

Epistemological Disjunctivism and its Representational Commitments*

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1 Introduction

As it is standardly presented, epistemological disjunctivism involves the idea that paradigm cases of visual perceptual knowledge are based on visual perceptual states which are propositional – states of *seeing that p* (McDowell (1982, 1995, 2008), Haddock and Macpherson (2008b), Pritchard (2012, 2016)). I look at the crow perched in the tree, in excellent perceptual conditions, with fully functioning perceptual and cognitive capacities, I come to know that the crow is black. I know this on the basis of visual perception. And the epistemological disjunctivist spells this out as follows: I have this knowledge in virtue of the fact that I can *see that* the crow is black.

Given this, the orthodox version of epistemological disjunctivism takes on controversial commitments in the philosophy of perception. Specifically, it is committed to the claim that some of our perceptual states are propositional attitudes, and hence have propositional representational contents. And in virtue of this, it is committed to the more general claim that some of our perceptual states are representational, where here this is understood merely as the idea that some of our perceptual states have representational contents. These are the *representational commitments* of orthodox epistemological disjunctivism.

Must epistemological disjunctivism involve these commitments? Must the view be hostage to the fortunes of representational views in the philosophy of

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perception? I don't think so. Here I will argue that we can take epistemological disjunctivism in a new direction and develop a version of the view free of these representational commitments. I will develop the non-orthodox version of epistemological disjunctivism I set out in French (2016) – what I will call the *thing-seeing approach*.

The basic idea is that instead of conceiving of knowledge grounding perceptions as states in which one sees that such-and-such is the case (e.g., that the crow is black), we should instead conceive of them as states or episodes in which one sees *a thing* (e.g., a black crow), we should conceive of them as *thing-seeings*.

I'll suggest that we can cast such seeings in this knowledge grounding role without conceiving of them as representational. But this is because we can put thing-seeings to epistemological work, in the framework of epistemological disjunctivism, whilst remaining *neutral* on whether or not they are propositional, or representational at all – call this the *neutrality claim*. The point, then, is not to replace epistemological disjunctivism's controversial representational commitments with controversial *non-representational* commitments. The point is, rather, that epistemological disjunctivism can be developed with fewer commitments in the philosophy of perception than is usually appreciated.

I'll proceed as follows. First, I'll outline the orthodox form of epistemological disjunctivism and its controversial representational commitments a little more fully. I'll then set out the thing-seeing approach and some of what motivates it. Finally, I'll consider and respond to two challenges to the neutrality claim. The first challenge is that unless states or episodes of thing-seeing are representational, they cannot provide factive rational support. The other challenge – which I devote most of the discussion in this article to – is that unless states or episodes of thing-seeing are representational, they cannot rationalize perceptual beliefs.

2 Epistemological Disjunctivism

What is epistemological disjunctivism? I understand it as a view about specifically *visual* perceptual knowledge. The view involves a negative claim underpinned by a positive claim. Thus, Duncan Pritchard states that it is

the rejection of the idea that the... rational support one possesses in favour of one's perceptual belief is the same regardless of whether one is having a normal veridical perceptual experience as opposed to being the victim of an introspectively indistinguishable experience which is in fact deceptive or untrustworthy in some way (e.g., a hallucination) (2011, p. 434).

[The] two rational standings are radically different *in kind* (this is what makes this epistemological proposal disjunctivist) (2012, p. 16).

We can thus put the negative strand of epistemological disjunctivism in this way:

The Negative Claim

The rational support in the Good and Bad Cases is not of the same nature or fundamental kind.

Epistemological disjunctivism also involves a positive thesis which underlies the negative claim. Pritchard puts the positive thesis like this:

The Core Thesis

In paradigmatic cases of perceptual knowledge an agent, *S*, has perceptual knowledge that ϕ in virtue of being in possession of rational support, *R*, for her belief that ϕ which is both *factive* (i.e. *R*'s obtaining entails ϕ), and *reflectively accessible* to *S* (2012, p. 13).

A paradigmatic case of visual perceptual knowledge is one where that knowledge is grounded in a perfectly veridical case of visual perception. The nature of the rational support provided by these cases of perception, the Core Thesis tells us, is such that it is *reflectively accessible*, and *factive*.

