in contributing to our epistemic orientation in relation to the world. Only eliminativists about propositional attitudes would deny that having a belief does so.<sup>118</sup> If you don’t think that there are any beliefs then, *a fortiori*, you don’t think that having them contributes to your epistemic orientation. I have little to say against the eliminativist position except that folk psychology seems to work just fine, and I will assume that it does throughout.<sup>119</sup>

### 5.3 Concept-dependence and reason-giving

The claim that different beliefs make different unique contributions to one’s epistemic dispositions is merely an expression of the role we take them to play in folk psychological explanation and prediction. However, such a characterization of the phenomena takes us towards murky waters. Talk of dispositions for deliberation and action is notoriously unsatisfying. In particular, we need to explain what it is about these

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<sup>116</sup> See, e.g., Fodor (1975; 1978; 1985; 1987).

<sup>117</sup> See, e.g., Dennett (1987; 1991), as well as Davidson (2001b, and 2001c, esp. his (1997) in which he rejects the notion that the indeterminacy involved in belief attribution entails an antirealism about the propositional attitudes).

<sup>118</sup> See, e.g., Churchland (1981; 1984).

<sup>119</sup> For a thorough, and I believe successful, reply to the eliminativist charge, see Horgan & Woodward (1985).

dispositions to make certain transitions in thought or to execute certain actions in virtue of which they are *epistemic* dispositions. After all, being so disposed might come about by some rare and complicated disease or by being repeatedly hit on the head with a mallet. For these dispositions to be genuinely *epistemic* dispositions, and for us to make sense of a subject's occupying an *epistemic* orientation towards the world, it is not sufficient to point to the fact that having a belief disposes one to make de facto appropriate transitions between thoughts or to perform de facto appropriate actions. A disposition to make a certain transition in thought is a disposition to draw an *inference* (an *epistemic* disposition) only insofar as one *has* reason(s) in light of which one finds the transition appropriate (irrespective of whether or not it *is* appropriate). And a disposition to satisfy a given desire by performing a certain behavior is an *epistemic* disposition only insofar as one has reason(s) in light of which one recognizes the appropriateness of the behavior to the satisfaction of that desire. Crucially, then, we need to make sense of one's *having reasons in light of which one is so disposed*.

Thus, looking to the contribution that having a belief makes to the dispositions that one has does not yet capture the epistemic nature of this contribution – it does not yet elucidate the reason-giving status of beliefs. It merely provides a description of the phenomenon in need of explanation. What is further required is a substantive account of the capacities involved in having beliefs such as would *explain* their reason-giving character and account for the particular contribution that having a belief makes to one's epistemic dispositions. It is these gaps that claim (2), above, aims to fill.

The claim is that the unique contribution *Z* that having a given belief makes to *S*'s epistemic dispositions is determined as a function of, and is explained by appeal to, the

concepts exploited (and, *a fortiori*, possessed by the subject) in having the belief. The truth of this second claim plausibly depends on what we take concepts to be, what it is to possess a concept, and how we think concepts are related to the propositional attitudes. The space of possibilities here is enormous. However, as mentioned in the introduction, a particularly revealing contrast within this space is, to use Fodor's (2004a; 2008) terms, one between neo-Cartesian and Pragmatist accounts of concepts (more will be said about the contrast between these broad categories as they are discussed below). In evaluating claim (2), I will focus on exemplars of each. Peacocke's inferential role semantics (IRS) will serve as representative of the latter, whereas Fodor's informational semantics will serve as representative of the former.<sup>120</sup> As we shall see, these two positions stand in diametrical opposition within the space of possibilities mentioned – in what they take concepts to be (Fregean Senses/mental particulars), in what it is to possess a concept (satisfying certain a-priori possession conditions/having thoughts involving that concept),

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<sup>120</sup> One reason for focusing on Peacocke's version of inferential role semantics is that Fodor (2004a) takes Peacocke to be his main Pragmatist opponent. As a result, the debate between Fodor and Peacocke best manifests the Cartesian/Pragmatist divide, and it is useful to follow this debate in framing the current discussion. An additional, and more important, reason for this choice is that Peacocke's is perhaps the most thoroughly developed version of concepts and inferential role semantics. Finally, it will provide us a better understanding of his account of perceptual content and observational concepts which will be discussed in the next chapter. Nonetheless, it is important to bear in mind that these are merely representatives of two broad families of theories of concepts. Other proponents of some form of informational semantics are Dretske (e.g., 1981; 1986; 1995), Millikan (e.g., 1989; 2000), and Margolis (1998), to name but a few. Among the representatives of some form of inferential/causal/functional role semantics are Harman (1982) and Block (1986). For representatives of a host of other theories of concepts that do not neatly fall in either of the aforementioned categories see the various articles in Margolis & Laurence (1999). The majority of the theories of concepts represented there (such as definitionism, prototype, exemplar, and theory-theory) hold that there is some constituency relation between possessing a given concept and possessing other concepts or having available certain epistemic capacities, and in this sense they are antithetical to Fodor's atomistic account and in important respects similar to Peacocke's. However, with respect to the nature of concepts, most of the theories represented hold, as Fodor does, that concepts are mental particulars rather than abstract objects (with exceptions, of course). As I have said, the space of possibilities is enormous, and though I cannot argue for it here, I believe that the discussion that follows applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to these other theories as well.

and in how concepts are related to propositional attitudes (constituents of Fregean contents/constituent vehicles of Russellian contents). Many of the heated debates raging in the current literature on concepts and mental content can be understood in light of the contrast between these two positions. But, most importantly, the contrast between these two positions revolves around the central question of this chapter – whether and, if so, how the exploitation of conceptual capacities in representing the world accounts for the subject’s having reasons (for deliberation and action).

This is not the place to give detailed accounts of each position, nor to resolve the many conflicts between them about which Peacocke remarks ‘it would be possible to spend a lifetime’ (2004a, p. 85). Nonetheless, I will attempt to say enough so as to expose the different ways in which we might account for the determination of the contribution that having a given belief makes to the believer’s epistemic orientation as a function of the concepts exploited in that belief. I will argue that both are able to provide some account of the *dependence* relation between the concepts exploited and the contribution made to one’s epistemic orientation. However, I will further argue that certain features of Fodor’s account, and neo-Cartesianism in general, prevent it from providing an adequate *explanation* of the reason-giving status of beliefs, of a belief’s making a contribution to one’s epistemic orientation, in terms of the exploitation of one’s conceptual capacities. The central upshot of attending to Fodor’s position is to illuminate the conditions that an account of concepts must meet if the exploitation of such concepts is to explain a belief’s reason-giving status; conditions that Fodor’s neo-Cartesian position fails to satisfy and that the Pragmatist, and in particular, Peacocke’s position, accommodates.

### 5.3.1 Concepts as constituents of propositional attitudes

Of course, for claim (2) even to get off the ground it must be the case that having a belief involves the exploitation of concepts possessed by the believer. This latter claim derives from the central role of concepts as constituents of propositional attitudes. A subject's undergoing a certain propositional attitude, then, *presupposes* that the subject possesses all the constituents of which the attitude is composed. If one does not possess the concept snow, one cannot believe, desire, hope, wish, or entertain the thought, that snow is white.

There are a variety of reasons why we might be drawn to the view that propositional attitudes have concepts as constituents, and hence that having a propositional attitude depends on the exploitation of concepts one possesses. Perhaps most widely considered and relevant to our concerns is the apparent need to explain the productivity and systematicity of our attitudes (endorsed by both representatives under consideration).<sup>121</sup>

The former expresses the fact that, though we are finite creatures, we can nonetheless think an unlimited number of different thoughts. The latter expresses the apparent psychological generalization that one who is capable of thinking that Mary has never been to Washington and that John is a resident of Ohio, for example, is also capable of thinking that Mary has never been to Ohio (whether or not that thought ever crosses one's mind). The most straightforward explanation for both these features is the same kind of

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<sup>121</sup> As Peacocke (2004a) says: "Fodor and I agree that systematicity and productivity are non-negotiable features of conceptual content. We diverge in our views of the source of these features. He has long regarded them as empirical matters of psychological law, and still does so, while I hold them to be a priori features of contents composed from concepts. But whatever their source, we agree that theories that are incompatible with this systematicity and productivity must be rejected."(p. 90)

explanation provided for the productivity and systematicity of language, namely, that thoughts have recombinable constituents – i.e., concepts.<sup>122</sup>

Different accounts of concepts differ with respect to the *sense* in which concepts are the recombinable constituents of propositional attitudes. The two representatives mentioned in the previous section, Fodor and Peacocke, are a case in point.

Fodor argues that propositional attitudes are *mental representations* the constituents of which are concepts. Concepts themselves are representational elements and hence are psychological particulars that *have* content; they are the *vehicles* with which we represent propositions (understood in Russellian terms), rather than the *contents* of our representations.<sup>123</sup> To have a belief one must then possess all the concepts that are its constituents.

According to Peacocke, concepts, rather than being mental particulars that *have* content, are the constituents of the *content* of propositional attitudes, where these contents – propositions – are understood as Fregean Thoughts.<sup>124</sup> In order to have a belief with a certain propositional content one must possess all of the concepts that are its constituents.

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<sup>122</sup> Reflection on these properties of thought has led Evans to propose his Generality Constraint on thought: "...if a subject can be credited with the thought that *a* is *F*, then he must have the conceptual resources for entertaining the thought that *a* is *G*, for every property of being *G* of which he has a conception."(1982, p. 104)

<sup>123</sup> In arguing against a Fregean account of concepts, as modes of presentation (MOPs), Fodor is explicit about this point: "...MOPs are supposed to be the *vehicles* of thought, and entertaining a MOP means using it to present to thought whatever the MOP is a mode of presentation of; it's thinking *with* the MOP, not thinking *about* it" (1998a, p. 18). See also Fodor (1975; 1990).

<sup>124</sup> "Concepts are constituents of those intentional contents which can be the complete, truth-evaluable, contents of judgment and belief" (Peacocke, 2001a, p. 243). See also Peacocke (1992).

If we hold some version of either of these divergent positions, then having the belief that  $p$  rather than the belief that  $q$  is a matter of a difference in which concepts possessed by the subject are exploited in having the belief. There is a straightforward sense, then, in which the unique contribution  $Z$  that  $S$ 's having a belief that  $p$  makes to  $S$ 's epistemic dispositions *depends* on the concepts exploited in having the belief that  $p$ . Having different beliefs involves exploiting different concepts, and having different beliefs makes different unique contributions (as discussed in Section 5.2). So, exploiting different concepts entails making different unique contributions. However, this does not yet provide the *explanation* that we seek. What is required is an explanation of what it is about the exploitation of a particular concept in having a belief in virtue of which  $S$ 's having that belief makes the unique contribution  $Z$  that it does to  $S$ 's epistemic orientation.

### 5.3.2 The dependency of epistemic contribution on the exploitation of concepts

Let us turn now to consider the claim that the unique contribution  $Z$  that having a given belief makes to  $S$ 's epistemic dispositions is determined and explained as a function of which of the concepts that  $S$  possesses are exploited in having the belief.

Here too, as in previous chapters, Frege cases can prove useful guides. As a reminder, in the previous chapter (Section 4.3), a formulation of Frege's Criterion of Identity for Senses was appealed to as illustrating how the fine-grained specification of belief content articulates the contribution that having a given belief makes to a person's finding certain actions and deliberations appropriate from the person's point of view. I argued that a

specification of content utilizing the concept triangular articulates a different contribution than having a belief about the shape of a triangle makes than a specification of content utilizing the concept trilateral. For example, the former but not the latter indicates a contribution to one's finding appropriate a judgment involving the concept triangular, without *thereby* contributing to one's finding appropriate a similar judgment in which the concept trilateral figures in its stead. The objective of this section, the bulk of the chapter, is to provide an explanation of how the exploitation of a given concept in having a belief determines this unique contribution. One of its challenges, then, is to explain how the differential exploitation of the concepts triangle or trilateral account for the differential contribution that beliefs involving them respectively make.

Consider a belief that represents some object O through the exploitation of the concept P (e.g., the belief that the volcano is erupting, in which case a mountain, Tungurahua say, is represented by having a belief exploiting the concept volcano). How does the involvement of the concept P in S's belief about O determine the contribution Z to S's epistemic orientation in relation to the world, and in relation to O in particular? How does a belief about the mountain that represents it *as a volcano* contribute to the epistemic dispositions had by a resident of Baños having that belief? The two representative accounts I consider here provide two very different ways in which the contribution to S's epistemic dispositions, in having a belief, is a function of the concepts exploited in the belief.<sup>125</sup> Fodor's account considers the contribution that having a given belief makes as a

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<sup>125</sup> Note that if they are to be adequate for the purposes of folk psychology they will have to be *extensionally equivalent*, i.e., provide the same mapping from concepts exploited to contributions made. This is not to say that their respective *explanations* of this mapping are the same. Nor is it to say that they are on the same footing with respect to *other* desiderata that an appeal to concepts



function of the *a-posteriori* organization of S's other propositional attitudes (and will be discussed extensively in the next Section 5.3.2.1). Peacocke's account, on the other hand, considers this contribution to be a function of the *a-priori* possession conditions for the concepts employed in the belief (and will be discussed in Section 5.3.2.2). In both cases, the accounts are highly dependent on what is involved in concept possession as a precondition on having beliefs involving those concepts. As mentioned, I will further argue (in Section 5.3.2.1.1) that Fodor's account makes it difficult to see how the exploitation of concepts *explains* a belief's making the contribution that it does to the believer's epistemic orientation (as a result of his minimal conditions on concept possession and his commitment to a Russellian account of content).

### 5.3.2.1 Fodor's neo-Cartesianism and the notion of an epistemic liaison

According to Fodor, the essential feature of neo-Cartesian accounts of concepts (which serves to contrast them with Pragmatist accounts) is the claim that to possess a given concept P is simply to have the capacity to think about O's *as Ps*. He says:

“What's important about Cartesianism, for my purposes, is that it understands concept possession *nonepistemically*; Cartesians hold that concept possession is an *intentional* state but not an *epistemic* one. In particular, it's not what you know (-how or -that) that determines what concepts you have [as the Pragmatist would have it]; *it's what you are able to think about*. To have the concept DOG is to be able to think about dogs as such; and conversely, to be able to think about dogs as such is to have the concept DOG. That's

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is meant to satisfy. To say *that* would be to say that Peacocke and Fodor's accounts of concepts are merely notational variants.

all there is to concept possession, according to (my kind of) Cartesian [*sic*]. Polemics aside, I do find that view plausible on the face of it.”(Fodor 2004a, p. 31)

Importantly, having the concept dog amounts to the ability to think about dogs *as dogs*.

As he says in a footnote to the above quotation:

“The ‘as such’ is [*sic*] marks the intentionality of concept possession. Since extensionally equivalent concepts can be distinct, your being able to think about Granny’s favorite animals doesn’t ipso facto manifest your possession of DOG; not even if dogs are your Granny’s favorite animals. What *would* show that you have DOG is your thinking about Granny’s favorite animals *as dogs*.”(ibid, fn. 3)

This qualification is significant as it purports to make sense of the manifest differences between beliefs that Frege cases serve to illustrate (though, as I will argue in Section 5.3.2.1.1, it is ultimately unsuccessful). When Oedipus thinks lustful thoughts about Jocasta his thoughts about her have as a constituent the concept Jocasta. Though the concept Oedipus’ mother has the same *content* as Jocasta (on Fodor’s Russellian account of propositions it is the individual that is their referent), they are nonetheless different concepts. They are different ways of being related to the same individual – via different vehicles.<sup>126</sup>

Fodor’s account is atomistic, so that possessing a given concept does not depend on having any other concepts (with the exception of complex concepts, e.g., red balloon).

Similarly having a belief involving a given concept does not imply that one has any

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<sup>126</sup> For a discussion of the Oedipus/Jocasta predicament and what it tells us about concepts, see Fodor (1990) esp. his Ch. 6 ‘Substitution Arguments and Individuation of Beliefs’. See also Fodor (1987), esp. his Chapter 3, ‘Meaning Holism’, as well as his (2008).

interesting epistemic capacities (again, with certain exceptions).<sup>127</sup> My having the concept dog does not imply that I have the concept animal, nor, *a fortiori*, does my having the belief that a dog is before me imply that I possess a capacity to infer that an animal is before me.<sup>128</sup>

However, Fodor is also committed to the claim that which belief one has makes a contribution to the subject's epistemic dispositions the manifestation of which it is the role of belief attribution within folk psychology to explain and predict (though as we shall see below, he might object to this *epistemic* characterization). We need to explain why Oedipus found it reasonable to marry his mother (whether or not *it was* reasonable from the reader's 'god-eye' view of the situations) and to predict what he would find reasonable to do once discovering the full extent of what he did. The way Fodor attempts to navigate between these commitments is by insisting that we don't get our epistemic dispositions for free. We cannot just stipulate that if something is a dog then it is an animal.<sup>129</sup> Rather, this inference is acquired a-posteriori through our various interactions with the world. Which inferential transitions I, in having the belief that there is a dog

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<sup>127</sup> Fodor finds this to be a great benefit of his account of concepts, since it allows for the sharability of concepts (types) across widely different populations and throughout history.

<sup>128</sup> In stark contrast with the views mentioned in fn. 1201, and for related reasons, as we will see, also in contrast with Peacocke's position. As he says: "I'm going to argue for a very strong version of psychological atomism; one according to which what concepts you have is conceptually and metaphysically independent of what epistemic capacities you have. If this is so, then patently concepts couldn't be epistemic capacities." (Fodor 1998a, p. 6)

<sup>129</sup> After all, we might discover that dogs are in fact robots sent to spy on us by an alien race. If the possession conditions of the concept dog involved possessing the concept animal, then having discovered this disturbing fact about *dogs* our concept dog itself would change. This is a slippery slope leading to a problematic holism that would entail that different people with *different beliefs about* dogs do not have the same concept dog (see, especially, Fodor and Lepore 1991). As mentioned in my fn. 127, a central motivation of Fodor's atomism is that it allows that before we discover that dogs are robots, not animals, and after that discovery, the concept dog is one and the same concept.

before me, am disposed to draw, and the satisfaction of which desires I am disposed to recognize depends on my particular acquaintance with the world. In large part, it depends on the circumstances in which the concept dog is tokened in my thoughts.

On Fodor's position, then, Oedipus and Tiresias can both have a belief with the same content *and* involving the same concept-types, e.g., the belief that Jocasta is beautiful, and yet differ greatly in their epistemic dispositions towards Jocasta (since the former also has a true belief that Jocasta is Oedipus' mother, whereas the latter does not). This is as would be expected; having the belief that Mount Tungurahua is erupting might bring about different epistemic dispositions in the early native Ecuadorian from those of the current residents of Baños.

Importantly, Fodor is uncomfortable calling these capacities 'epistemic', and for good reason. Dispositions to draw certain inferences and to recognize the satisfiability of certain desires, to which having a particular belief contributes, are *psychological* in nature rather than epistemological. As we have seen already in Chapter 1, *having* a reason to form a particular judgment or to perform a certain action does not depend in the least on whether or not *there is* a (good) reason for that judgment or action (thought if all is working properly, the two will tend to coincide – my having a reason to believe that there is a dog before me will tend to coincide with there actually being a dog before me). It is the former (which is central to intentional psychology) that is our concern throughout this dissertation not the latter (which is central to epistemology). Thus, though Fodor might object to my usage of the term 'epistemic' in characterizing these capacities, this reflects a terminological rather than a substantive disagreement. The reason for my calling them *epistemic* capacities, nonetheless, is that possessing them is a *precondition* on knowledge

and knowledgeable action; the condition that a subject deliberates and acts in light of reasons the subject has (whether or not these are *good* reasons, i.e., whether or not the outcome of the subject's deliberations might count as knowledge).

It is, then, in virtue of one's particular acquaintance with the world that one comes to take some proposition to be related in certain ways to another. However, this need not reflect anything about the obtaining of an actual relation between the propositions. In arguing against meaning holism, Fodor introduces the notion of an *epistemic liaison*. Though he does not elaborate on the notion, it will be useful towards analyzing and evaluating Fodor's position. He says:

“When an intentional system takes the semantic value of P to be relevant to the semantic evaluation of Q, I shall say that P is an *epistemic liaison of Q* (for that system at that time). Please note the relativization to agents and times. ‘Epistemic liaison’ is really a *psychological* notion, not an *epistemological* one. That is, what counts isn't the *objective* dependencies between the semantic values of the propositions; it's what the agent *supposes* those dependencies to be.”(Fodor 1987, p. 56)

The objective relation between the propositions *Jocasta is widowed* and *Oedipus' mother is widowed* is mutual entailment; hence, the truth or falsity of the one guarantees the truth or falsity of the other. Nonetheless, this is clearly not what Oedipus takes the relation between them to be. Had the former been an epistemic liaison of the latter *for him* (at the time) – that is, had he taken the truth or falsity of the proposition *Jocasta is widowed* to be relevant to the evaluation of the truth or falsity of *Oedipus' mother is widowed* – he likely would not have married Jocasta (incidentally, the former *is* an epistemic liaison of the latter *for Tiresias*). Note that the notion of epistemic liaison can be easily extended to cover also the subject's taking the semantic value of a proposition to be relevant to the

possible satisfaction of a given desire (e.g., for Oedipus, at least in the opening scenes of Sophocles' play, the proposition *Jocasta is widowed* was an epistemic liaison of certain lustful desires). Though Fodor does not do so, it is in this broad way that I will use it in the following.<sup>130</sup>

How, then, does the exploitation of the concept  $P$  in  $S$ 's belief about some object  $O$ , the belief that  $p$ , determine and explain the belief's unique contribution to  $S$ 's epistemic orientation in relation to  $O$ ? The notion of an epistemic liaison helps direct our investigation towards a plausible (yet, ultimately unsatisfying) initial answer. It appears that  $S$ 's having the belief that  $p$  contributes to  $S$ 's dispositions to recognize the satisfiability of those desires and to draw inferences to those beliefs in relation to the contents of which the proposition  $p$  serves as an epistemic liaison *for S*. Perhaps, then, the contribution,  $Z$ , can be specified by appeal to the appropriate set of contents for which  $p$  is an epistemic liaison for  $S$ , call this set  $\{p_i\}$ .

As stated, however, this initial proposal does not yet sufficiently distinguish between contributions made by different beliefs, nor does it explain the role that the exploitation of particular concepts play in bringing this contribution about. Consider the belief that  $p$  that has as its content the same Russellian proposition as the belief that  $q$ . The difference between the two beliefs is not in their *content* but in the *vehicles* by which their content is represented. Say, as before, that having the belief that  $p$  exploits all the same concepts as

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<sup>130</sup> As mentioned, Fodor uses the notion of epistemic liaison to argue that meaning holism must be false. According to his rendition of meaning holism, it "... is the idea that the identity – specifically, the intentional content – of a propositional attitude is determined by the totality of its epistemic liaisons." (1987, p. 56) In the example of Oedipus and Tiresias, since the epistemic liaisons of the proposition *Jocasta is widowed* differs for both characters, meaning holism has the disturbing implication that the two cannot believe *the same thing* when they both believe that *Jocasta is available for marriage*.

the belief that  $q$  with the exception of the concept  $\underline{P}$  rather than the co-extensive concept  $\underline{Q}$ . Since in such cases the proposition  $p$  and the proposition  $q$  are one and the same proposition, there appears to be only *one* set of propositions in relation to which  $p$  (or  $q$ ) serves as an epistemic liaison for S. According to the initial proposal, then, both the belief that  $p$  and the belief that  $q$  contribute to S's epistemic dispositions towards all the same propositional attitudes the contents of which belong in the abovementioned set.

If this were the case, then it is not clear in what sense the two beliefs differ in their contribution to S's epistemic dispositions. Furthermore, it is evident that there are countless many examples in which this initial proposal is falsified – in which having the belief that  $p$  contributes to S's epistemic dispositions only with respect to a (proper) *subset* of those propositional attitudes. It is just such situations that Frege cases illustrate. For Oedipus, it is possible that the Russellian proposition *Jocasta is widowed* is an epistemic liaison of *Jocasta is a potential mate* and of *it is not the case that Jocasta is a potential mate*. If his belief that Jocasta is widowed were to contribute to his disposition to draw appropriate inferences to *all* those beliefs in relation to the contents of which the proposition *Jocasta is widowed* is an epistemic liaison for him, Oedipus would be disposed to draw a contradiction – to believe that Jocasta both is and is not a potential mate. Oedipus, of course, is not in such a position. Rather, plausibly, Oedipus' belief that Jocasta is widowed contributes to his disposition to believe that Jocasta is a potential mate, whereas it is his belief that Oedipus' mother is widowed that contributes to his disposition to believe that it is not the case that Oedipus' mother is a potential mate.

Given that  $\underline{P}$  and  $\underline{Q}$  are different concepts, even if co-extensive, a possible explanation for their differently epistemically disposing S is that in *establishing* a-posteriori semantic

dependency relations between propositions – throughout the course of S’s investigations of the world – these different concepts have been differentially exploited. We might say that it is the exploitation of the concept Jocasta in representing the proposition *Jocasta is widowed* in virtue of which it is an epistemic liaison of a certain set of propositions, say  $\{p_i\}$ , to which belongs the proposition *Jocasta is a potential mate*. But, it is the exploitation of the concept Oedipus’ mother in representing the *same* proposition in virtue of which it is an epistemic liaison of another set of propositions, say  $\{q_i\}$ , to which belongs the proposition *it is not the case that Jocasta is a potential mate* (in which case  $\{p_i\} \cap \{q_i\} \neq \emptyset$ ). As a result, for Oedipus, the proposition itself *is* an epistemic liaison of any proposition  $x$ , such that  $x \in \{p_i\} \cup \{q_i\}$ . Nonetheless, having a belief exploiting the concept Jocasta contributes to Oedipus’ epistemic dispositions to draw inferences to those beliefs and to recognize the satisfiability of those desires the contents of which are any proposition  $x \in \{p_i\}$ . Representing the same Russellian proposition by exploiting the concept Oedipus’ mother, on the other hand, contributes to Oedipus’ epistemic dispositions towards those attitudes the contents of which are any proposition  $x \in \{q_i\}$ .

Even if this response is successful in showing *that* the exploitation of different concepts in representing one and the same proposition can account for selective dispositions in relation to contents for which the proposition is an epistemic liaison, an additional worry arises. The worry is best exemplified by the fact that the discussion above, nonetheless, permits situations in which  $\{p_i\} = \{q_i\}$ . Presumably, this is not the case for Oedipus with respect to beliefs that have the same content but exploit the concept Jocasta rather than the concept Oedipus’ mother, and vice versa, but perhaps it is the case for Tiresias. That is, for Oedipus  $\{p_i\} \neq \{q_i\}$ , whereas for Tiresias  $\{p_i\} = \{q_i\}$ . It *appears* that in such cases



both beliefs make *the same* contribution to S's epistemic dispositions, a situation which would threaten the uniqueness claim. However, as we have seen in Section 5.2, though there are situations in which an attributer would be at a loss when choosing among competing belief attributions, this is not to say that the two beliefs make *the same* contribution. Perhaps it would be difficult to attribute to Tiresias the belief that Jocasta is beautiful rather than the belief that Oedipus' mother is beautiful. Nonetheless, we can still hold that the different beliefs make different unique contributions. What is crucial for specifying the contribution that each belief makes is the fact that membership in each set,  $\{p_i\}$  and  $\{q_i\}$ , is determined on the basis of the exploitation of different concepts; it is this same fact that allows for these sets to differ. This is so, even if it *so happens* that the two contributions end up converging, at some point in the subject's life history, in the epistemic dispositions the subject thereby has. So, if  $\{p_i\} = \{q_i\}$ , as in the example of Tiresias, his being disposed to judge that Jocasta is beautiful – to endorse a proposition that happens to belong to both  $\{p_i\}$  and  $\{q_i\}$  – is in virtue of its membership in one set *rather than* the other, depending on which concept (Jocasta or Oedipus' mother) was utilized in the belief that contributed to his being so disposed.

In contrast with the initial proposal on behalf of Fodor, the above considerations show that we *cannot* specify the unique contribution  $Z$  that having a belief that  $p$  makes to S's epistemic dispositions merely by looking to those propositions in relation to which  $p$  *happens to be* an epistemic liaison for S. They cannot distinguish contributions  $Z_1$  and  $Z_2$  made by different beliefs. This is hardly surprising given that what is an epistemic liaison for what, for S, is a purely contingent a-posteriori matter on Fodor's account.

However, something even more critical emerges from this discussion. A specification of the contribution that a given belief makes to one's epistemic dispositions is *completely* divorced from the set of propositions in relation to which one is disposed when having that belief. Rather, it is a function of how membership in that set of propositions is established. How such membership is established is supposedly a function of which concepts possessed by the believer are exploited in representing the world. However, we have no account of what it is *about* the exploitation of a concept in having a belief about the world that allows the believer to establish such membership – in fact, it is *this* that we set out to explain. In the following subsection I elaborate on this difficulty and argue that we are unlikely to find its resolution in Fodor's account. I will argue that Fodor can, at most, provide an account of the *reasons why* a subject makes certain appropriate transitions in thought and engages the world in certain appropriate ways in terms of the concepts by which the subject represents the world. However, this is unsatisfactory as an *explanation* of the subject's doing so in light of reasons that the subject *has*.

#### 5.3.2.1.1 The failures of neo-Cartesianism

We have seen that it is *in virtue of* the exploitation of the concept P rather than Q in having the belief that *p* that S takes *p* (or equivalently *q*) to be an epistemic liaison of certain propositions rather than others, i.e., in virtue of which these propositions (rather than others) are members of the set of propositions in relation to which S is appropriately disposed. However, the crucial aim of this chapter is to *explain* what it is in virtue of which the exploitation of a certain concept rather than another in having a belief makes

the contribution that it does to one's epistemic dispositions. This depends on having an explanation of what it is in virtue of which exploiting a concept makes *any contribution at all* to one's *epistemic* dispositions.

The account, as presented so far, seems to be begging the exact question this chapter aims to answer. In saying that it is in virtue of the exploitation of  $\underline{P}$  in the belief that  $p$  that  $S$  *takes* the proposition  $p$  to be an epistemic liaison of such and such a set of propositions we are already assuming what we aim to explain. Our aim is to explain what a subject's conceptual apprehension of the world amounts to; to explain what it is about the exploitation of  $\underline{P}$  in virtue of which one is in a position to 'take', or 'suppose', anything at all (see also my fn. 107).

How does exploitation of the concept  $\underline{P}$  in the belief that  $p$  account for  $S$ 's *having a reason* for endorsing or rejecting certain beliefs and for potentially satisfying or frustrating certain desires? More generally, how does the exploitation of concepts in having a mental state confer *reason-giving status* to that mental state – and in particular one that disposes those having the mental state to make the kind of transitions in thought and action that they do? It will not do merely to show *that* the exploitation of different concepts makes different contributions to one's epistemic dispositions – that would merely show that an appeal to concepts as constituents of propositional attitudes potentially provides the appropriate grain of contributions to a subject's epistemic dispositions as the success of folk psychological explanation requires (a claim already established in Section 5.3.1). It will not *explain* how they do so.

As we have seen, Fodor is committed to the claim that possessing a concept  $C$  is having an ability to think about  $C$ s *as such*. Having such an ability does not imply that one knows (-that or -how) *anything* at all; this, he takes to be *the* central tenet of neo-Cartesianism. Furthermore, he says, "...what bestows content on mental representations is something about their causal-cum-nomological relations to the things that fall under them: for example, what bestows upon a mental representation the content *dog* is something about its tokenings being caused by dogs."(1998a, p. 12) This latter claim expresses Fodor's commitment to an informational (Russellian) account of content.

Fodor's dual commitments are in the service of supplying a computational account of thinking. His aim is to show how we can understand mental transformations in computational terms, i.e., in terms of purely syntactic operations on symbols. Concepts, as constituent representational vehicles, are such symbols. They have content, determined by their nomic relation to their referents, as well as syntactic form. Since on Fodor's position co-extensive concepts are synonymous, they cannot differ with respect to their content. Rather, they differ in their syntactic properties. The fact that co-extensive concepts differ in this way, and are thus different symbols, is meant to explain how their differential exploitation in a belief can make a computational difference – i.e., how they can participate in different mental transitions.<sup>131</sup> Fodor, thus, provides an account that allows us to see how a mechanism (a brain, perhaps) might carry out those transitions that *are*, at a different level of description, the subject's engaging in intentional, reason-based,

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<sup>131</sup> As Fodor says: "If beliefs (and the like) are relations to syntactically structured mental representations, there are indeed two parameters of belief individuation, just as Frege requires: Morning Star beliefs have the same conditions of semantic evaluation as Evening Star beliefs, but they implicate the tokening of different syntactic objects and are therefore different beliefs with different causal powers."(1998a, p. 39)

mental transitions – drawing *inferences* and *recognizing* the satisfiability of certain desires.

However, the question we must ask is this: what is it about the exploitation of one concept rather than a co-extensive other that makes reasonable *from the subject's perspective* one set of mental transitions rather than another – transitions that Fodor's computational account purports to mechanize? The difficulties that Fodor's account faces are similar to ones we have already confronted when considering the non-epistemic (and in particular Tye's neo-Russellian) account of perceptual content in Chapters 3 and 4.<sup>132</sup>

In these previous chapters I introduced the *Perspectival Constraint* on the specification of mental content. This was the claim that a canonical specification of mental content articulates how the subject apprehends the world as being. The notion of apprehension is that of a reason-giving awareness of the world. The *Perspectival Constraint*, then, holds that a canonical specification of content aims to articulate the contribution that having a state with such content makes to the subject's epistemic orientation. Now, Fodor clearly denies the *Perspectival Constraint* on the specification of *mental content* in general.