How does this positive claim underpin the Negative Claim? Here, factivity is doing the work. To say that a kind of rational support is factive is to say that if rational support of that specific kind obtains, then that guarantees the truth of the belief it supports. So the Core Thesis tells us that in a perfectly veridical experience of a black crow before me, say, the rational support to believe that there is a black crow there, which perception provides, is in its nature, factive. But now consider the rational support I have in a subjectively indistinguishable but non-veridical hallucinatory experience. Such rational support is not, in its nature, factive. Thus, given the Core Thesis, Bad Case rational support differs in its nature to Good Case rational support.

Epistemological disjunctivism, understood along these lines, is standardly underpinned by a more specific commitment. Once again we can draw on Pritchard's presentation, and we can put the further specification of the Core Thesis, like this:

The Specification

The particular kind of rational support that the epistemological disjunctivist claims that our beliefs enjoy in paradigm cases of perceptual knowledge is that provided by *seeing that* the target proposition obtains. So when one has paradigmatic perceptual knowledge of a proposition, p , one's reflectively accessible rational support for believing that p is that one *sees that* p (p. 14).

The orthodox epistemological disjunctivist claims that states of seeing that p themselves constitute the rational support for belief had in paradigm cases of perceptual knowledge.¹ Such states are factive, so if we assume that they are reflectively accessible, then this works just fine as a specification of the Core Thesis, and gives us a more complete version of epistemological disjunctivism.

3 Representational Commitments

The orthodox epistemological disjunctivist holds that the visual states which underly paradigmatic cases of visual perceptual knowledge are states of seeing that p . The orthodox epistemological disjunctivist is therefore committed to the claim that some visual states are propositional attitudes with propositional representational contents, and hence that some visual states are representational. As noted in the introduction, these are the *representational commitments* of the orthodox form of epistemological disjunctivism.

These commitments are controversial in the philosophy of perception. It is not obvious that any states of perception are propositionally structured, or that any states of perception are representational at all.² Recent philosophical literature on perception bears this out. Some think that perception is representational, but deny that it is propositional (e.g., Burge (2010), Crane (2011)). And others claim that perception isn't even representational (e.g., Travis (2004), Weir (2004), and Hutto and Myin (2012)).³

¹See also McDowell's claim that 'When one knows something to be so by virtue of seeing it to be so, one's warrant for believing it to be so is that one sees it to be so...' (2011, p. 33).

²If one denies that there are any propositionally structured states of perception, that doesn't commit one to denying that there are states of the form: S sees that p . For one might deny that such states are states of visual perception. An alternative is to hold that for S to see that p (at least in one sense 'see') is for S to *know* that p , on the basis of vision. On which see French (2012a, 2013, 2016).

³Though these are relatively recent examples, note that non-representational theorizing about perception is not new, and that it can take many different forms. There are, for instance, versions of sense-datum views, adverbial views, and sensationalist/raw feel views, which reject the idea that perception has representational content.

Now I don't propose to get into a discussion here about whether any visual states are propositional or representational (for recent discussion see the articles in Brogaard (2014)). And I am certainly not *objecting* to the orthodox epistemological disjunctivist for having controversial commitments in the philosophy of perception. I'm merely highlighting that the orthodox epistemological disjunctivist has these controversial commitments.

But why is this worth highlighting? Because it reveals an under-explored way in which epistemological disjunctivism is *vulnerable*. For not only is the view controversial from within epistemology, but also from within the philosophy of perception. Those who deny that perception is ever representational or propositional must reject orthodox epistemological disjunctivism. Arguments against the view that perception is ever representational or propositional are arguments against orthodox epistemological disjunctivism.

In light of this, it is natural to ask whether the epistemological disjunctivist *needs* to take on controversial representational commitments. Are these at the heart of epistemological disjunctivism? Or is there a way of upholding epistemological disjunctivism without these controversial commitments in the philosophy of perception? If there is, then it may turn out that non-propositional or non-representational manoeuvring in the philosophy of perception will not necessarily move us away from epistemological disjunctivism, and may well be consistent with upholding the epistemological insights that the epistemological disjunctivist offers. So, is there a more neutral form of epistemological disjunctivism available?

I want to suggest that there is. I will develop a form of epistemological disjunctivism which is consistent with representational commitments *but also with the denial of these commitments*.

4 The Thing-Seeing Approach

Consider states or episodes of *thing-seeing*, that is, states or episodes in which we see particular things in our environments. I will suggest that we can develop an epistemology of visual perception which fits the epistemological disjunctivist mould, with thing-seeings at its heart – that is, where we take thing-seeings to be the visual states or episodes which ground paradigm cases of visual perceptual knowledge.⁴

Before proceeding, let me note two limitations of the discussion to follow. First, I won't attempt to defend or motivate the framework of epistemological disjunctivism itself. I'll just assume that it is in good order. Second, I'll be

⁴Here I develop some of the ideas in French (2016).

restricting attention to cases of visual knowledge concerning a thing in one's environment (e.g., there is a black crow there, the package is brown, etc). I leave discussion of other cases of visual knowledge (e.g., its foggy) for another occasion.

The idea at the heart of the thing-seeing approach is that Good Case rational support comes from states or episodes of thing-seeing. Thus, we can replace the aforementioned specification of epistemological disjunctivism (see 'The Specification' above) with the following:

The Thing-Seeing Specification

The particular kind of rational support that the epistemological disjunctivist claims that our beliefs enjoy in paradigm cases of perceptual knowledge is that provided by visual perceptual states or episodes of thing-seeing.

Here 'thing' is a dummy term, which, as Dretske (1979) notes, is 'intended to cover such disparate items as tables, houses, cats, people, games, sunsets, signals, tracks, shadows, movements, flashes, and specks' (p. 98). Thus, 'thing' covers the heterogenous class of particular things or entities in our environments that we can see.

There are three motivations for developing epistemological disjunctivism in this new direction. First, it captures an aspect of common sense. Consider the example where there is a crow before me and I can see. It seems to be part of common sense to suppose that rational support for beliefs about the crow can come from my seeing *it*. Suppose I know that the crow on the tree before me is black. How do I know that the crow there is black? Because I can see it. I draw here on Cassam (2007, pp. 347-348) who makes the similar claim that we readily accept explanations of knowledge in terms of seeing objects (e.g., 'how do you know that the cigarette lighter is under the desk?', 'Because I can see it.').

Second, the approach doesn't face the basis problem facing the orthodox form of epistemological disjunctivism (on which see Pritchard (2011)). Briefly: the basis problem for orthodox epistemological disjunctivism arises once we add the standard view of seeing that *p* into the mix. Standardly, seeing that *p* is thought to be a way of knowing in the sense that to see that *p* just is to know that *p* by visual means (Dretske (1969), Williamson (2000), Cassam (2009)). If the standard view is accepted, then it is unclear how states of seeing that *p* can be, as the orthodox epistemological disjunctivist claims, the *basis* of perceptual knowledge: for being in such states already amounts to having perceptual knowledge.

But this problem doesn't arise on the thing-seeing approach, since the knowledge grounding visual states or episodes appealed to – thing-seeings – clearly do not entail knowledge (see here Dretske (1969, Chapter II)). Thus, if we re-work epistemological disjunctivism so that the rational support for paradigm instances of perceptual knowledge comes not from states of seeing that p but from states or episodes of thing-seeing, then there is no basis problem (for fuller discussion of this, see French (2016)).⁵

A third motivation for developing epistemological disjunctivism along the lines of the thing-seeing approach is that the approach is, *per se*, less committal in the philosophy of perception when it comes to the representational commitments outlined above.

The idea here is *not* that the approach explicitly conceives of thing-seeings as *non-propositional* or *non-representational*. Though typical linguistic expressions associated with thing-seeings, e.g., sentences of the form ' S can see an $F x$ ', ' S can see x ' (e.g., 'Jaya can see a black crow', 'Barry can see Lola'), aren't themselves propositional constructions (unlike sentences of the form ' S sees that p '), it might be that thing-seeings are, in their nature, propositional or representational in some way. It might be that the correct theory of seeing a thing – linguistic expression aside – is one on which seeing a thing constitutively involves representation, even propositional representation, of some sort. We shouldn't take the thing-seeing approach to deny this. But we shouldn't take the approach to affirm it either. And that's the point. Even though there is, presumably, a fact of the matter about whether thing-seeings are representational, the thing-seeing *approach* – which is to say, the construal of epistemological disjunctivism in terms of the thing-seeing specification – is, *per se*, non-committal on that issue. It is metaphysically neutral when it comes to representational commitments.

Thus, if the thing-seeing approach is to work, then we can put states or episodes of thing-seeing to epistemological work, in the framework of epistemological disjunctivism, whilst remaining *neutral* on whether or not they are propositional, or representational at all. It is this claim – the neutrality claim – that I want to defend in the remainder.

5 Neutrality: The Factivity Challenge

Do thing-seeings constitute *factive* rational support for the beliefs they support? If not, then the thing-seeing approach cannot be a way of developing epistemological disjunctivism, since the idea that the rational support perception provides in Good Cases is factive is at the heart of epistemological disjunctivism.