Nonetheless, for the sake of accommodating the generalizations of folk psychology he must account for the fact that different beliefs with the same Russellian content can make different contributions to one's epistemic orientation. The challenge for Fodor, then, is to account for these possible differences in some way *other than* by appeal to differences in content. He does this, as we have seen, by appeal to differences in the vehicles by which *the same content* can be represented. When thinking about Jocasta via the concept Jocasta

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<sup>132</sup> Indeed, it would be very surprising, and disheartening, if we arrived at a different result when assessing the possibility of accounting for the reason-giving status of beliefs by appeal to Russellian contents.

one is exploiting an ability to think about an individual *as Jocasta* and when thinking about her via the concept Oedipus' mother one is exploiting an ability to think about the same individual *as Oedipus' mother*.

However, this intensional specification merely casts the *illusion* that these different ways of representing an individual amount to different ways that the subject apprehends the individual, and that might provide different reasons that *the subject has* for engaging the individual. Rather, it serves to mark the one vehicle by which a given content is presented to thought rather than another. But which vehicle is exploited in bringing an object or property to thought is not something available to the subject and that might, therefore, figure in the subject's reasoning. It cannot make a difference to the reasons the subject *has* and in light of which deliberates and acts.

Regardless of *how* Oedipus thinks about Jocasta, regardless of which concept is employed in representing her, *the* point of Russellian accounts of conceptual content is that the concept makes the *same* contribution to his different thoughts about her. Since on a Russellian account of content, co-extensive concepts make the same contribution to the thoughts into which they figure, there seems to be nothing *from the thinker's point of view* that would differentiate the thinker's thinking the one thought rather than the other. But, then, what sense can be made of the suggestion that the subject's exploiting a certain concept in thought, rather than another, supplies the subject reasons for a certain set of engagements with the world rather than another?

Oedipus' thinking about Jocasta provides Oedipus reasons to engage her in ways he deems appropriate in light of the *way* he thinks about her. Thinking about her in a

different *way* provides him a different light by which he would deem *other* engagements appropriate. This is the phenomenon in need of explanation. But because on the Russellian account both ways of thinking about her make the *same* contribution to Oedipus' thoughts, there is *nothing* in light of which Oedipus *could* deem one set of engagement with her appropriate over another.<sup>133</sup>

One might object that the above argument fails to take into account a central feature of the example considered so far. There is an important difference between the concept Jocasta and the concept Oedipus' mother. The former is a *primitive concept* whereas the latter is a *syntactically complex concept*. Unlike the former, possessing the latter concept *does* imply that one possesses other concepts, and having a thought involving it *does* imply that one possesses certain inferential capacities (e.g., one's having the thought that Oedipus' mother is widowed implies that one has a capacity to infer that someone's mother is widowed). Perhaps it is sensitivity to such syntactic differences that explains the subject's having different reasons for engaging the world.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> This of course is not to say that corresponding to the two (or more) ways of thinking about an individual there do not stand two (or more) vehicles of representation. On the contrary, it is merely to say that differences in vehicles of representation cannot be what *explain* the different ways that the subject thinks about an individual *and in light of which* engages the world appropriately.

<sup>134</sup> This seems to be Fodor's position. He argues that Frege problems arise only in the case of co-extensive *primitive* concepts. He says: "There is no Frege problem for concepts that are expressed by complex Mentalese formulas (i.e., Mentalese formulas that have constituent structure). Since complex concepts can differ in their constituency, they can differ in their possession conditions. That is so whether or not the concepts are coextensive; or even *necessarily* coextensive."(2008, p. 75)

I cannot see how we might make sense of a kind of personal-level<sup>135</sup> sensitivity to syntactic differences while avoiding the implausible claim that in having a thought about the world the subject must somehow be *simultaneously* aware of the vehicles by which his awareness of the world is established.<sup>136</sup> However, there is no need to explore this question here, as there are sufficiently many examples of co-extensive *primitive* concepts for which explanation in terms of some personal-level sensitivity to syntactic differences will not be applicable. The concepts being trilateral and being triangular come to mind. Both concepts refer to one and the same property. On the Russellian account of content they contribute to thoughts that involve them one and the same content, the property itself. Yet, one might find certain engagements with a triangle reasonable in light of having the one thought but not in light of having the other thought. This cannot be explained by appeal to the content of the thought *or* by appeal to its syntactic complexity.

Perhaps it would be argued that these are in fact two *disguised* complex concepts (triangular and tri-lateral).<sup>137</sup> But, what of the co-extensive primitive concepts Hesperus and Phosphorus, or cilantro and coriander?<sup>138</sup> If you detest cilantro and yet are unaware that cilantro and coriander are one and the same (a combination that appears to be the case

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<sup>135</sup> Presumably, on Fodor's account there is some *sub-personal* mechanism the operation of which *is* sensitive to such syntactic differences. But the point being made here is exactly that an appeal to such *sub-personal* mechanism is inadequate for the explanatory task at hand – to explain the availability of reasons to the subject.

<sup>136</sup> This is not to say that we can never be aware (in some sense) of the vehicles by which we represent the world. Whether or not we can, it is highly questionable that Oedipus does any such thing when deciding that marrying Jocasta is a good idea.

<sup>137</sup> If our having thoughts about triangles were to require also an awareness of the vehicles by which we represent them, shouldn't the question of whether or not these concepts are complex or primitive be an a-priori matter? Could there be genuine puzzlement? But, surely, there is nothing wrong with the question: is the concept triangular a complex or primitive concept?

<sup>138</sup> Similar (as well as other) objections revolving around the difficulty of Fodor's account to accommodate the different roles of co-extensive *primitive* concepts can be found in Rives (2009).



with many people), what is it about your belief that the salad sitting in front of you has cilantro in abundance – but *not* about your belief that it has coriander in abundance – in light of which you find the salad inedible? We can (and should) follow Fodor in holding that different vehicles are involved in the two beliefs. Different symbols with different forms allow the two beliefs to be implicated in different mental transformations. But, on the Russellian account there is *nothing* insofar as *you* are concerned that would make a difference to the light by which you might find the salad edible or not.

This problem is nicely revealed in Fodor’s recent discussion of Frege cases (to which he dedicates a full chapter in his 2008):

“Lois rather fancies Superman but Clark leaves her cold. Your referential semantics can’t, all by itself, make sense of that. You also need to know that Lois has two, co-referential representations of Clark Kent(/Superman), and that each representation is connected with its own, distinct, set of inferences and attitudes. And, if you want to predict Lois’s behavior, predilections, inferences, etc. from the mental state that she is in you have to know which of these representations is activated.”(p. 86)

However, since semantics is *all* that is available to *Lois* in light of which she can deliberate and act – in particular, she has no awareness of ‘which of these [Clark Kent(/Superman)] representations is activated’ – how could *Lois* be in a position to find the one set of behaviors, predilections, inferences, etc. reasonable *rather than the other* when thinking about Clark Kent(/Superman)? If content is understood as Russellian, *she cannot*. But since she obviously does (and, *a fortiori*, *can*), a Russellian account of conceptual content cannot explain how a concept’s exploitation in thought provides her reasons.

The problem is even more severe. It is not clear how *even semantics* are available to Lois as that in light of which to deliberate and to act. As mentioned in previous chapters, Frege cases are merely illustrative of the difficulties that purely referential accounts of content face; their actuality is not essential to those difficulties. The central difficulty is *not* that such accounts carve the mental life of the subject in too coarse a grain for capturing the folk psychological generalizations true of the subject. Suppose there were no genuine Frege cases involving primitive co-extensive concepts. If this were the case, a purely referential account of content *could* cut just as finely as required; we would have just enough contents to go around (and Fodor's appeal to a fine-grained account of representational *vehicles* to resolve Frege cases, which I argued is unsuccessful, would also be unnecessary). Nonetheless, the problems facing Russellian accounts of content would persist. *The* central problem that purely referential accounts of content face, *a possible side-effect of which* is the fineness of grain problem, is that such accounts of content are not individuated in a way that could account for the reason-giving role of mental states having such contents. Frege cases *illustrate* this failure by showing that different mental states sharing the same Russellian contents might nonetheless make different contributions to the reasons the subject undergoing these mental states has. The individuation conditions of the reason-giving features of a mental state come apart from those of the mental state's Russellian content. If Frege cases are actual, then Russellian accounts of content are revealed as too coarse grained. But the essential point is that a mental state's Russellian contents are simply not the right *kind* of entity that could account for that mental state's making the contribution it does to the reasons a subject has.

In Chapters 3 and 4, in discussing purely externalist accounts of *perceptual* content, I suggested that the *reason* they are not the right kind of entity is because the norms governing their individuation are in no way available to the subject. Russellian contents are individuated completely externally, without reference to the subject's understanding. As we have seen, '...what bestows content on mental representations is something about their causal-cum-nomological relations to the things that fall under them: for example, what bestows upon a mental representation the content *dog* is something about its tokenings being caused by dogs.' But the nature of this causal relation, a nature that determines the content of the representation, is not something to which the subject is privy. That Lois is undergoing a thought *about* Superman rather than a thought *about* dogs, for example, is understood as her undergoing a thought that is appropriately caused by Superman, rather than by dogs. But such facts regarding what her thoughts are appropriately caused by are ones to which Lois is completely blind. A difference *merely* in the Russellian contents of a mental state does not then reveal a difference *from the subject's perspective*. And, if it is no difference from the subject's perspective, *a fortiori*, it cannot be a difference in light of which the subject finds certain engagements with the world reasonable rather than others.

This result resonates with Fodor's identification of neo-Cartesianism as the claim that concept possession is to be understood intentionally but *non-epistemically*. Possessing a concept does not imply anything about what the subject knows (-that or -how). Having a concept is merely being able to have thoughts *about* the referent of the concept (via a

particular vehicle). However, the considerations above suggest an *even weaker* notion of concept possession – as *non-intentional*.<sup>139</sup>

Concepts are the purported reason-giving features of thought. The account under consideration individuates them finely enough to accommodate the generalizations of folk psychology (i.e., there are enough of them to go around). But, they are individuated according to norms that the subject is completely blind to (blind to the syntactic form of the vehicle of representation, and blind to its etiology). The neo-Cartesian can account for differences between any two thoughts, even necessarily co-extensive thoughts, by appeal to their constituent concepts. But, such an appeal does not yet account for the subject's being apprised of such differences. As a result, though concepts, *a la* the neo-Cartesian, might be finely individuated *causes* of mental activity, they cannot be *reason-giving* features for that activity.

Furthermore, given that different concepts have different causal powers, having different occasions of tokening and different forms, we can understand how different thoughts involving different concepts can each come to be 'connected with its own, distinct, set of inferences and attitudes' (as in the case of Lois and Superman/Clark Kent). As such, we can explain how having a thought contributes to a subject's dispositions to make certain

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<sup>139</sup> Fodor claims that whatever attitudes, feelings, emotions, etc., "...that cluster around a mode of presentation of a concept have [nothing] to do with the content of the concept" (2008, p. 86). In a footnote to this quotation his antagonist, Snark, asks: "Haven't you now implicitly given up claiming that psychological laws are intentional?" (Ibid, fn. 56) In a recent review of Fodor's (2008), Rupert (forthcoming) makes a similar point about Fodor's treatment of Frege cases. He too notes this same footnote in support. Rupert says: "...one might worry that too much explanatory work has been shunted off to the nonintentional level. There is a risk that so much human behavior will be explained by facts about syntax or the properties of realizers that there is not much work left for an intentional psychology to do. Fodor seems to concede as much (86 n56), but his doing so does not square very well with the defense of folk psychology (and its vindication by a scientific psychology) for which Fodor is well known."

transitions in thought and to engage in certain behaviors, by appeal to how the concepts exploited in the thought are, as Fodor puts it, ‘engaged’ in the subject’s ‘galaxy of beliefs, desires, hopes, despairs, whatever’ (2008, p. 87). But they cannot explain a subject’s being *epistemically so disposed*, i.e., being disposed to draw *inferences* or to *recognize* the satisfiability of certain desires. The subject will have made appropriate transitions, given the a-posteriori organization of her mental economy, but will not have made those transitions for the reasons that they were found appropriate from her perspective. We might have an answer to the *reason why* a subject makes certain transitions in thought and engages the world in certain ways by appeal to the concepts by which the world is represented. But we, as of yet, do not have an *explanation* of the subject’s doing so in light of reasons that the subject *has*.

Fodor seems to welcome some such result. At one point he says:

“For better or for worse, we’re committed to LOT [i.e., the Language of Thought]; and LOT, though it is a system of representations, isn’t a system of representations that anybody *uses*, correctly or otherwise. One doesn’t use thoughts, one just has them. Having thoughts isn’t something that you *do*; it’s something that happens to you.” (2008, p. 203)

The account of the mind that emerges is as of a brute causal system. This in itself is no objection. On the contrary, it is central to the kind of naturalistic project Fodor is engaged in to show how reasons *are* causes. The problem is, rather, that on the account proposed,

there is no explanation of how the *causes* identified as relevant to the mind's operations *can be reasons* that the subject *has*.<sup>140</sup>

Whatever features of a mental state account for its contributing to the reasons the subject has (whether content or vehicle), for its contributing to the subject's epistemic orientation, those features must be individuated in a way that is, in some sense, available to the subject. This constraint must be in place if there is sense to be made of there being a difference *from the subject's perspective* between having mental states with different reason-giving features, i.e., differences that can make a difference to what the subject finds reasonable to do and to think. If concepts are to be the reason-giving features of a mental state, then this constraint is a constraint on concept individuation. The neo-Cartesian account of concepts fails to satisfy this constraint. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, conceptual capacities as the neo-Cartesian has them are *not appropriate epistemic capacities*.

In the following section I will argue that Pragmatist accounts of concepts, according to which possessing a concept *is* understood as having certain knowledge (-that or -how), are able to satisfy this central constraint. As a result, unlike the neo-Cartesian account, they manage to do more than merely provide an account of how the contribution that a given belief makes to the subject's dispositions to engage the world depends on the concepts exploited in that belief. They further manage to *explain* how having a certain

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<sup>140</sup> This would not be too problematic had it not been for the fact that Fodor too notes the important difference between merely having dispositions to make certain mental transitions and being so disposed in light of having reasons. Ironically, he is explicit that any *proper theory of mind* must make sense of this distinction. And, as we shall presently see, he takes his own position to be superior to the Pragmatist, who he argues fail in just this respect. Thus, the result of this discussion of Fodor's account is in crucial tension with the kind of objection he raises against the Pragmatist.

belief might contribute to the subject's *epistemic* dispositions, as a function of the particular concepts involved in that belief.

### 5.3.2.2 Peacocke on concepts and possession conditions

Peacocke's notion of concept possession provides a seemingly straightforward account of how the contribution *Z* that *S*'s having the belief that *p* is determined by, and most importantly *explained* by appeal to, the concepts the belief exploits.

We have seen that according to Fodor possessing a concept entails only that one is able to have thoughts involving that concept. Possessing a concept is both ontogenetically and explanatorily *prior* to whatever other epistemic capacities the subject might have. This is *the* central tenet of neo-Cartesianism. In strong contrast with Fodor's account, according to Peacocke it is *constitutive* of having a given concept that one has certain specific epistemic capacities. These include recognizing the validity of certain transitions among propositions involving the concept and recognizing the conditions of the concept's correct application.<sup>141</sup> It is for this reason that Fodor considers Peacocke's to be a Pragmatist account of concepts.

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<sup>141</sup> A useful articulation of such an inferential role account of concepts is given by Bermúdez & Macpherson (1998): "Any acceptable account of what it is to possess a concept will have to include certain specifications of circumstances in which it is appropriate to apply that concept. But this is not all. Concepts form part of, and are individuated by their role in, the contents of propositional attitudes. Part of what it is to possess a given concept is that one should be able to recognize that certain circumstances give one good reasons to take particular attitudes to contents containing that concept. Moreover, concept mastery is also evidenced in dispositions to make and to accept as legitimate or justified certain inferential transitions between judgements."

S's having the belief that  $p$ , involving a certain concept  $\underline{P}$ , *does imply* that S has a certain set of epistemic capacities, namely, those that are *constitutive* of  $\underline{P}$ 's *a-priori* possession conditions. Furthermore, and, again, in strong contrast with Fodor, according to Peacocke the possession conditions for a given concept and the individuation conditions of that concept converge. Peacocke's 'simple formulation' of this principle reads: "Concept  $F$  is that unique concept  $C$  to possess which a thinker must meet condition  $\mathcal{A}(C)$ ." (1992, p. 6)<sup>142</sup> Different concepts (including necessarily co-extensive ones) will, then, of necessity involve different possession conditions. Possessing each of the concepts will entail the possession of different sets of epistemic capacities.

More specifically, Peacocke argues that S's possession of a concept  $\underline{C}$  consists in part in S's finding certain transitions involving that concept 'primitively compelling'.

"To say that the thinker finds such transitions primitively compelling is to say this: (1) he finds them compelling; (2) he does not find them compelling because he has inferred them from other premises and/or principles; and (3) for possession of the concept  $C$  in question ... he does not need to take the correctness of the transition as answerable to anything else." (Peacocke 1992, p. 6.)

In the case of an observational concept, its possession conditions will be given in part by reference to transitions one must find primitively compelling from appropriate perceptual experiences to judgments involving that observational concept (indeed, its *being* an *observational* concept *consists* in this feature of its possession conditions).<sup>143</sup> I leave

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<sup>142</sup> In his (1998a; 1998b) Peacocke somewhat revises his account of possession conditions, but we need not be concerned at this point with the details of his revision. See also most recently his (2009).

<sup>143</sup> "Some conceptual contents are actually individuated in part by their relations to those perceptual experiences that give good reasons for judging those contents" (Peacocke 1992, p. 66). These will be those contents involving observational concepts.



discussion of observational concepts to the next chapter in which their relation to the nonconceptual contents of perception will be discussed further.

For the moment, consider as an illustration one of Peacocke's most frequently cited examples, the possession condition for conjunction,  $\mathcal{A}(\text{conjunction})$ . An *a-priori* condition on possessing the concept conjunction is that the subject finds primitively compelling instances of the elimination and introduction rules of conjunction. That is, the subject must find a transition from  $pCq$  to  $p$  (or to  $q$ ) primitively compelling, and likewise with respect to the transition from  $p$  and  $q$  to  $pCq$ . Finding such transitions primitively compelling *just is* possessing the concept conjunction.

If this is the case, it follows immediately that the contribution that S's having a given belief makes to S's epistemic dispositions is determined by the possession conditions of the concepts that are the constituents of its content. This is so, as it is constitutive of having a belief with a certain conceptual content that one finds primitively compelling those transition that are mentioned in the possession conditions of the concepts involved in its content. So, to follow with the conjunction example, S's having the belief that Jack and Jill went up a hill will contribute to S's epistemic dispositions to recognize the validity of the inference to Jack went up a hill (as well as many other inferences, as a function of the possession conditions of the concepts involved in the belief).

Spelling out in detail the contribution that having a particular belief makes to a subject's epistemic dispositions will turn on our specifying the possession conditions for the concepts that are the constituents of the belief (as well as their mode of composition - e.g., the belief that John loves Mary and the belief that Mary loves John involve all and

only the same concepts, yet they differ in the contribution they would make to a person having them. The former would likely contribute to the person's dispositions to judge that someone loves Mary, whereas the latter to judge that someone loves John. This will have to be accommodated in the possession conditions of love). Specifying these possession conditions is a difficult project indeed, and Peacocke (e.g., in his 1992) provides various sophisticated examples illustrating how it should be undertaken.

“It is virtually never a trivial matter to find the possession condition for a concept, not even one which can be put in the  $\mathcal{A}(C)$  form. To work out what the possession condition is, one must take a sufficiently wide range of truths about which [Fregean] Thoughts involving the concept are informative, and which Thoughts involving the concept are uninformative, in various circumstances. A correct statement of the possession condition for the concept must be capable of explaining this range of truths about informativeness and unformativeness.”(Peacocke, 1998b, p. 131)

However, for the purposes of this chapter it is sufficient to note that an account of concepts, as Peacocke develops it, provides a straightforward (albeit, not easily undertaken) derivation of a given belief's unique contribution to S's epistemic dispositions as a function of the possession conditions of those concepts exploited in having the belief.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Bermúdez (1999) argues that any account that holds a constitutive relation between concept possession and finding certain inferential transitions primitively compelling faces considerable complications. Such accounts fail the test of both intuition and empirical plausibility. It appears that one can possess a concept while nonetheless failing to find primitively compelling certain transitions that are purportedly mentioned as part of the *a-priori* possession conditions of that concept. As Bermúdez says, “no room is left [on Peacocke's account] for the important distinction between not possessing a concept and failing correctly to apply a concept which one none the less does in fact possess” (1999, p. 83). As an example for the empirical plausibility of this claim he points to the literature on the Wason selection task that suggests that though subjects possess the concept of a conditional they fail to find primitively compelling transitions such as modus tollens. Yet, part of the possession conditions for the concept of a conditional is that one finds compelling a transition such as modus tollens. Peacocke acknowledges these difficulties

Consider how Peacocke might account for the different contributions,  $Z_1$  and  $Z_2$ , made to a subject's epistemic orientation when having different beliefs respectively involving the co-extensive concepts triangle and trilateral. The different contributions would be determined as a function of the different possession conditions of these two concepts. Having a belief exploiting the one concept would involve one's finding a certain set of inferences primitively compelling. Given that these are different concepts, and given that concepts are individuated in terms of their possession conditions, having a belief exploiting the other concept would involve one's finding a different set of inferences primitively compelling. Which particular inferences these might be can be left to the side; it is a matter of the detailed analysis of the possession conditions of the respective concepts. By appeal to the possession conditions of the concepts composing the content of the two beliefs we can specify each of their contributions  $Z_1$  and  $Z_2$  and be assured that  $Z_1 \neq Z_2$ .

Given the critical analysis of neo-Cartesianism in the previous section, stopping at this point of our analysis of the Pragmatist position would be an injustice. Rather, we are called upon to ask the same question that was asked of the neo-Cartesian. Though we can see how the involvement of different concepts in a belief might account for the unique contribution that having that belief makes to the subject's dispositions, is this sufficient to make sense of their being *epistemic* dispositions?

In particular, the appeal to a subject's finding certain inferences primitively compelling in specifying the possession conditions of a concept might raise a few eyebrows. It is not at

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with his A(C) form conception of possession conditions for concepts, and provides a response, for example, in his (2004a).

all clear how the notion of *finding* some transition primitively compelling is to be understood such that it is anything more than merely having a disposition to make that transition. But, if we are to explain how the exploitation of a certain concept in a belief contributes to the subject's epistemic dispositions, we must make sense of how exploiting that concept explains the subject's *having reasons in light of which the subject is so disposed*. After all, even on the neo-Cartesian account of concepts we have seen that an explanation of the subject's dispositions being as they are can be provided as a function of which concepts are involved in the subject's beliefs.<sup>145</sup>

Indeed, one of Fodor's central complaints against the Pragmatist position in general,<sup>146</sup> and against Peacocke's in particular,<sup>147</sup> is that *any* account according to which possessing a concept is understood in terms of having certain dispositions is bound for failure. It has the order of explanation backwards. Dispositions to make transitions in thought or to behave in certain ways are the *right kind of dispositions* only if they also have the right kind of etiology.<sup>148</sup> Being disposed to make transitions manifesting the elimination and

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<sup>145</sup> The question for Peacocke is analogous to the one asked of Fodor. In the latter case, I pointed out that we require an explanation of S's *taking* some proposition *p* to be an epistemic liaison of such and such a set of propositions in terms of the concepts involved in representing *p*. The neo-Cartesian account was found unsatisfactory. In Peacocke's case we are now called upon to provide an explanation of S's *finding* certain transitions primitively compelling in terms of the concepts involved in the content of the reason-giving state.

<sup>146</sup> Fodor (2008).

<sup>147</sup> For example, in Fodor (1995; 1998b; 2004a; 2004b).

<sup>148</sup> In discussing the Pragmatist account of rule-following (reacting specifically to Boghossian) Fodor (2008) argues that such accounts are committed to the claim that following a rule, R, consist in having a disposition to conform to R. But this cannot be correct, he argues, "...because following R requires that one's behavior have a certain etiology; roughly, that one's intention that one's behavior should conform with R explains (or partially explains) why it does conform to R. A fortiori, *you aren't following R unless R is the 'intentional object' of one of your mental states*" (pp. 36-37). To follow R we must have an opaque reading of R, otherwise the behavior will merely be in conformity with R. You must intend to follow R, but this requires that R is somehow

introduction rules of conjunction (e.g., from accepting *p* and accepting *q* to accepting *p* and *q*), counts as evidence for one's possession of conjunction only if *one's reason* for being so disposed includes one's having an understanding of conjunction. But, one's having such an understanding *presupposes* that one possesses the concept conjunction.<sup>149</sup>

Applied to Peacocke's account, the objection is that it is one's *antecedent* possession of the concept C, and the exploitation of that concept in a belief that *p*, that is supposed to *explain* one's *finding* some transition or other primitively compelling, rather than one's merely being disposed to make that transition. Contrary to Fodor's contentions, I have argued (in the previous section) that the neo-Cartesian account of concepts cannot satisfy this explanatory role. They are not the right kind of *epistemic* capacities. However, it appears that neither can the Pragmatist; this time, on pain of circularity. We are in a bind.

Neo-Cartesians seem unable to get the subject's epistemic engine going, as their notion of concept possession is too minimal to explain how *the subject* is able to do anything with the concepts he has. Whereas Pragmatists seem to start off with the subject's epistemic engine in full gear, as their notion of concept possession is identified with certain of *the subject's* 'intelligent' capacities. However, as a result, they are unable to *explain* the intelligence of these capacities, since to do so they must appeal to the subject's antecedently possessing that concept purportedly constituted by these very same capacities.

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represented and implicated in the etiology of the behavior. As a result, you must already be able to represent R if you are going to follow the rules that are constitutive of R. This, as Fodor likes to say, is to walk in a very small circle.

<sup>149</sup> "Prima facie, whether you have CONJUNCTION depends not just on what inferences you accept, *but also on your reasons for accepting them...*" (Fodor 2004a, p. 45)

This is a difficult problem and there is much more that can be said about it than I am able to in the limited context of this chapter. Nonetheless, I believe that insofar as we are concerned with elucidating the reason-giving status of belief, the Pragmatist has a relatively straightforward response. To get a very general idea of this response, it is worth looking at what Ryle (1949), who may be considered the paradigmatic Pragmatist, has to say about what he calls, the Cartesian, or intellectualist, ‘legend’ (see also my fn. 106). Ryle argues that at the core of the Cartesian legend is the thought that the intelligence of an action is inherited from the intelligence of the planning that brings it about.<sup>150</sup> However, committing to this ‘legend’ seems to lead to infinite regress. This is so, as the planning itself is an activity that can be carried out intelligently or not, and its intelligence too must be explained by a *prior* act of intelligent activity. The explanatory challenge can be reiterated indefinitely. Ryle’s strategy for blocking this regress is to insist that in acting intelligently a person is not (in general) doing two things, considering how to act, and acting. Rather, “[w]hat distinguishes sensible from silly operations is not their parentage but their procedure, and this holds no less for intellectual activity than for practical performances ... My performance has a special procedure or manner, *not special antecedents*” (Ryle, 1949, p. 32, emphasis added).

In mentioning Ryle, I am not suggesting we follow his particular Behaviorist alternative. Rather, I am pointing to the fact that the Pragmatist sidesteps Fodor’s circularity objection altogether. Pragmatists reject the Cartesian principle that the intelligence of an

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<sup>150</sup> Fodor, we have seen, is explicit that it is this Cartesian commitment that he aims to revive – hence, his focus on the *etiology* of a disposition or of a certain behavior (see, also, my fn. 148, above).

activity must be explained by appeal to an antecedent and independently specifiable intelligence-bestowing activity.

To bring this thought back to Peacocke's account, one's finding certain transitions primitively compelling should not be seen as the *outcome* of some prior understanding, the possession conditions of which are independently specifiable. Rather, one's finding certain transitions primitively compelling *constitutes* one's understanding. The explanatory relation between concept possession and the transitions one is disposed to make is not an etiological relation but a constitutive one. A concept C being exploited in having a thought about the world is not *that in light of which one finds* certain transitions rather than others primitively compelling, namely, those mentioned in C's possession conditions. Rather, its being exploited in a thought *just is* one's finding compelling certain transitions as are specified in the concept's possession conditions. As a result, there is no threat of circularity.<sup>151</sup>

The neo-Cartesian might still object that such a response simply takes for granted the notion of *finding* a transition compelling, without explaining what such finding consists in that would mark it off from merely having *de facto* appropriate dispositions (given that I have denied that possessing an appropriate concept is to *explain* this distinction). I have required of the neo-Cartesian some account of how the exploitation of a given concept *explains* the subject's *taking* some proposition to be an epistemic liaison of some set of propositions  $\{p_i\}$ . The subject's *taking* was to be distinguished from the subject's merely

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<sup>151</sup> The only circularity that might threaten this kind of explanation is one that mentions concept C in specifying the possession conditions of that very concept (C can be used, but not mentioned in the possession conditions of C). It is this kind of circularity that Peacocke's (1992) account is designed to avoid.

being disposed. If we are allowed to leave unanalyzed the notion of *finding* a transition compelling, why are we not allowed the same with the notion of *taking* some proposition to be an epistemic liaison of  $\{p_i\}$ ?

The reason for this *seeming* favoritism is that on the neo-Cartesian account, possessing a concept is completely independent of whatever epistemic capacities the subject has. As a result, it is unclear how possessing a concept is to explain the subject's *taking* some transition to be appropriate, rather than the subject's merely being disposed to make a transition that is de facto appropriate. I have argued that given that, on such accounts, concepts are individuated independently of the subject's understanding,<sup>152</sup> concepts *cannot be* the reason-giving features of a mental state; they can, at most, account for the structure of the subject's de facto dispositions. The situation with the Pragmatist, and with Peacocke's position in particular, is inverted. Possessing a concept *is dependent* on the subject's epistemic capacities, on what a subject knows (-that or -how). This is, ultimately, what makes sense of the personal-level nature of *having* reasons. Indeed, unlike the neo-Cartesian, a concept is individuated by its possession conditions, where these specify what mental states having contents involving that concept provides the subject reason to think and to do. Such an account of concepts, then, makes it unproblematic to see what it is about the exploitation of a concept in having a belief about the world in virtue of which the subject is *epistemically* disposed to make certain inferences and recognize the satisfiability of certain desires.

As Peacocke puts the relevant distinction:

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<sup>152</sup> Which is the sensible thing to do if you hold on to the Cartesian 'legend' that the intelligence of an activity, i.e., the subject's understanding, must be explained by appeal to an antecedent and independently specifiable intelligence-bestowing activity, i.e., concepts.



“What all Fregean IRS theories, of whatever stripe, agree upon is the central place of reasons and rationality in the individuation of concepts. Reasons for making judgments are central in any Fregean theory, since the informativeness criterion appeals to what can be reasonably judged in given circumstances. The distinctive claim of the Fregean IRS theorist is then that we can give a philosophical explanation of how reasons contribute to the individuation of concepts by appealing to inferential or conceptual role. *The notion of a thinker’s reasons for making a judgment plays virtually no positive part in Fodor’s account of concepts.*”(Peacocke 2000, p. 332, my italics)

#### 5.4 A general account of reason-giving

The two diametrically opposed positions considered both *purport* to show that S’s having the belief that *p* makes a unique contribution *Z* to S’s epistemic orientation, a contribution determined as a function of, and explained by appeal to, the concepts possessed by S and exploited in S’s having the belief that *p*. However, given their very different accounts of concepts, concept possession, and the relation between concepts and the propositional attitudes, the way that such a claim is substantiated differs greatly. I have argued that they are not both successful in this task. In particular, concepts as understood by neo-Cartesians, and as exemplified by Fodor, are inadequate as the reason-giving features of belief. At bottom, this is so as their individuation is completely independent of the subject’s understanding.

The Pragmatist account of concepts, on the other hand, considers them to be individuated by appropriate epistemic, inferential and recognitional, capacities. As a result, a subject’s possessing a concept just is that subject’s possessing such epistemic capacities. The claim that concepts are the reason-giving features of belief – and hence, that the exploitation of a concept in a given belief explains the contribution that having that belief makes to the

subject's epistemic dispositions – is unproblematic. This is *constitutive* explanation, rather than reductive or etiological explanation.

According to Peacocke's particular account, the contribution that S's having a belief that *p* makes to S's epistemic dispositions, to the inferences S is disposed to draw and to the satisfiability of desires S is disposed to recognize, is determined by the *a-priori* possession conditions of the concepts that are constituents of *p*.

So, how are we to understand the core issue with which this chapter began – that of a subject's being in a position to treat the contents of a belief as a premise in reasoning? How does the above amount to an analysis of the subject's being in such a position? And, how, for example, should we understand the fact that having the belief that Tungurahua is erupting makes *transparent* to people in the area the significance of Tungurahua's eruption to their actions and deliberations?

The first step towards providing an answer is to emphasize that S's having a belief is to be distinguished from S's being aware *of that belief*. Having a belief is an awareness of whatever the belief *is about*. The beliefs that are of interest in the context of this dissertation are empirical beliefs – beliefs about the world. When having such beliefs, it is *the world* that one is aware of. Furthermore, S's having the belief that *p* must also be distinguished from S's being aware of the *content* of the belief. If we follow Peacocke, *p* is a Fregean Thought. To say that S has a belief with such content is not to say that S is thereby aware *of* the Fregean Thought that is its content. Rather, S's belief that *p* is a particular awareness of the world *in virtue of* grasping the Fregean Thought that *p*. Having beliefs with different Fregean Thoughts as *contents* does not necessarily amount

to an awareness of *different entities* – indeed, the point of Frege cases is to illustrate that often it is a *different awareness of the same entities*.<sup>153</sup>

The importance of these distinctions is that the claim that the subject is in a position ‘to treat *the contents of the belief* as a premise’ seems to invoke a suspiciously detached view of the relation between the subject and the subject’s beliefs. It suggests that the subject’s having the belief and treating its contents as a premise requires that she is in a position to deliberate *about* the belief (or its content) and *about* the inferential relations that it stands in towards other beliefs (or their contents).<sup>154</sup> It is as though having a belief and having reasons in light of which to deliberate or act involves a two-step process, first having the belief, and then reasoning about what having that belief makes reasonable for you to think or to do. This is a suggestion that should be avoided. Though it is often the case that having a belief is *accompanied* by a higher order belief about it, this is not required to make sense of the subject’s being in a position to ‘treat the contents of belief as a premise in reasoning’. Indeed, not only is it not required, but insisting on it brings forth the very difficulties pointed out by Ryle (as discussed in the previous section). A subject’s having a belief is not something the subject is necessarily aware *of*, it is what the subject is aware *with*.