⁵For further discussion of the basis problem see also Millar (2016, p. 56, fn 27).

Reflecting on this gives rise to the *factivity challenge*. Unless thing-seeings have propositional structure, it is unclear how they can constitute or provide rational support which is factive. For on one understanding of a factive mental state, it is a *propositional attitude* that one can have only to truths. (Think of paradigms: e.g., knowing that p). Seeing that p is such a mental state. It is a propositional attitude one can have only to a true content. But if seeing a black crow, for instance, is not a propositional attitude, then it can't be a factive mental state in the technical sense just outlined. How, then, can thing-seeings constitute or provide factive rational support for beliefs?

The key to answering this is to highlight how a state or episode of thing-seeing can constitute factive rational support for p without being factive in the *technical* sense.

A way to see how this is possible is to note that seeing an F thing is similar to seeing that a (the, that) thing is F , in this sense: S cannot see an F thing if there isn't an F thing there to be seen. Seeing a black crow requires that there is a black crow there to see. Whether or not seeing a black crow is a factive mental state in the technical – propositional – sense, if I see a black crow, then there must be a crow which I see and it must be black. Thus, a formulation of epistemological disjunctivism in terms of thing-seeing can capture the idea that Good Cases involve factive – truth-guaranteeing – rational support. Seeing a black crow guarantees the truth of the belief (or beliefs) it rationally supports, e.g., *that the crow is black*. And this doesn't require states or episodes of thing-seeing to be propositional.

This draws on the following idea we find in McDowell

if a perceptual state can consist in a subject's having a feature of her environment perceptually present to her, that gives lie to the assumption that a perceptual state cannot warrant a belief in a way that guarantees its truth. If a perceptual state makes a feature of the environment present to a perceiver's rationally self-conscious awareness, there is *no* possibility, compatibly with someone's being in that state, that things are not as the state would warrant her in believing that they are, in a belief that would simply register the presence of that feature of the environment (2011, p. 31).

Seeing a crow there is a way for a crow to be perceptually present to one. If it *merely* looks to one as if there is a crow there, then a crow is not perceptually present to one, but if one genuinely *sees* a crow there, then a crow is present to one. Thus that perceptual state or episode can serve as a truth-guaranteeing warrant for a belief with the content: *there is a crow there*.

What I suggested previously is an expansion of McDowell's idea in this passage, and we can put it alternatively like this: if one sees a *black* crow, then, in the McDowellian idiom, there is *no* possibility, compatibly with someone's being in that perceptual state, that things are not as the state would warrant her in believing that they are in a belief that attributes the feature in question to the object in question (i.e., a belief that the crow is black).

So, states or episodes of thing-seeing can provide factive rational support for beliefs which simply register the presence or existence of the things seen, but also for beliefs which attribute features to the things seen.

What is doing the work here is that seeing a thing requires the existence of the thing, that seeing is subject to what Dretske (1969) calls an 'existence condition' (pp. 43-54), or, to put it another way, that seeing is *relational*.⁶ In this respect, seeing is just like standing next to a thing. If I stand next to a black crow, then there must be a black crow there which I stand next to.

This is not a special *theoretical* point about seeing, it is just a basic point about the logic or structure of seeing, as Burge (2010) notes, it holds 'as a matter of the most elementary and superficial understanding' (p. 62, fn. 1). Whatever the deep nature of states or episodes of thing-seeing – propositional, representational or otherwise – they have a relational structure, and are thus factive in the non-technical sense.⁷

Note, the claim that thing-seeing is relational is *not* the same as the controversial claim that the *visual experiences* we have when we see mind-independent things are relations between perceivers and those things, or, as it is sometimes put, that such visual experiences involve their mind-independent objects as constituents. (See Campbell (2002), Martin (2004) Brewer (2011), Logue (2012),

⁶For further discussion of this point about seeing, and potential counterexamples, see French (2012b, §1.3.1).

⁷The fuller passage from Burge is as follows: "The standard specification of such states [seeing, knowing, remembering, etc] *entails*—as a matter of the most elementary and superficial understanding—truth, veridicality, or some relation, such as perceptual reference, to the environment. Knowing something entails that it is true. Seeing something entails perceptually referring to it and being causally related to it" (p. 62, fn. 1). Note here how swiftly Burge moves from the theory-neutral point that seeing something is relational to more theoretically loaded ideas such as the idea that seeing something requires a *causal* relation, and *reference*. It is not these ideas, but the *theory-neutral point* that I am suggesting the epistemological disjunctivist avail themselves of. And though Burge appeals to the idea of successful perceptual reference to what is seen, this isn't built into the very idea of seeing or its relational structure (it is not a matter of the most elementary and superficial understanding that seeing involves *reference*). For one might attempt to explain the relational structure of seeing not by invoking representational notions such as reference, but rather non-representational notions such as the non-representational relation of acquaintance appealed to by authors such as Brewer (2011). This may turn out not to be the correct approach, but it is certainly not at odds with the very idea of seeing and its relational structure.

and Soteriou (2013)).