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<sup>153</sup> Though I put the neo-Cartesian position to the side, it is worth noting that if we think of content in Russellian terms, as Fodor does, then what the belief is *about* and the *content* of the belief converge. Having an empirical belief with a certain content is having a belief *about that content*. Nonetheless, importantly, in the Russellian case, too, having an empirical belief amounts to having an awareness *of the world* (see also my fn. 123).

<sup>154</sup> According to Shoemaker (1995), it is a necessary condition on S’s having a belief that S is *able* to have higher order beliefs, beliefs *about* beliefs. As I understand him, what underlies this claim is the view I describe here about what is required for S to be in a position to treat the contents of S’s beliefs as premises in reasoning. Though having a belief *often* is accompanied by a higher order belief about it, the presence of such a higher order belief does not seem to be necessary for S to be in a position to treat the contents of S’s beliefs as premises in reasoning.

A subject's 'being in a position to treat the content of her belief as a premise' should be understood in terms of her awareness of the world being such as to contribute to her epistemic dispositions to utilize *the world* – that of which she is aware – as a truth-maker for certain appropriately related beliefs and as a potential satisfier for appropriately related desires. Which beliefs and desires are 'appropriately related' is, as we have seen, a function of the possession conditions of the concepts involved in the particular belief. The subject's *actually* 'treating the content of the belief as a premise in reasoning' is simply the subject's actualizing one or more of these dispositions, that is, it is the subject's actually utilizing *the world* in the service of satisfying certain of these desires and forming (or modifying) certain of these beliefs. In so doing, the subject need not have any understanding of the notion of truth-making, or of inference. Indeed, as anyone who has taught even the most rudimentary logic course can attest, the majority of people are quite able to draw inferences and satisfy their desires in light of their empirical beliefs, yet they are at pains when it comes to articulating the principles governing their reasoning.

When Sam, a normally functioning human being, has the belief that Jack and Jill went up a hill he need not be aware *of his belief* for him to be in a position to form the belief that Jill went up a hill. He need not recognize that the content of his belief contains a conjunction and reason on the basis of his understanding of the truth functionality of conjunction that conjunction-elimination supports the truth of each of the conjuncts. Rather, having the belief is a way that Sam is aware of the world that contributes to Sam's epistemic dispositions in relation to the world – in relation to Jack, Jill, and whatever hill they might have gone up. Given the possession conditions of conjunction,

having the belief involves Sam's finding primitively compelling each of the conjuncts. Or, what amounts to the same thing, having the belief contributes to Sam's epistemic disposition to form beliefs the contents of which are each of its conjuncts. More generally, there is no need for the subject to *recognize* the rational relations that hold between his belief and his other possible propositional attitudes. Having the belief is itself a recognition of *the world's* bearing on certain of his other propositional attitudes; it *just is* the subject's finding primitively compelling certain transitions rather than others.

Similarly, we can understand what is meant by the claim that having the belief that Tungurahua is erupting makes *transparent* to residents of Baños the detrimental significance of the eruption to the satisfiability of their desires to remain alive and well and to pursue their life long dreams. When a resident of Baños *believes* that Tungurahua is erupting, his having this belief just is his having a particular awareness of the volcano. It is an awareness of the volcano the having of which makes a particular contribution to his epistemic dispositions in relation to the volcano. Again, he need not reflect on his belief about Tungurahua and then *take* the belief to support certain inferences and to satisfy, or frustrate, certain desires. The belief is a *taking* of Tungurahua itself. It is a way of *apprehending* Tungurahua, where this apprehension can be understood in terms of its impact on, or contribution to, his other propositional attitudes. The specific contribution of the belief is a function of, and is explained by appeal to, the particular concepts that are exploited in that belief.

Finally, and most importantly for the further purposes of this dissertation we can also understand how the reason-giving status of a given mental state *can* be independent of concept possession. When a concept is exploited in a mental state, say a belief, the state

makes a certain *kind* of contribution to the believer's epistemic orientation. However, the *general* notion of a reason-giving state is that of a state the having of which makes *some* contribution to one's epistemic orientation. For a mental state to make *some such* contribution, we have seen, the reason-giving features of the mental state, that which determines and explains its reason-giving character, cannot be individuated independently of one's understanding; they cannot be individuated independently of what the subject knows (-that or -how). Rather, the reason-giving features of a mental state should be individuated, as the Pragmatist would have it, in terms of certain epistemically robust possession conditions.

Concepts comprise a particular family of epistemic capacities that are individuated by a specific family of possession conditions, namely, ones specified in terms of transitions among propositions that one must find primitively compelling. Having a mental state involving *conceptual* content is, then, having a mental state that makes a certain kind of contribution to the subject's epistemic dispositions, a kind dictated by the appropriate kind of possession conditions. It is a contribution to one's epistemic dispositions to draw certain inferences and recognize the satisfiability of certain desires.

A general formulation of reason-giving can be stated from which, in the next chapter, a nonconceptual account of reason-giving, geared towards an explanation of the reason-giving role of perception, can be constructed:

1. S's having a reason-giving state, R, makes a *unique* contribution, Z, to S's epistemic dispositions in relation to the world (it shapes S's epistemic orientation in a certain unique way)

2. The contribution, Z, that having the reason-giving state, R, makes to S's epistemic dispositions is a particular function of, and is explained by appeal to, certain epistemic capacities exploited in R (and, hence, possessed by S)

If perception is to be a reason-giving state we must account for the contribution that it makes to S's epistemic orientation. In the case of belief, this contribution was explained in terms of the exploitation of *conceptual* capacities. As a result, the nature of the contribution was of the sort discussed above. If perception is nonconceptual, we can expect both that the nature of the unique contribution that having a particular perception makes to the subject's epistemic orientation will differ from that of belief, and that the explanation of this contribution will not appeal to the *conceptual* capacities of the perceiver. Nonetheless, an explanation of this contribution will have to appeal to *some* appropriate epistemic capacities possessed by the perceiver; capacities individuated in terms of appropriate possession conditions. As should be expected, one of the central difficulties facing such an explanation will be carving out the right *kind* of possession conditions for perceptual contents. On the one hand, we must avoid making them so thin as to be of no use, and, on the other hand, avoid making them too robust so as to collapse into the conceptualist position. It is to this set of challenges that I now turn in Chapter 6, 'Nonconceptual Perceptual Apprehension.'

## Chapter 6: Nonconceptual Perceptual Apprehension

### 6.1 Introduction: Recap and strategy for an account of perceptual apprehension

In the previous chapter I explored the status of beliefs as paradigmatic reason-giving states. I argued that having a belief makes a unique contribution to the epistemic orientation of the believer, where this is understood in terms of the believer's epistemic dispositions to draw inferences and to recognize the satisfiability of desires that are *appropriately* related to the belief in question. Which propositional attitudes are appropriately related to a given belief is a function of the concepts exploited in that belief. I further argued that in order for the exploitation of concepts in a belief to explain this reason-giving character not any account of concepts will do. Rather, I argued in favor of a substantive account of conceptual content according to which concepts are robust epistemic capacities individuated by epistemically significant possession conditions. Understood in this way, the kind of explanation we obtain is not a *reductive* explanation. Rather, it is a *constitutive* explanation of the reason-giving status of beliefs in terms of epistemic capacities of a particular kind.

Having explored the reason-giving status of belief, I abstracted a general notion of reason-giving that is independent of concept possession. This general notion was formulated as follows:



1. S's having a reason-giving state, R, makes a *unique* contribution, Z, to S's epistemic dispositions in relation to the world (it shapes S's epistemic orientation in a certain unique way)
2. The contribution, Z, that having the reason-giving state, R, makes to S's epistemic dispositions is a particular function of, and is explained by appeal to, certain epistemic capacities exploited in R (and, hence, possessed by S)

Claim (1) merely articulates what being a reason-giving state in general amounts to. It remains silent about the *kind* of contribution that having the state makes to a subject's epistemic dispositions (i.e., how it shapes the subject's epistemic orientation to the world). It also says nothing about what explains the state's making such a contribution.

Claim (2) aims to fill these gaps.

With respect to beliefs, the epistemic capacities mentioned in (2) are *conceptual* capacities. Following Peacocke's (1992) account, extensively discussed in the previous chapter, in saying that they are *conceptual* capacities we are indicating that they are capacities individuated by a certain kind of possession condition, namely a kind that involves one's finding primitively compelling appropriate transitions among propositional attitudes.<sup>155</sup> When R is the belief that *p*, the contribution Z that having R makes to one's epistemic orientation will be a function of, and be explained by, the concepts exploited in R. The contribution Z will turn out to be of the kind expected given

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<sup>155</sup> In the case of *observational* concepts, to which I return shortly, these transitions will also mention appropriate perceptual experiences. Unless stated otherwise, I will omit this qualification.

the role that beliefs play in folk psychological explanation, namely, supplying that in light of which the believer finds reasonable certain inferences and actions.

This formulation complements the discussion in earlier chapters regarding the attribution and specification of mental content. In Chapter 3 I introduced the *Perspectival constraint* on the specification of mental content. As a reminder, the constraint states that a canonical specification of mental content is to articulate how one *apprehends* the world in having (or undergoing) that mental state. How one apprehends the world is precisely how having that mental state contributes to one's epistemic orientation – to one's finding reasonable certain thoughts or actions (rather than others). The canonical specification of the content of R, thus, aims to articulate this contribution. When R is the belief that *p*, the canonical specification of its content, say 'Fa', will utilize exactly those concepts the exploitation of which make the unique contribution *Z* to one's epistemic orientation, namely those concepts that are constitutive of *p*, i.e., the concepts F and a. As a result, in the case of belief, we can clearly see how the *Perspectival constraint* is satisfied; the concepts mentioned in the canonical specification of belief content just are those concepts by which one apprehends the world when having that belief.

In the case of perception, however, I argued that a prima facie difficulty for nonconceptualists was that it is not clear how a canonical specification of content *does* articulate the contribution that having a perception makes to the subject's epistemic orientation. That is, if perceptual content is nonconceptual, it is not clear how the *Perspectival constraint* is to be satisfied. How, for example, does specifying one's perception of the Mach Figure (introduced in Section 3.3.1) by appeal to the concept square articulate the contribution that having the perception makes to the subject's

epistemic orientation? On the face of it, such a specification suggests that having the perception makes the contribution  $Z_c^{\text{square}}$  that having a mental state exploiting the concept square would make to one's epistemic orientation (where the subscript 'c' stands for 'conceptual'). But, this is a denial of nonconceptualism about perceptual content. Given that concepts are individuated in terms of certain possession conditions, which, in turn, *constitutively* explain the contribution that contents involving those concepts make to one's epistemic orientation, to say that some *perception* makes a contribution  $Z_c^{\text{square}}$  *just is* to say that perception involves the exploitation of the *concept square*.

Alternatively, given that according to the nonconceptualist the subject *can* undergo a perception thus specified without possessing this (or any) concept, it is clear that having the perception *does not* make such a contribution  $Z_c^{\text{square}}$ . But then, what contribution  $Z_{nc}^{\text{square}}$  (where  $Z_{nc}^{\text{square}} \neq Z_c^{\text{square}}$ , and the subscript 'nc' stands for 'nonconceptual') *does* the appeal to the concept square in the canonical specification of the content of perception articulate? How does such a specification illuminate how the subject perceptually *apprehends* the world?

By definition,  $Z_{nc}^{\text{square}}$  will be that contribution made by a perception the canonical specification of the contents of which appeals to the concept square; it will be that contribution that having a perception of something *as square*, rather than *as diamond* or *as red*, makes to one's epistemic orientation. However, we have yet little idea how to specify this contribution nontrivially. Furthermore, as it is not a *conceptual* capacity that explains the contribution  $Z_{nc}^{\text{square}}$ , we must supply some *alternative*, i.e., *nonconceptual*, substantive account of the epistemic capacities exploited in perception that *do* explain its making such a contribution.

In order to develop an account of *nonconceptual* apprehension (applicable to perception) I will follow a similar strategy as I have in the previous chapter when discussing the case of *conceptual* apprehension.

Briefly, the previous chapter involved two main parts corresponding to claims (1) and (2) above. The first part (Section 5.2) aimed to characterize the *kind* of contribution that beliefs make to a believer's epistemic orientation. It did so by considering their paradigmatic role within folk psychological, intentional, explanation and prediction of deliberation and action. The process of belief attribution is a holistic process, governed by norms of rationality, sensitive to the inferences that the subject is disposed to draw and to the desires that the subject is disposed to satisfy. Given a certain background of beliefs and desires, the attribution of a belief explains the subject's performing a certain class of inferences and actions and predicts his performing certain others. The contribution, *Z*, that having a given belief makes to one's epistemic orientation was, thus, identified as its unique contribution to the inferences that the subject is in a position to draw and to the desires the satisfaction of which the subject is in a position to recognize.

The second part (Section 5.3 and on) aimed to provide an explanation of the reason-giving phenomena just characterized; an explanation of the kind (and grain) of contributions that beliefs paradigmatically make. Such an account, I argued, should appeal to certain recombinable reason-giving elements – concepts. I proceeded to investigate the nature of these recombinable elements, and argued, following Peacocke, in favor of a Pragmatist account of concepts according to which concepts are individuated in terms of a certain kind of possession condition. The kind of possession condition involved was specifically geared for the explanatory project characterized.

Note that though the direction of *analysis* was from reflection on the practices of folk psychological explanation and prediction to the nature of conceptual content, the nature of such content does not *depend* on the vagaries of our explanatory practices. Rather, it is the other way around. The *success* of these explanatory practices is the phenomenon an explanation of which depends on the exploitation of epistemic capacities with a certain nature. In particular, it depends on the exploitation of fine-grain recombinable capacities individuated by possession conditions specified in terms of epistemic dispositions to draw certain inferences and to recognize the satisfiability of certain desires.<sup>156</sup>

This two-partite strategy can, and should, also be followed when thinking about the reason-giving character of perception. We can begin by characterizing the *kind* of contribution that perception paradigmatically makes to a perceiver's epistemic orientation, and then proceed to develop an explanation of this contribution in terms of the exploitation of appropriate epistemic capacities.

Significant advances on these two stages have already been made in previous chapters. With respect to the kind of contribution that perception makes to one's epistemic orientation I argued (in Chapters 3 and 4) that, at the very least, perception provides reasons for certain kinds of discriminative behaviors. In particular, perception provides our reasons for sorting objects (and engaging with them, more generally) according to certain metrics of similarities and differences. A central aim of this chapter is to follow on these results – to develop and elaborate this discriminative role that perception

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<sup>156</sup> Of course, as mentioned in the previous chapter, if, contrary to my assumption throughout this dissertation, folk psychology turns out to be nothing more than a myth, then these epistemic capacities, i.e., concepts, will turn out to be a very different kind of entity (indeed, there may not be any).

purportedly plays and to emphasize its centrality in thinking about the content of perception over other alternatives. This will provide us a canonical specification of perceptual content that accurately articulates the space of possible contributions that perception makes to a perceiver's epistemic orientation. I will then proceed to develop an account of the epistemic capacities the exploitation of which constitutively explains the different contributions thus specified.

Advances have also been made with respect to this further goal. With a substantive account of *conceptual* content at hand, we can now say *something* substantive about the essentially contrastive notion of *nonconceptual* content. Nonconceptual content is simply content that is *not* individuated by possession conditions of the kind that we have seen govern the individuation of concepts. It is for this reason that nonconceptual content is commonly defined as content the canonical specification of which need not appeal to concepts that the subject possesses – the subject can undergo states with such contents without having satisfied the possession conditions that individuate the concepts utilized in the canonical specification of their contents.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> We now can see more clearly why the claim to ambiguity in the notion of nonconceptual content, which has received much recent attention, and as mentioned in my fn. 51, is unmotivated. The ambiguity arises from the thought that the nature of a state's content, conceptual or nonconceptual, is independent of whether or not one must possess certain concepts to undergo such a state. If the claim were true, then it would be possible to have a state with conceptual contents without possessing the concepts that are utilized in specifying that content. It would also be possible to have a state with nonconceptual content even though having such a state depends on possessing the concepts specifying that content. Neither of these claims can be sustained once we recognize the relation between the individuation conditions of a content, its nature, and its possession conditions. If you do not satisfy the possession conditions of a concept, you cannot undergo a state whose content is partially individuated by your satisfying those very possession conditions. And if undergoing a state with a certain content *necessitates* that you satisfy the possession condition of certain concepts an explanation of this modal fact would be that the nature of that content is partially individuated by your satisfying these very possession conditions, it is a content that involves the concepts thus individuated. Thus, the crucial mistake

This negative characterization of *nonconceptual* content leaves much theoretical space for the notion to inhabit. Nonetheless, the notion of nonconceptual *content* is highly constrained. The negative lesson of our analysis of purely externalist accounts of content, in Chapters 3 and 4, was that, insofar as content (whether conceptual or nonconceptual) is to be the relevant reason-giving feature of a mental state, it *cannot* be individuated independently of (at least some of) what the subject knows (-that or -how), as the Pragmatist would put it (in contrast with the neo-Cartesian of the previous chapter).<sup>158</sup> Furthermore, the positive lesson of the previous chapter was that an adequate account of nonconceptual content will appeal to the exploitation of robust epistemic capacities individuated by a certain kind of possession conditions (specified in terms of what the subject must know (-that or -how)), albeit *not* of the kind that individuates conceptual capacities.<sup>159</sup> Indeed, it is precisely because the subject's dispositions to make certain transitions among mental states are dispositions sustained by the exploitation of such

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of proponents of the state/content distinction, mentioned in my fn. 51, is that they fail to recognize the relevant substantial notion of conceptual content with which the notion of nonconceptual content must be contrasted (as Heck 2007 also argues in response to Byrne 2005).

<sup>158</sup> This I have argued followed from the *Perspectival constraint* on the specification of mental content and its underlying commitment to a notion of content governed by *Personal-level reason explanation*.

<sup>159</sup> These negative and positive conditions on an account of nonconceptual content resonate nicely with Cussins' (2002) remarks regarding the notion of mental content in general and of nonconceptual mental content in particular. He says: "The point of a theory of content is to reveal cognitive accessibility to the world, and therefore should be given in terms of elements of subjects' access to the world. For example, by means of concepts that the subjects possess. That's how a theory of conceptual content specifies contents. But that a theory of nonconceptual content can make canonical use of concepts that are not possessed by the subjects of content does *not* mean that a theory of nonconceptual content is not in the exclusive business of specifying forms of cognitive access to the world. It does not therefore mean that a theory of nonconceptual content can liberate itself from content specifications in terms of the elements of subjects' access to the world. What it *does* mean is that there are elements of subjects' access to the world *other* than concepts."(p. 149)

capacities that we can say that these dispositions are *epistemic* dispositions, and hence that the state that explains the subject's making these transitions is a reason-giving state.

At this point we already have the beginning of an answer to the question with which this dissertation began: How can perception be nonconceptual and yet also provide us reasons for deliberation and action? We can fully articulate what *it would take* for perception to be both reason-giving and nonconceptual. Perception would have to make some contribution to our epistemic dispositions to form particular beliefs and to engage in certain actions. And its making such a contribution would have to be sustained by the exploitation of epistemic capacities individuated by possession conditions of a different kind than that which individuates concepts. Of course, the difficulty is in showing how these two conditions can be simultaneously met. That is, the difficulty is to show that epistemic capacities thus individuated can in fact explain the kind of contribution that perception makes to one's epistemic orientation.

In this chapter I will argue that the paradigmatic reason-giving role of perception is to be characterized in terms of its making a contribution to our epistemic dispositions towards certain appropriately related discriminative behaviors. I will further argue that, analogous to the case of belief, we can explain perception's particular contribution by appeal to the exploitation of *discriminative* capacities individuated by appropriately specified possession conditions. Finally, I will argue that the account of perceptual content developed in this dissertation, which appeals to such discriminative capacities, can explain how perception can both be nonconceptual and provide our reasons for belief and action.



However, before turning to this positive suggestion as to the reason-giving role of perception and the nature of the capacities that are to explain perception's playing this role, it is worth looking at an initially attractive and important alternative, yet one that I shall argue is ultimately unsuccessful.

### 6.2 Perception and observational concepts

One of the central challenges with which this dissertation began (and which it aims to resolve) was to explain how perception, as a state with nonconceptual content, can provide one's reasons in light of which one forms appropriate perceptual beliefs. Given the newly developed characterization of a reason-giving state, we can analyze perception's providing such reasons in terms of its making a contribution to the perceiver's epistemic dispositions to form such perceptual beliefs. Seeing as an adequate account of perceptual content is to accommodate the full range of perceptual beliefs for which perception provides us reason, a straightforward suggestion as to the canonical specification of perceptual content would be to utilize just those concepts that specify the corresponding beliefs. The canonical specification of each perceptual state's content will, then, appeal to exactly those observational concepts that appear in the canonical specification of the content of the perceptual beliefs to the formation of which that state purportedly contributes.

The different perceptions of the Mach Figure, for example, make different contributions to one's epistemic orientation. One way of perceiving the figure contributes to one's dispositions to form perceptual beliefs exploiting the concept square, whereas another

way of perceiving the figure contributes to one's dispositions to form perceptual beliefs exploiting the concept diamond. Specifying the content of the former perception by appeal to the observational concept square and the latter by appeal to diamond precisely articulates these differences between their respective contributions,  $Z_{nc}^{\text{square}}$  and  $Z_{nc}^{\text{diamond}}$ .

Generally, the appeal to some observational concept, O, in the canonical specification of perceptual content, articulates the contribution  $Z_{nc}^O$  to a perceiver's epistemic orientation, where this can now be understood as a contribution to the perceiver's epistemic dispositions to apply that very concept, O, in thought.

Which perceptual beliefs one will be epistemically disposed to form, when undergoing a perception, will be a straightforward function of the different contributions that it makes to one's applying particular observational concepts in thought (as expressed in its canonical specification). For example, Samantha's undergoing a perception the canonical specification of the contents of which appeals to the concepts crimson and square provides her reason to form the perceptual belief that *there's a crimson square* (as well as others). This is so, as the *cumulative* contribution of  $Z_{nc}^{\text{crimson}}$  and  $Z_{nc}^{\text{square}}$  just is a contribution to her epistemic dispositions to employ in thought *both* concepts crimson and square, an instance of which is the belief mentioned.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> This is, of course, a simplification in many respects. In particular, for a perception to provide reason for the belief identified, it is not sufficient that it merely contribute to the perceiver's epistemic dispositions to apply the concepts square and crimson; correspondingly, it is not sufficient that it is a perception the canonical specification of which mentions these concepts. The canonical specification must also indicate the compresence of these properties (perhaps by each being indexed to a location, or surface, in egocentric space). I put such complication to the side. Though worthy of further investigation, it does not appear to invalidate the substance of the current proposal.

Finally, such a characterization of the reason-giving role of perception has the added benefit that it complements the account of observational concepts, briefly discussed in the previous chapter, along Peacocke's (1992; 2004a; 2004b) lines.

As mentioned, according to Peacocke, observational concepts are concepts that are partially individuated in terms of possession conditions having to do with one's finding primitively compelling transitions from appropriate perceptual experiences to contents involving those concepts.

He says:

“A perceptual experience can make it rational, in certain circumstances, to judge that a presented object falls under an observational concept, but not under a theoretical one. The observational judgement can amount to knowledge, and does so because a willingness to apply the concept in the given circumstances is mentioned in its possession condition. Similarly, *a perceptual experience can make it rational to judge that a presented object falls under one but not under a second observational concept, precisely because the experience is of a kind mentioned in the possession condition for the first, but not for the second concept.*” (Peacocke 2004a, p. 86, my italics)

The observational concept square is individuated in part by a possession condition that mentions a perceiver's willingness to apply the concept in response to experiences of a particular type, whereas the observational concept diamond is individuated in part by a possession condition that mentions experiences of a *different* type. How these perceptions are to be typified is, of course, the most crucial question. Simply saying that the former is a square-type perception and the latter a diamond-type perception is insufficient. Further required is an adequate account of what being a perception of such a type *consists in* such that it can 'make it rational' to form some perceptual judgment, or to apply some observational concept, rather than another.

One response, sufficient for establishing Peacocke's epistemological claim above, is that the different perceptions are typified by their correctness conditions (provided, e.g., in terms of positioned scenarios or protopositions).<sup>161</sup> In one sense of the phrase, the fact that the perception has certain correctness conditions *makes it rational* to form a judgment involving certain observational concepts. Appealing to such facts (specifying these correctness conditions) can then make transparent the appropriateness of a transition from a perceptual experience to contents involving certain observational concepts. The appropriateness of the transition is guaranteed, as an observational concept will truthfully apply to exactly those entities that satisfy the correctness conditions of the perception type mentioned in the concept's individuation conditions. Furthermore, one's *possessing* some observational concept, O, entails that one is willing to apply the concept in circumstances in which it is, *de facto*, reasonable for one to apply it, i.e., those circumstances in which one undergoes a perception that is correct when Os are about. In this way Samantha's perceptual belief that there's a crimson square can amount to knowledge. The concepts square and crimson are individuated in part by a willingness to apply them when undergoing perceptions of the square- and crimson-type where these are perceptions whose correctness conditions are satisfied when crimson squares are about.

Nonetheless, though appealing to a perception's correctness conditions is sufficient to account for the appropriateness of a transition from perception to a state involving some observational concept, it is not sufficient as an account of perceptual *content* (just as an

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<sup>161</sup> As noted in my fn. 66, Peacocke (1992) presents the Mach Figure as an example that cannot be accommodated by his account of nonconceptual content as positioned scenario contents. Positioned scenario contents are insufficient to distinguish between the individuation conditions of the observational concepts, square and diamond. Peacocke develops the notion of protopositional content as an additional layer of nonconceptual content, that manages to overcome this difficulty.

appeal to truth conditions in the case of beliefs is insufficient as an account of belief content).<sup>162</sup> Rather, an adequate account of what a perception of the given type consist in (the type appearing in the possession conditions of a given observational concept) must explain the subject's finding transparent the appropriateness of what might very well (but need not) be an appropriate transition. Otherwise, we fail to account for the subject's making the transition *because* of thus finding it appropriate. An account of perceptual content must explain its *making rational* the formation of a certain judgment *from the perspective of the perceiver*.<sup>163</sup>

Put differently, to say that a willingness to apply Q in some condition C is part of the possession condition of Q, is just to establish a conditional: if one possesses Q, then one is willing to apply Q in condition C. It is silent on what such willingness consists in and on how it comes about. An account of perceptual content aims to *explain* what it is about

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<sup>162</sup> Indeed, I would say that for a theory of *content* the appeal to correctness conditions is also unnecessary; a satisfactory account of perceptual content will *ipso facto* determine a perception's correctness conditions. As Cussins (2002) says in discussing the case of belief content: "...if you get right the specification of the mode of presentation (the content) then something would have gone wrong if, having done that, the theorist had to go on to specify the reference. A specification of content is a specification of cognitive availability. ... ordered pairs whose first member refers to the 'object' of experience or thought, and whose second member refers to a mode or manner of presentation have no place in a theory of content. The right specification of *how* is also a specification of *what* is available in a cognition; and it is crucial to understanding the theory of content to see that this is so."(p. 149)

<sup>163</sup> In terms of a distinction drawn in previous chapters, and borrowed from McDowell (1994a), correctness conditions can illuminate a transition's reasonableness from the standpoint of rationality, but not from the standpoint of the subject's rationality. This same distinction is the one that has plagued us from the very beginning. Recall, for example, the discussion of Vision (2009) in Chapter 2. I argued that according to Vision objectual perception can show how a transition from perception to thought is rational because there is *some* specification of the objectual perception that make transparent the appropriateness of the transition. However, I argued, an adequate account of perception must respect, what I called, the *first person transparency constraint* according to which the specification that makes transparent the appropriateness of the transition must, in some sense, be available to the perceiver. The same considerations were later expressed in the *Perspectival constraint*, which I argued non-epistemic accounts of perception fail to meet.

condition C (undergoing a certain perception) in virtue of which one is willing to apply  $\underline{O}$  (rather than do nothing, or rather than apply some other observational concept).

It is *this* role of perception that the current proposal characterizes (though does not yet *explain*). The relevant perception *type*, the type specified by appeal to some observational concept  $\underline{O}$ , encompasses those perceptual experiences that provide the perceiver reason to apply  $\underline{O}$  in thought. In other words, the type encompasses those perceptions that make the contribution  $Z_{nc}^O$  to a perceiver's epistemic orientation – a contribution to the perceiver's epistemic dispositions to apply  $\underline{O}$  in thought.

#### 6.2.1 Explaining perceptual apprehension: Individuating epistemic capacities

Given this characterization of the reason-giving role of perception, the further question is how to *explain* perception's playing such a role. We must provide an account of the epistemic capacities the exploitation of which in perception would explain its providing the perceiver reasons to apply appropriate observational concepts in thought. Most importantly, we must do so in a way that is consistent with the nonconceptual character of perception.

In the case of belief, the epistemic capacities in question are conceptual capacities. The exploitation of conceptual capacities explains the contribution that having a belief makes to one's epistemic orientation, as these capacities are individuated by possession conditions specifying transitions among propositional attitudes that the subject finds primitively compelling. The contribution that a belief makes is *constitutively* explained as

a function of the possession conditions that individuate the concepts that are the constituents of that belief.

A similar proposal can be developed in the case of perception. However, unlike conceptual capacities, the capacities exploited in perception will be individuated by a different kind of possession conditions. They will be individuated by possession conditions geared toward the constitutive explanation of the contribution that perception purportedly makes to the application of particular observational concepts, and, correspondingly, to the formation of particular perceptual beliefs.

Focusing on a characterization of the reason-giving role of perception in terms of epistemic dispositions to apply particular observational concepts elicits a straightforward (yet unsuccessful) suggestion as to the nature of the epistemic capacities an exploitation of which in perception would constitutively explain such contribution. These are epistemic capacities individuated in terms of the observational concepts the application of which in thought the subject must find primitively compelling. Just as having the concept and, for example, consists in one's finding instances of the elimination and introduction of the concept primitively compelling, so we may consider the capacity to *perceive* something *as O* as consisting in one's finding the application of the observational concept O in thought primitively compelling.

The fact that a perception of the Mach Figure *as square*, but not *as diamond*, makes a contribution to one's epistemic dispositions to apply the concept square in thought is explained by the fact that having such a perception involves the exploitation of an epistemic capacity individuated by a possession condition mentioning the subject's

finding primitively compelling the application of the concept square, rather than diamond. The exploitation of this epistemic capacity *constitutively* explains the contribution that having the perception makes to the subject's epistemic orientation, i.e., a contribution to the subject's epistemic dispositions to apply the concept square in thought.

Individuating the epistemic capacities exploited in perception in this way seems ideal for the purposes of explaining the unique contribution that perception makes to one's epistemic dispositions to apply concepts in thought. For each observational concept there will be some epistemic capacity the exploitation of which in perception accounts for one's being epistemically disposed to apply it in thought. And for each perceptual belief, there will be some set of epistemic capacities the joint exploitation of which in perception accounts for one's being epistemically disposed to form it (namely, those capacities individuated by possession conditions appealing to the observational concepts that are constituents of the perceptual belief).

There is something correct about this suggested reason-giving role of perception. Having a perception as of  $p$  commonly provides us reason to believe that  $p$  (where  $p$  is a proposition composed of observational concepts). Similarly, there is something correct about the thought that perception contributes to one's epistemic dispositions to apply particular observational concepts (as expressed in the possession conditions of these concepts). An account of perceptual content is obligated to provide *some* explanation of perception's playing this role.



Nonetheless, though the exploitation of *some* epistemic capacities must explain this range of contributions that perception makes to our epistemic orientation, such capacities *cannot* be individuated by the possession conditions just identified – in terms of a creature’s finding the application of a given observational concept (rather than another) primitively compelling. Epistemic capacities thus individuated are anathema to the notion of nonconceptual content.

First, note that the exploitation of such epistemic capacities is *too fit* for the explanation of the contribution that perception makes to one’s dispositions to apply observational concepts in thought. It limits the reason-giving role of perception to whatever contributions it makes to a creature’s conceptual life.<sup>164</sup> If perception’s reason-giving role were in fact so limited, much of our motivation for the nonconceptual character of perception would dissipate. Recall that the main motivation for nonconceptualism about perception is the recognition that perceivers need not be conceivers and that a creature’s perceptual acuity can transcend its conceptual acuity.<sup>165</sup> In other words, it is motivated by the thought that the contribution that perception makes to a creature’s epistemic orientation is independent of the creature’s conceptual capacities (if any).

Suppose that a nonconceptual creature, an Icelandic puffin, for example, is having a perception canonically specified by appeal to certain observational concepts. According to this suggestion, the creature is undergoing a state whose contribution to its epistemic orientation is *exhausted* by its contribution to its dispositions to apply those observational

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<sup>164</sup> As perception’s contribution is constituted by the creature’s finding primitively compelling the application of certain observational concepts.