To spell out why these claims are different, suppose that one denies the relational theory of experience, and holds instead that a visual experience as of a black crow doesn't involve the crow as a constituent, but instead is to be understood in non-relational, representational terms: in terms of the visual representation of a black crow (or crow-shaped thing). If one holds this, must one deny the claim that *seeing* a black crow requires that there is a black crow which one sees? No. What one will deny is merely that this relational structure is part of the nature of the experience one has when one sees. That's not to deny that seeing has a relational structure. It is perfectly consistent with the idea that seeing is relational and that this relational structure is, so to speak, located elsewhere (e.g., in the perceiver's being causally related to the thing seen).

I've argued that we can meet the factivity challenge by appealing to the claim that thing-seeing is relational. This is to appeal to a theory-neutral feature of thing-seeing. Thus, the epistemological disjunctivist can appeal to states or episodes of thing-seeing as the visual states or episodes which provide *factive* rational support in Good Cases, and they can do so without committing to (or denying) a propositional or representational view of such states or episodes.

6 Neutrality: The Rationalizing Role Challenge

The second challenge to neutrality that I want to consider has the following form: the visual states or episodes which constitute factive and reflectively accessible rational support in Good Cases must play a rationalizing role with respect to the perceptual beliefs they support. But we can't capture how thing-seeings play this role unless we admit that they are representational. We can call this the *rationalizing role challenge*.

I am adapting this challenge from work by Hannah Ginsborg (2006; 2011). It's an *adaptation* because Ginsborg is not explicitly concerned with the epistemological disjunctivist framework. But in Ginsborg's discussion we find (a) a conception of the rationalizing role of perception, and then (b) the suggestion that to capture how visual perceptions can play this role we must admit that they are representational.⁸

⁸An epistemological disjunctivist might deny that knowledge grounding visual states or episodes have to play the rationalizing role that Ginsborg highlights. To satisfactorily deny this, they would have to spell out their notion of reflectively accessible rational support such that it doesn't entail that visual perceptions must have this rationalizing role. Though this is an option, here I'll just accept that the disjunctivist's knowledge grounding visual perceptions must have this rationalizing role.

6.1 The Rationalizing Role

So, first, what is the relevant conception of the rationalizing role of perception? Ginsborg expresses it as follows:

As a subject assessing my own beliefs, what I need to determine is what the facts are independently of those beliefs: if the issue is whether I am justified in believing that it has rained, I need to determine whether the streets are wet, not whether I believe that the streets are wet. But if I am assessing someone else's beliefs, then I need to determine how things present themselves as being from her point of view. As William Alston puts it, "when we ask whether *S* is justified in believing that *p*...we are ...asking a question from the standpoint of an aim at truth; but we are not asking whether things are in fact as *S* believes. We are getting at something more 'internal' to *S*'s 'perspective on the world'.... We are asking whether the truth of *p* is strongly indicated by what *S* has to go on" (1985, 71). To give someone's reason for a belief by way of answering the kind of question Alston describes, is to specify a psychological state, typically another belief, in the light of which her original belief can be recognized, from a third-person perspective, as rational. Reasons in this sense might be referred to as "third-person" reasons for belief... (2006, p. 290)

Ginsborg is drawing a distinction between two senses of 'reason' for belief. Take Riya who believes that it has rained. On the one hand she has an excellent reason for this belief: the fact that the streets are wet. If asked why she believes that it has rained, she can reply: 'because the streets are wet'. She thus gives her reason in one sense of 'reason': she offers up the fact that the streets are wet as the reason for her belief. On the other hand – and this is what is immediately relevant to us – there is, Ginsborg suggests, a second sense of 'reason' on which reasons are psychological states of subjects which rationalize their beliefs. Riya believes that it has rained. She is rational in holding this belief because her perspective includes *the other belief* that the streets are wet: the *belief* that the streets are wet rationalizes (together with other background beliefs, no doubt) her further belief that it has rained. To put it in Alston's terms, the belief that the streets are wet is an aspect of her perspective on the world which 'strongly indicates' that it has rained. It thus plays a rationalizing role with respect to the belief that it has rained.