<sup>165</sup> That is, the creature can make many more perceptual discriminations than it can conceptual discriminations (in the limit case, it can make no conceptual discriminations at all).

concepts in thought. However, one can apply in thought *only* concepts that one antecedently possesses, and the nonconceptual creature possesses none (nor *can* it possess any). But, then, insofar as nonconceptual creatures, infants and others in the animal kingdom, are concerned, such a contribution to their epistemic dispositions remains inert, and insofar as we are concerned they remain undisclosed. As a result, it is a mystery why we should think that perception makes any such contribution in the first place. And more seriously, it is a mystery why we should think that such creatures have contentful states at all.

A similar consideration holds with respect to the fine-grained contributions that perception purportedly makes to the epistemic dispositions of adult human beings (who possess a great deal of observational concepts). Such contributions, too, would remain inert and undisclosed so long as perceivers fail to possess the fine-grained observational concepts involved in the canonical specification of their perceptual content. So long as Samantha does not possess the concept red<sub>27</sub> her having a perception the canonical specification of which appeals to the concept red<sub>27</sub> might provide her a reason to apply that very concept in thought, however, it is a reason that cannot be manifest. Samantha is unable, even if merely contingently, to have such thoughts. The fine-grained specification of perceptual content, which purportedly articulates fine-grained contributions to one's dispositions to apply fine-grained observational concepts, articulates *principally invisible contributions* to one's epistemic orientation. But if this is the case, we have similarly lost

our motivation to think that perception *makes* such fine-grained contributions to our epistemic orientation.<sup>166</sup>

Note that even if the nature of perceptual content is as suggested, none of the above entails that nonconceptual creatures are barred from having perceptions, neither does it entail that their perceptions fail to provide them reason to apply particular observational concepts in thought. Similarly, it does not entail that perception fails to provide a perceiver reason to apply fine-grained observational concepts in thought, whether or not the perceiver happens to possess those particular concepts. Rather, what it *does* entail is that were perception's reason-giving role a function of the exploitation of capacities individuated as suggested, we would have no insight into the perceptual capacities of nonconceptual creatures, and we would have no reason to think that the contribution perception makes to a creature's epistemic orientation is in fact independent of its conceptual capacities.

This is an important point to recognize. Though the *manifestation* of such contributions *does* depend on the antecedent conceptual capacities of the creature, perception's making these contributions need not depend on such capacities. To think otherwise, is to fail to note the distinction (discussed in Chapter 5, Section 5.2) between one's having certain epistemic dispositions and one's having a state that makes a certain contribution to one's epistemic dispositions. The notion of a reason-giving state is that of a state that makes some contribution to a perceiver's epistemic orientation. It does not follow that merely in

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<sup>166</sup> By definition, fine-grained content is content specified by concepts that we need not possess. But as content specification is to articulate such contribution, it is a contribution that does not depend on possessing concepts. But if all manifestation of such contribution depends on concept possession, we have no evidence for such fine-grained contributions.

virtue of having the reason-giving state the perceiver is thereby disposed to think or act in certain ways. Just as being made of salt contributes to an object's disposition to dissolve in water even if the object is encased in an impermeable plastic shell and even if no water existed, so is the case with one's having a reason-giving state such as perception.<sup>167</sup>

One's having a perception the canonical specification of which appeals to the concept crimson, for example, contributes to one's epistemic disposition to apply that concept in thought, even if one does not possess the concept crimson, or any other concept, for that matter, and indeed, even if, like an Icelandic puffin, one *cannot* possess that (or any) concept. One's failing to possess the concept merely entail that this contribution will fail to manifest.

Whether or not perception's making such a contribution *does* depend on a creature's conceptual repertoire is a matter of whether or not it is possible for a creature to satisfy the possession conditions of the epistemic capacities the exploitation of which in perception constitutively explain this contribution, while failing to satisfy the possession conditions of the concepts to the application of which the perception contributes.<sup>168</sup> The difficulty above is not with the general claim that perception makes some contribution to a creature's conceptual life. On the contrary, its making such a contribution is part of the

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<sup>167</sup> Or, how having a mass of 50kg contributes to a *round* object's disposition to make a *triangular* impression in a sheet of wax, though the object is not thereby disposed to make such an impression. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the case of belief is no different. One's having the belief that mount Tahurangua is erupting might contribute to the native's dispositions to flee, but that is not to say that the native is thereby disposed to flee. What the native is disposed to think or to do is a function not only of his having this one belief, but of the constellation of other beliefs and desires he might have. See also my fn. 115.

<sup>168</sup> If a creature cannot satisfy these possession conditions nonconceptually, we will also find ourselves with a circular account of observational concepts. Undergoing the kind of perceptions that are mentioned in the possession conditions of the observational concept Q, would require that one antecedently possesses Q, in which case, an appeal to that perception type in the possession conditions of the concept will do nothing to illuminate the nature of that concept.

phenomena that an appeal to the nonconceptual nature of perceptual content aims to explain. Rather, the difficulty is that the epistemic capacities identified lead to an account of perception whose contribution to a creature's epistemic orientation can only be manifest in a way that depends on the conceptual capacities of the creature. As a result, it is unclear why we would think that the notion of nonconceptual apprehension has any role to play in an account of perceptual content.<sup>169</sup>

However, we now come to a more serious objection to the proposed nature of the epistemic capacities that are to explain perception's contribution to our applying observational concepts in thought. Can we really make sense of a creature's satisfying the possession conditions individuating these epistemic capacities without possessing, or even being able to possess, any concepts whatsoever? How can a creature incapable of possessing the concept square, for example, find primitively compelling its application and, hence, satisfy the possession conditions individuating its capacity to perceive some object *as square*?

Insofar as a nonconceptual creature is concerned, there is no difference between its satisfying a possession condition specified in terms of its finding the concept square primitively compelling rather than the concept diamond, or for that matter, rather than the concept red. The creature finds the application of none of these concepts compelling.

There is clearly *something* different, insofar as the creature is concerned, between its perception of an object *as square*, rather than *as diamond*, and rather than *as red*. It is that

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<sup>169</sup> To continue with the analogy to the contribution that properties make to the objects that have them, the suggested identification of the epistemic capacities exploited in perception is analogous to identifying the mass of an object by appeal to the contribution that it makes to the object's disposition to make a triangular impression in a sheet of wax, rather than by appeal to its contribution to the object's disposition to resist an applied external force.

something in virtue of which the former perception makes a contribution to its epistemic disposition to apply the concept square in thought, rather than diamond or red (a contribution that, as noted above, *does not* depend on the creature's possessing or being able to possess the concept). However, if the creature can possess none of these concepts, this difference cannot be captured in terms of concepts the application of which the creature finds primitively compelling.

The same consideration holds with respect to the fine-grained contents of perception that purportedly exploit epistemic capacities individuated by possession conditions mentioning observational concepts that we do not possess. How can Samantha, who does not possess the concept red<sub>27</sub>, undergo a perception exploiting an epistemic capacity to perceive some object *as red<sub>27</sub>*, if a condition on her undergoing such a perception is that she finds primitively compelling the application of that very concept she lacks?

Alternatively, what possession condition does Samantha satisfy, what is it that she knows (-that or -how), when she perceives something *as red<sub>27</sub>* rather than *as red<sub>28</sub>*? It seems that if Samantha finds *any* concept primitively compelling, it is, rather, one and the same concept on both occasions, the concept red, which she *does* possess.

A possible response might be that the capacities exploited in perception are to be identified in terms of the observational concepts the application of which one *would* find primitively compelling *were* one to possess those concepts. In discussing observational judgments, Heck says that “[t]he perceptual state can not have the content that *p*, strictly speaking, since its content is nonconceptual; rather, it appears to me as if *p* just in case I am in a state on whose basis I would judge that *p*, were I to judge solely on that basis” (2000, p. 517). And in a footnote, he says: “It seems to me that one can truly *say* that it

appears to me as if  $p$ , even if I lack the concepts required if I am to form that judgment, so long as I would so judge, if I did have those concepts...”(Ibid, fn. 37)

Such a response allows us truthfully to say that even Sam the Icelandic puffin undergoes a perception of some object *as square*. This is so as it is a perception-type such that were he to possess the concept square he would find the application of that very concept primitively compelling. Similarly, it allows us truthfully to say that Samantha undergoes a perception of some object *as red*<sub>27</sub>, because were she to possess the concept red<sub>27</sub> she would find primitively compelling its application in such circumstances. Though true, it does not provide us any insight into the nature of the epistemic capacities the exploitation of which in perception *makes* it true. Rather, what makes the counterfactual claim true is the fact that the perception is of a kind mentioned in the a-priori possession condition of the observational concept square, or red<sub>27</sub>. Possessing the concept *entails* that one finds its application in such circumstances primitively compelling. We can see why one would find the application of a concept primitively compelling were one to possess the concept *from the analysis of the possession conditions of observational concepts*. But this tells us nothing about the reasons that perception provides a perceiver in light of which *were one to possess the appropriate concept one would find its application primitively compelling*.

Before moving to the next and final section, it is worth providing a brief summary of some of the central points above. Importantly, we need not doubt that perception makes a contribution to a perceiver’s epistemic dispositions to apply a given concept in thought (and consequentially, to the formation of perceptual beliefs). Nor should we doubt that it can make such a contribution independently of the perceiver’s conceptual capacities. This is so even though the manifestation of such a contribution does depend on the perceiver’s

conceptual repertoire. What is needed is a substantive account of perceptual content the canonical specification of which utilizes those observational concepts to the application of which the perception contributes. Such a substantive account of perceptual content will appeal to the exploitation of epistemic capacities individuated in terms of possession conditions that a creature must be able to satisfy independently of its having any conceptual capacities. To explain perception's making such contributions, we cannot appeal to epistemic capacities individuated in terms of the observational concepts one must find primitively compelling; the possession conditions individuating these epistemic capacities must be specified without mentioning the possibility of any conceptual deployment.<sup>170</sup>

So, how are we to individuate these epistemic capacities? To this I now turn.

### 6.3 Perception and the nonconceptual individuation of discriminative capacities

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the positive suggestion that I advance here is that we understand the paradigmatic reason-giving role of perception in terms of its making a unique contribution to our epistemic dispositions to carry out certain appropriate discriminative engagements with our environment.

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<sup>170</sup> In other words, no concepts can be *mentioned* in the possession conditions of these epistemic capacities. In particular, the observational concept whose application in thought is to be explained by appeal to the exploitation of some epistemic capacity in perception cannot be mentioned in the possession conditions of that very epistemic capacity. See also my fn. 168 above in relation to the circularity worry in the individuation conditions of observational concepts. Once mention of observational concepts enter into the possession conditions of these capacities, it is clear that one cannot possess these capacities, and hence, cannot undergo perceptions without also having satisfied the possession conditions of the concepts mentioned.



Perceiving some object *as red*, for example, makes the unique contribution  $Z_{nc}^{red}$  to one's epistemic orientation, where this is understood as a contribution to one's epistemic dispositions to engage the object perceived (or the environment more generally) in what might be termed, conveniently, as red-appropriate ways. The crucial challenges that this section aims to overcome is to identify the *relevant* red-appropriate engagements by which to characterize the range of unique contributions that perception paradigmatically makes. And, further, it aims to provide a nonconceptual account of the discriminative capacities exploited in perception that would constitutively explain its making the contributions thus characterized.<sup>171</sup>

The previous section has already dealt with one suggestion as to these relevant engagements. The application of an appropriate observational concept is, after all, also a *kind* of discriminative response for which perception provides us reason. Furthermore, it is a particularly apt kind of response for the purposes of characterizing the *unique* contribution that perceiving some object *as P* makes to one's epistemic orientation.

Perceiving some object *as P* uniquely contributes to the perceiver's epistemic dispositions to apply the concept P in thought. The relevant red-appropriate engagement with a perceived object is then the formation of thoughts about the object involving the observational concept red. Such discriminative responses seem perfectly tailored for the purpose of characterizing the full range of different contributions that perception makes to our epistemic orientation.

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<sup>171</sup> In much the same manner as I have investigated the engagements appropriate to the belief that *p* by looking to its role within folk psychology as a first step in characterizing the reason-giving role of belief. An explanation of the reason-giving role characterized was then sought in terms of the exploitation of conceptual capacities.

Though perception *does* contribute to our having such epistemic dispositions, and different perception types will make different such contributions, I have argued that this suggestion will not work. Characterizing perception's reason-giving role in these terms cannot serve to guide the individuation of the *nonconceptual* epistemic capacities the exploitation of which in perception would constitutively explain such contributions.

An additional and less intellectually demanding suggestion – one that does not appeal to a creature's dispositions to apply any concepts in thought – appeals to a creature's sorting behaviors.<sup>172</sup> At the very least, perception provides us reasons in light of which we sort squares with squares, diamonds with diamonds, crimson objects with other crimson objects, etc. Perhaps, then, perceiving something *as red* can be understood in such terms – as making a contribution to our epistemic dispositions to differentially engage with red objects.

Though initially more promising, merely to characterize the paradigmatic reason-giving role of perception in terms of such sorting behaviors, to sort red objects with other red objects, for example, does not yet capture the unique contribution that perceiving something *as red* makes to one's epistemic orientation. Such sorting behavior does not constitute a *uniquely red-appropriate* engagement with the world. As a result, it is not a

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<sup>172</sup> In discussing the notion of discriminatory capacities in perception, Millar (2000) also makes room for a concept-independent account of discriminative capacities. He argues that “[a] creature can be said to discriminate Fs by sense M when it has the capacity to respond in a distinctive way to Fs which it perceives via M. ... The important point is that a capacity to discriminate Fs is not necessarily a capacity to bring Fs under the concept of an F.”(p. 85) Thus, Millar points out that the application of an appropriate concept is the manifestation of the exploitation of some discriminative capacity. But, crucially, other ‘distinctive ways’ of responding to what is perceived are equally adequate as manifestations of the exploitation of such a capacity. The aim of this section can be seen as supplying some substance to the relevant ‘distinctive ways’ of responding. What, I ask, are the distinctive ways of engaging our environment that would uniquely indicate a subject's exploiting a capacity to perceive objects *as red*?

good candidate for characterizing the kind of engagements for which perception (in particular, perceiving something *as red*) paradigmatically provides us reason.

To see why this is the case, consider as an example an infant who, when confronted with several blocks, one red and the others green, consistently chooses the red block among them. We can imagine that the infant picks the red block to play with while pushing away the other green ones.

The fact that the infant manifests systematic differential patterns of engagement with the differently colored blocks (in effect, sorting the reds from the greens) is *prima facie* reason to think that the infant is undergoing a perception that represents the red block *as red* and the green blocks *as green*. The perception of the blocks provides the infant reason to engage differentially with the differently colored blocks. That is certainly how we would be tempted to describe the situation. Perhaps it is even true.

However, this temptation can also be resisted. Such differential responses only indicate the infant's capacity to discriminate between the blocks. Of course, if the infant *could not* so discriminate between the blocks, i.e., could not produce differential responses in relation to the differently colored blocks, we would have good reason to think that it *does not* perceive the one *as red*, and the others *as green*. But, to conclude that he does so perceive the blocks, from his ability to engage in such differential behavior, is simply to negate the antecedent.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> This example is adapted from Armstrong (1968), where he provides a similar response. He says that "...the differentiated behaviour towards the blocks does provide good reasons for saying that it can perceive a difference between the blocks..."(p. 247). But, he continues to argue, such

In fact, the same pattern of differential responses to the differently colored blocks can equally be the manifestation of the infant's perceiving a host of other properties that happen to characterize the red block but not the green ones; perhaps it is the brightness of the blocks the perception of which provides the infant reason to engage them differently, or perhaps it is the particular shade of the red block, rather than its redness tout court. Seeing as these are open possibilities, it follows that differential engagement with red objects is not indicative of a creature's undergoing a perception of the object *as red*.<sup>174</sup>

It might, of course, be replied that experimental psychology has advanced greatly in the last century, and has in fact devised sophisticated methods by which to tease apart these different possible explanations. Surely, with enough experimental ingenuity, we can make it so that all variables other than the color of the blocks are fixed (that is, the possible interference of any *accidentally* co-instantiated properties can be removed). We can thus eliminate competing explanations. The only explanation remaining is that the infant is responding differentially to the *colors* of the different blocks.

Plausibly, the infant *is* responsive to the different colors of the blocks. By experimenting in the aforementioned way, we can narrow down the properties that the creature under investigation *is sensitive to*; the properties that the creature represents. It is in this way

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behavior is not yet sufficient evidence to the effect that the infant discriminate redness. At most, it manifests an ability to discriminate *the red block* from the *other green ones*.

<sup>174</sup> In fact, as Bermudez (2007) points out, there are cases in which one manifests such discriminative responses without perceptually representing the objects discriminated at all. See his fn. 7 (on pp. 71-72) and the text to which it relates (p. 59). One good example comes from blindsight patients who report not to have any perceptual awareness of portions of their visual field, yet manage to respond well above chance when guessing the identity of stimuli presented to that same portion of their visual field (as discussed briefly in my Chapter 3, Section 3.2, above).

that we can ascertain that bats are blind to colors, though they are particularly sensitive to shapes.