6.2 Ginsborg's Argument: Outline

Having highlighted this rationalizing role, Ginsborg (2011) argues that it is hard to see how thing-seeings can be rationalizing if they are not representational. Thus she says that we need to make sense of how

our beliefs and judgements can be rationally intelligible in the light of our perceptions (p. 135).

But she adds that this

seems to require that we ascribe some kind of representational content to perceptual experience... For on a certain natural line of thought, perception of an object cannot rationalize a belief, that is, make it rationally intelligible, unless it presents the object as being a certain way, that is, as having a certain general property or feature (p. 135).

There are two related waves to Ginsborg's argument which I'll discuss in turn. First, Ginsborg argues that for a subject's perception to rationalize their belief that p , their perception must provide them with a 'perspective on the world' which 'indicates' that p is true, but we can't capture this unless we admit that perception is representational. Second, Ginsborg argues that for a subject's perception to rationalize their belief that p , their perception must make available to them a reason to believe that p , but we can't capture this unless we admit that perception is representational.

6.3 Ginsborg's Argument: First Wave

Ginsborg considers 'how seeing a package in front of you might provide you with rational grounds for believing that there is a package in front of you' (p. 137). And one idea about this, which Ginsborg (p. 147) draws from Brewer (2004), is that one sees the package, and in seeing it has *experiential access* to some of the features which are relevant to the judgement that it is a package (e.g., its colour and shape, its being a package, etc), and that's why seeing the package rationalizes the belief that there's a package there.

But Ginsborg suggests that it is not entirely clear how to satisfactorily unpack the idea of the relevant features being 'experientially accessible', and a natural way to do so invites appeal to representation. Consider Asha, who sees the package before her. Suppose we unpack the idea that she has 'experiential access' to the relevant features, as follows: she sees the package *as* brown, *as* rectangular, and *as* a package. Now, if Asha's perception is understood in this way, we can

understand how it rationalizes her belief that there is a package there: her perception is such as it gives her a perspective on her environment which ‘indicates’ to her how things are. But in construing her visual perception in these terms we are, Ginsborg suggests, taking it to be representational (p. 138).

Is there an alternative construal of the experiential accessibility of the relevant features which doesn’t invite appeal to representation? Ginsborg considers some of Brewer’s discussion of the Müller-Lyer Illusion. In this illusion two lines in fact equal in length look unequal in length to the subject. Brewer claims that, despite the illusion, the *equality* in length of the lines is experientially accessible to the subject (p. 70). What does this mean? Ginsborg spells it out as follows:

... what this seems to amount to in the Müller-Lyer case is just that we are capable, under appropriate circumstances, of coming to represent the lines as having the property of identity in length: for example, we can come to represent them as identical in length if the misleading arrow-heads and -tails are removed (p. 138).

So the sense of ‘experiential accessibility’ in play is that the features are experientially accessible if they are instantiated by what is perceived, and we are capable of representing them or coming to see that they are instantiated in what is perceived, in appropriate circumstances. So if we apply this to the case of the package, the idea is the following: ‘the color, shape, and functional kind of the package are experientially accessible in this weaker sense if the package has them, and if we are capable of coming to see that it has them.’ (p. 138).

But Ginsborg notes that this doesn’t help since

saying that [the relevant features] are experientially accessible in this sense does not seem to add anything to the claim that the package presented to us is in fact brown, rectangular, and a package, since these are features of a kind which we can, typically, come to see things as having. So it does not help with the question of how having a particular brown, rectangular package perceptually presented to us can rationalize the belief that it has those properties of being brown, being rectangular, and being a package (p. 138).

The weak notion of experiential accessibility doesn’t help us to see how a subject who sees the package is rational in judging that it’s a package, since though the relevant features are experientially accessible, they are not accessible in such a manner that the perception ‘indicates’ that the object has those features. It is,

Ginsborg thinks, not sufficient for one's perception of an *F* thing to rationalize the belief that the thing is *F* that one simply sees the thing and it is in fact *F*. There has to be, Ginsborg supposes, something about the perception which makes '*F*' rationally applicable to the thing in light of the perception. Saying that *F* is experientially accessible in the weak sense under consideration doesn't capture this any more than the fact that one sees the thing and it in fact is *F*.