However, the most crucial point is still left untouched. Such differential behavior can indicate *which* properties the infant represents, but it remains silent on *how* it represents these properties. *Any* co-extensive specification of content provides us exactly the same range of such contributions (including Sam's arbitrary notation from Chapter 3), and would be an equally adequate candidate for the explanation of the infant's consistently selecting the red block rather than the green ones. After all, differentially responding to red objects (e.g., sorting them in one pile while excluding others) *just is* differentially responding to objects disposed to cause in normal observers red-type experiences (or, in terms of Sam's notation, 5439-type objects). Yet, it is not *as disposed to cause in normal observers red-type experiences* (or *as 5439*) that the infant perceives these objects.

The problem with the current suggestion is that *mere* differential response to appropriately characterized objects is too unconstrained. It characterizes the *appropriateness* of the response extensionally in terms of *the properties to which it is a response*. What makes the response appropriate is that it is a systematic differential response to objects characterized by a certain property. As such, it is equally appropriate irrespective of how the property is specified.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> It is precisely this problem that we have seen haunts non-epistemic accounts of perception in Chapters 3 and 4. Similarly, it is the same problem that confronts truth-conditional accounts of belief content. Oedipus' consistently bringing flowers to Jocasta but not to Tiresias, is the manifestation of Oedipus' thinking about Jocasta in some distinctive way that is not a way he thinks about Tiresias. However, such discriminative response to Jocasta is in no way sufficient to distinguish between Oedipus' thinking about her *as Jocasta* and his thinking about her *as his mother* (as well as an indefinitely many other possibilities).

It is for this reason that mentioning perception's making a contribution to one's epistemic dispositions to engage differentially with a certain class of objects (those having some property P) is not useful for characterizing perception's paradigmatic reason-giving role. Though it is a necessary condition on perceiving something *as P* that it makes such a contribution to one's engagements with the object perceived, such sorting behavior is not yet *sufficient* to characterize the *unique* contribution  $Z_{nc}^P$  that perceiving something *as P* makes to one's epistemic orientation.

So, if mere differential response to red objects is insufficient as a uniquely red-appropriate engagement, what is?

When perceiving something *as red*, the *relevant* differential responses must be, to put it somewhat trivially, of a *red-appropriate* sort, *rather than of a sort appropriate to something's being red*.<sup>176</sup> Of course, if all goes well, providing an account of these red-appropriate responses will also show why they are responses that are appropriate to something's being red.<sup>177</sup>

To illustrate, note that the appeal of the suggestion from the previous section was precisely that it characterizes the contribution that perception makes to one's epistemic

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<sup>176</sup> A similar point that has proved especially inspiring in the process of developing this dissertation is expressed by Dennett (1969) who in discussing the behavior of a rat in a maze claims that perceiving a food pellet *as a left turn signal* is to be disposed to turn left upon perceiving the food pellet, whereas to perceive it *as a food pellet* is to try and eat it (circa p. 75). The point is that the attribution of content is not merely sensitive to considerations having to do with that which stimulates some reaction, but a sensitivity to the appropriateness of the reaction. "No afferent can be said to have the significance 'A' until it is 'taken' to have significance 'A' by the efferent side of the brain, which means, unmetaphorically, until the efferent side of the brain has produced a response ... the unimpeded function of which would be appropriate to having been stimulated by an A" (Ibid p. 74). It is this 'appropriateness' relation that we are investigating here.

<sup>177</sup> See my fn. 162 in this regard.

orientation in terms of responses that are uniquely appropriate for the particular content *as specified*. Perceiving some object *as red* is distinguished from all other co-extensive specification of perceptual content, e.g., from perceiving the object *as disposed to cause in normal observers red-type experiences*. The former is a state that contributes to the application of the observational concept red, whereas the latter is a state that contributes to the application of a very different concept. The application of the concept red is a uniquely red-appropriate response. Furthermore, the red-appropriate response, the response characteristic of perceptions *as red*, is *also* an appropriate response to an object's *being* red. Red objects are exactly those objects to which it is appropriate – true – to apply the concept red.<sup>178</sup> This suggestion, however, is no longer under consideration.

A different suggestion, however, *is* still on the table – one that was touched upon briefly in Chapter 4. In that chapter I appealed to different *kinds* of sorting behaviors in order to defend the position that our common sense color concepts, red, green, etc., rather than other co-extensive concepts, provide the canonical specification of perceptual content.

As noted, we can specify our color perceptions by appeal to concepts relating to those microfeatures of the surfaces of objects in virtue of which perceiving such objects produce in us certain color experiences. We can also specify these same perceptions by appeal to concepts pertaining to the different wavelengths that such surfaces are disposed to reflect. There are indefinitely many specifications of our color perceptions that would be equally adequate for the sake of providing appropriate correctness conditions; that is,

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<sup>178</sup> Notably, the contribution that perceiving the object *as disposed to cause in normal observers red-type experiences* makes to the perceiver's epistemic orientation *is also equally* an appropriate response to something *being* red, since an object's being red just is that object's being disposed to cause in normal observers red-type experiences.

adequate for picking out those properties the presence of which would make our perceptions correct.<sup>179</sup> However, each such specification articulates different contributions made by a mental state for which the specification is *canonical*. In particular, the different specifications of content articulate contributions to one's epistemic dispositions to undertake different *kinds* of sorting behaviors. And, I suggested, our common sense color concepts fully articulate *the particular kind* of sorting behavior to which our color perception contributes.

The kind of sorting behavior appropriate for characterizing the reason-giving role of our color perception, as discussed in Chapter 4, is essentially relational, or holistic. It is *not* an atomic kind of sorting, by which is meant that for each color property there is some response that is specifiable independently of any other color property and of the response for which perception of that other color property provides us reasons. For example, respond "Red!" iff red things are about; respond "Green<sub>15</sub>!" iff green<sub>15</sub> things are about; respond "Blue!" iff blue things are about; etc.<sup>180</sup> Rather, the responses appropriate for each color property and for which perception provides us reason are *essentially* specified by reference to *other* color properties and the responses for which our perceiving *them* provides us reason.

This is illustrated most clearly by the fact that perception provides us reason to sort (or otherwise engage with) differently colored objects according to a certain metric of

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<sup>179</sup> And, as we have seen, one such specification in particular will be uniquely adequate, as it will make transparent the fact that the perception is of a type that makes rational the application of particular observational concepts. It will be that specification that utilizes those very observational concepts that are partially individuated by possession conditions mentioning perceptions with the correctness conditions specified.

<sup>180</sup> Such independent specifiability fails precisely for the reasons we have seen above.



similarity and difference. Not only does perception provide our reasons to sort *same-with-same*, e.g., red<sub>27</sub> objects with other red<sub>27</sub> objects (or to engage each instantiation of red<sub>27</sub> in the same particular manner), a fact that would be compatible with *any* of an indefinitely many co-extensive specifications of perceptual content. But, crucially, it provides our reason to sort *like-with-like*, i.e., to engage with red<sub>27</sub> objects *similarly* as we would with red<sub>28</sub> and red<sub>29</sub> objects and *differently* than we would with green<sub>15</sub>, and orange<sub>14</sub> objects. When organizing differently colored objects, this like-with-like engagement is manifested most explicitly, for example, by our placing a red<sub>27</sub> object in proximity to a red<sub>28</sub> object and both at approximately the same distance from a green<sub>15</sub> object and at approximately the same (but shorter) distance from an orange<sub>14</sub> object, and so forth with respect to all other color properties.

Of course, it should be emphasized that nothing about the color property red<sub>27</sub> or about the particular location in which we have reason to place an object having that property makes placing it in that location a uniquely appropriate response to the object's having this property. Rather, what makes it the *uniquely* appropriate response to the object *on some occasion* is the location's relation to other locations at which we have reason to place other colored objects.<sup>181</sup>

Considered more abstractly, we see that sorting the colored object appropriately in relation to other colored objects is but a manifestation of the *unique* contribution that perceiving that color property makes to our epistemic orientation. The unique

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<sup>181</sup> Of course, insofar as the reasons that our *color* perception provides us are concerned, the placement of (up to) the initial n+1 differently colored objects will be arbitrary, where n is the number of orthogonal dimensions of similarity and difference characteristic of our color perceptions.

contribution is characterized more abstractly than any *particular* set of engagements with colored objects, but in terms of our epistemic dispositions to engage the colored object in accordance (or conformity) with the property's relative location within a specific characteristic *space* of similarity and difference that holds among the different color properties.<sup>182</sup> Perceiving a red<sub>27</sub> object, for example, makes the *unique* contribution  $Z_{nc}^{red27}$  to our epistemic dispositions to engage the object in ways that accord with the property's relative location within the relevant space of similarity and difference that holds among color properties.

Unsurprisingly, when specifying the content of our color awareness by appeal to our common sense color concepts (irrespective of whether it is perceptions or beliefs by which we come to be aware of the colors) we are articulating contributions to our epistemic dispositions to engage perceived objects in ways that stand in exactly the same relations of similarity and difference as above. Each fine-grained color concept articulates a particular contribution that corresponds to a point within this space, and each coarse-grained color concept can be seen as corresponding to a region.

For example, when we specify the content of our awareness by use of the (coarse-grained) concept red we are articulating a contribution to our epistemic disposition to engage with objects in ways that are identical to the intersection of engagements for which we have reason when undergoing an awareness canonically specified by appeal to

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<sup>182</sup> And even more generally, it is a location within a space of similarity and difference that holds among the different *perceptible* properties. However, all *other* dimensions of similarity and difference comprising this space will be *orthogonal* to the specification of the location of the *color* property. (So our *color* perception provides us reason to locate the red<sub>27</sub> object in the same position in relation to other colored objects irrespective of their non-color, yet perceptible, properties, such as shape, texture, or orientation).

the concept red<sub>27</sub>, or red<sub>28</sub>, but not green<sub>15</sub>, or blue<sub>13</sub>, etc. Representing an object *as red* just is undergoing a state the contribution of which is indifferent to which shade of red the object could be *represented as having*. If you wish to purchase red flowers, your awareness of the flowers as having whichever shade of red will do equally well as contributing to your epistemic dispositions to satisfy your wish, but representing them as having any other color will not do at all. Similarly, when specifying the content of our color awareness by appeal to the concept red<sub>28</sub> we articulate a contribution to our epistemic dispositions to engage the object in ways more similar to those for which we have reasons when undergoing an awareness specified by appeal to the concept red<sub>27</sub>, or red<sub>29</sub>, than those related to an awareness specified by appeal to the concept green<sub>15</sub>. E.g., the former three will contribute to our recognizing the satisfiability of all of our red related desires, whereas the latter will not, though they will all contribute to our recognizing the satisfiability of various other desires (perhaps, as in an example from Chapter 4, they will all contribute to our recognizing the satisfiability of our desire to hit a solid with the cue ball).

Paradigmatically, our awareness of color properties canonically specified in terms of our common sense color concepts provides our reasons for forming *judgments* regarding the appropriate relations of similarity and difference that hold among the different color properties – that is, it provides our reason in light of which to *articulate* the totality of the space of contributions relevant to our color awareness. Of course, we will not, as a matter of fact, be in a position to form judgments regarding such relations when we do not possess the concepts that enter into these judgments (such as fine-grained color concepts). But, we have seen, this does not prevent an awareness specified by appeal to

such concepts from *contributing* to our epistemic dispositions to apply those concepts in thought.

The space of contributions that our color *perception* makes to our epistemic dispositions, *just is* the space of contributions articulated by appeal to our common sense color concepts (rather than co-extensive others), whether we possess these concept or not. As a result, a canonical specification of the content of our color perception that aims to articulate the full range of contributions that perception makes to our epistemic orientation will appeal to precisely these common sense color concepts.

Now, is there any difficulty for a subject to satisfy the possession conditions of the epistemic capacities the exploitation of which would constitutively explain the contribution thus characterized, while failing to satisfy the possession conditions of any concept? There seems to be no such difficulty. Surely, possessing the concept red<sub>27</sub> is necessary for one to form the *judgment* that red<sub>27</sub> is more similar to red<sub>28</sub> than to red<sub>44</sub>, but that is reason to reject the suggestion that the paradigmatic reason-giving role of perception is to be understood as supplying reasons for such judgments. And, of course, it is reason to avoid utilizing such a characterization for the sake of individuating the relevant epistemic capacities exploited in perception. However, we can capture the full range of contributions that perception makes to our epistemic awareness, by appeal to capacities to engage in *nonconceptual* sorting behaviors of the kind illustrated above.

Thus, a straightforward suggestion as to the epistemic capacities the exploitation of which in perception would explain color perception's making the range of contributions thus specified is readily available. Such epistemic capacities are to be individuated by

possession conditions specified in terms of the unique kind of sorting behaviors that one must find primitively compelling. These are *discriminative* capacities of a particular kind. In the case of perceiving some object *as red*, the discriminative capacity exploited in perception is individuated by one's finding primitively compelling engagements with the object that conform to the property's relative location within the space of similarity and difference that is characteristic of our color perceptions. For example, one must find primitively compelling an engagement with the object that places it in the appropriate location in relation to other colored objects. A perception of some object *as blue*, would exploit a discriminative capacity individuated in terms of one's finding primitively compelling engagements with the object perceived that conform to *its* location within the relevant space of similarity and difference.

Granted that the discussion here is rather preliminary, and much more remains to be said, for example about how one comes to possess these different discriminatory capacities (as well as other questions which I raise below), there are already many things that can be learnt.

First, note that the unique contribution that perceiving some color property makes to one's epistemic disposition cannot be specified independently of the contributions made by the perception of other color properties. As a result, satisfying the possession conditions for a discriminative capacity that would constitutively explain the contribution that perceiving some color property makes to one's epistemic dispositions, demands that one satisfies the possession conditions of other related capacities. Thus, the possession conditions individuating a discriminative capacity that is to explain the unique contribution made by a perception of some object *as P*, where P is some color concept,

will mention various other discriminative capacities (those which would constitutively explain contributions made by the perception of other color properties). However, the possession conditions for a given discriminative capacity does not mention any conceptual capacities, and thus satisfying the possession condition for a given discriminative capacity does not depend on one's satisfying the possession conditions of any *concept*. Perceiving something *as red* depends on one's possibly perceiving something *as green*, and *as blue*, etc., but does not depend on the possibility of having thoughts involving the concepts red, green, blue, etc.<sup>183</sup> Nonetheless, color perception, like thought, is a holistic achievement.

Most importantly for the purposes of this dissertation, we now have a substantive account of perceptual content that can explain one's having reasons for the application of particular concepts in thought, independently of whether or not the subject possesses any concepts. We can see what it is about perceiving something *as red*<sub>27</sub>, for example, in virtue of which it makes a *unique* contribution to one's epistemic dispositions to apply the observational concept red<sub>27</sub> (rather than any other observational concept) in thought. The concept red<sub>27</sub> applies truthfully to exactly those entities an awareness of which makes a unique contribution to one's epistemic orientation in relation to the object, and, crucially, this very same contribution can be fully specified by appeal to *nonconceptual* epistemic dispositions to engage these entities in ways that conform to their location within the particular space of similarity and difference. In other words, when perceiving

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<sup>183</sup> Plausibly, one need not satisfy the possession conditions for *all* other epistemic capacities, but only a sufficient many that would be jointly sufficient for defining the relevant space of contributions that color perception makes to our epistemic orientation. However, this is a topic in need of much further exploration.

something *as red*<sub>27</sub> one is already locating the entity within the relevant space of contributions that our different color perceptions make. One already finds primitively compelling certain engagements with the entity, and unsurprisingly, the concept red<sub>27</sub> applies truthfully to exactly those entities in relation to which such engagements are appropriate.

Many further questions are still left open. First, I have focused in this section on color perception. Possibly the strategy I have followed here will not be generalizable to the case of perception in general. Can the strategy developed here be extended to the perception of all perceptible properties? Can we account for perception's providing nonconceptual reasons to the application of other observational concepts corresponding to different perceptible properties? What, for example, are the discriminative capacities the exploitation of which in perception would constitutively explain our having reason to apply shape concepts, such as square and diamond, in thought?

Developing a nonconceptual account of perceptual content that would constitutively explain our having reasons for the application of *all* kinds of observational concepts is too great a project for this dissertation. However, I believe that the difficulty is not principled. In the previous chapter, when discussing the Pragmatist construal of concepts, we saw that providing the individuation conditions for a concept, i.e., specifying its possession conditions, was no trivial task. I believe that the case is similar with respect to the individuation conditions of the various discriminative capacities exploited in perception. Each case is to be developed, to a certain degree, independently (to a *certain*

degree since the different perceptible properties form families that we can anticipate, as in the case of color perception, will not be independently analyzable). But this is no reason to be discouraged. On the contrary, the strategy pursued in this section provides us an outline for developing an account of these discriminative capacities, and it is a strategy consistent with their nonconceptual nature.

A related question that is worthy of close attention relates to the *scope* of the reasons that perception provide us for the application of particular concepts in thought and for engaging the world appropriately. Indeed, observational concepts just are concepts the possession conditions of which appeal to one's finding primitively compelling transitions from appropriately related perceptions to thoughts involving that concept. The scope of perceptual reason-giving just is the scope of observational concepts. So, is the concept of a positron an observational concept?



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