Consistently with the presence in experience of a package which in fact has the relevant features (and which are in the weak sense accessible), Asha's experience might nonetheless take such a form that it doesn't 'indicate' to her that there's a package there, or it might take such a form that it 'indicates' something quite different (e.g., there's a patch of light, or that's a large brick). Similarly, in the Müller-Lyer case, even though identity in length is a feature of the lines, and experientially accessible, the perception of those lines does not itself rationalize the belief that those lines are identical in length.

So instead, drawing on Brewer (2008), Ginsborg considers the idea that 'in the straightforward case where you take the package to be a package, the visual similarity of the package to paradigm packages makes [rationally] intelligible your taking it to be a package' (p. 138). But Ginsborg worries about this too:

Here again, though, it is not clear how the similarity is supposed to figure in your perceptual experience. It cannot be that your perceptual experience proper represents the package *as* similar to paradigm cases of packages...[because at this stage Ginsborg is considering how someone can capture the rationalizing role of perception without appeal to representational content.] But the only alternative would seem to be that the package is in fact similar to paradigm packages, where that similarity might or might not become salient to a given perceiver in a given context. And while that might make it possible to understand why, as a matter of psychological fact, your perception of the package leads you to believe that the package is a package, it does not help with the question of how your perception can make your belief "rationally intelligible" in the sense at issue (p. 139).

The fact that the package is visually similar to a paradigm package might be a reason for Asha to judge that it's a package. But how does her perception 'indicate' to her that this is how things are? This is intelligible if we are allowed to invoke seeing the object *as* visually similar to a paradigm package, where this is construed representationally. But not if all we appeal to is Asha's simply seeing a package which in fact is visually similar to a paradigm package. Consistently with the presence in perception of a package which is in fact similar to a

paradigm package, Asha's perception might nonetheless take such a form that it doesn't 'indicate' to her that there's a package there, or it might take such a form that it 'indicates' something quite different (e.g., there's a patch of light, or that's a large brick).

Considerations such as these lead Ginsborg to suggest that 'we cannot make sense of a perception as rationalizing a belief unless we take the perception to represent its object as having some general feature or other...' (p. 140).

I think there is something to Ginsborg's argument here. That is, if all we know about one's perception is that they see an *F* thing, we are not thereby entitled to suppose that they are rational in judging the thing to be *F* on the basis of their perception. Since if all we know is that they see an *F* thing, then we don't know much at all about the perspective on the world they have in so seeing. We just don't know anything about what their perception 'indicates' to them about their environment. For all we know, their perception may be illusory, lacking in detail or focus, confused, and so on.

But it is just not obvious that the only way to correct for this is to conceive of the rationalizing states or episodes of seeing as representational. Instead we can appeal to their *conscious characters*. That is, if we know that Asha has judged that there is brown rectangular package there on the basis of seeing a brown rectangular package, before we ascribe rationality to her we can ask: what kind of experience does she have in seeing the brown rectangular package, that is, what is it like for her to so perceive on this occasion? (The answer to that question certainly cannot be read off from the fact that she sees a brown rectangular package).

A familiar way to express or describe the kind of experience a perceiver has or the conscious character of their experience, is in terms of how things appear to the perceiver in perceiving as they do. Suppose, then, that it turns out that in seeing the package Asha has an experience the character of which can be captured by saying that the package appears brown, rectangular and package-like to Asha. Given this, we can see how it is rational for her to judge that there is a brown rectangular package before her on the basis of her visual perception. It is rational in light of her seeing the package *given the kind of experience she has when seeing it*. If all we could admit about the kind of experience she has is that it is a seeing of a brown rectangular package we wouldn't be admitting enough to make her subsequent judgement rationally intelligible. But by appeal to the conscious character of her experience, we can admit more, and thus regard her subsequent judgement as rational in the light of her visual perception.

One might have the following worry about the suggestion we've just considered. One might think that we are just agreeing with Ginsborg that states

of seeing must be representational if they are to be rationalizing, though we are using different terms to express it.

But then the suggestion would have to be that in talking of the conscious character of the subject's experience, of what it is like for the subject to experience as she does, we are just referring to how the subject perceptually *represents* the world, in different terms. However, this would need strong argument, since it is tantamount to supposing that there is a certain *incoherence* in the idea of a theory of experience which explicitly rejects appeal to representation in its account of conscious character.

One kind of constitutive account has it that the kind of experience a subject has when they see something is a matter of the representational nature of the experience. For instance, one view is that when Asha sees a brown rectangular package, and has an experience with a certain character, e.g., which can be captured by saying that the package looks rectangular, brown and package-like to her, this is a matter of her perceptually representing the package as being brown, rectangular, and package-like. But another account has it that the character of her experience is explicable in terms of a primitive non-representational perceptual relation to the package itself. On this view *the package itself* (and some of its features), and not a perceptual representation of the package, is constitutive of the character of her experience.⁹ Such a view may, of course, turn out to be false. But there is no evident incoherence it.

What we want to make sense of is how Asha's visual perception in which she sees a brown rectangular package can rationalize her subsequent judgement that there is a brown rectangular package there. I am suggesting that such a judgement is rational in the light of her visual perception given that her perception is or involves an experience of a certain kind, with a certain character. What the *nature* of the experience is given that it is of that kind, or given that it has that character, is a further question that doesn't need to be settled in order to capture what we want to capture. Asha's visual perception rationalizes her judgement *because it is (or involves) an experience of certain a kind*, whatever the correct constitutive account of that turns out to be.

⁹I don't mean to suggest that such relational views *have* to eschew a role for perceptual representation in accounting for conscious character, but they may do, and some proponents of such views do seem to develop their views in this way (see, for instance, Campbell (2002) and Brewer (2011)). Note also that such views don't have to say that the character of Asha's experience is *entirely* constituted by the package (and its features). For views of this sort can allow that there are other aspects of the relational nature of experience the specification of which is relevant to what shapes conscious character, such as facts about the subject of experience (Logue (2012)), the manner in which one is acquainted with the objects of experience (Soteriou (2013)), and the 'third relatum' or standpoint from which one perceives (Campbell (2009), Brewer (2011)). For further discussion see French (2018).

To return to Alston's terminology, we can acknowledge that for Asha's visual perception to rationalize her belief that there is a brown rectangular package there, it has to give her a 'perspective on the world' which 'strongly indicates' the truth of what she judges. (For future reference, let's call this *the perspective claim*.) But that's what having a visual perception of an object *with a certain conscious character*, which we can describe in terms of things appearing a certain way to one, does for Asha. Having a certain conscious character is part of what it is for her visual perception to give her a perspective on the world which strongly indicates that there is a package there.

So here again, as with factivity, it looks as though the explanatory work is being done by a theory-neutral feature of states or episodes of thing-seeing: that such states or episodes have conscious characters. We can intelligibly talk about the character of an experience without appealing to, smuggling in, or suggesting any *constitutive account* of what that amounts to. To capture what Ginsborg wants us to capture, I have suggested, *does* require us to consider the character of the experience the subject has when they perceive. But to capture what Ginsborg wants to capture *doesn't* require appeal to any particular constitutive account of that. Ginsborg goes straight for a constitutive account in appealing to perceptual representation, and thus neglects the idea that we can capture what she wants to capture in a more neutral way.

6.4 Ginsborg's Argument: Second Wave

The second wave of Ginsborg's argument brings in an account of why psychological states are rationalizing. Consider, then, the following:

On the approach we are considering, the perception of the package has to play the same kind of role in rationalizing the belief that there is a package present that the belief that the streets are wet plays in rationalizing the belief that it rained. In our paradigm case it is plausible to suppose that the belief plays that rationalizing role because it, so to speak, makes available to you a reason for your belief, namely the consideration that the streets are wet. When you form your belief that it rained, you have "in view" the fact or proposition that the streets are wet, and you are in a position to cite that fact or proposition as a reason for your belief that it rained. So if your perception of the package is to play the same kind of role with respect to your belief that there is a package in front of you, then it is plausible to suppose that it must also bring into view a consideration which supports the belief that there is a package in front of you

(2011, pp. 144-145).

There is a lot to unpack here. First is the assumption that we are to understand the rationalizing role of perception as Ginsborg understands the rationalizing role of belief. This is questionable. One might disagree with Ginsborg about the rationalizing role of belief. Or one might disagree with Ginsborg that the rationalizing role of perception should be modelled closely on that of belief. And one might question both things. But here I'll accept the way Ginsborg understands the rationalizing role of belief, and grant that the rationalizing role of perception should be understood similarly.

Ginsborg's argument has to do with the idea that for perceptions to be rationalizing, they must bring *reasons* into view. The idea seems to be that we can't capture how perceptions bring reasons into view (and hence how perceptions are rationalizing), unless we admit that perceptions are representational. This is the second wave of Ginsborg's argument.

Now, one line of thought is that seeing the package brings *the package* into view, and the package itself can be a reason for beliefs about it. Perhaps seeing the package in front of one can rationalize the belief that *there's a package there*, similarly to how beliefs rationalize other beliefs, that is, by bringing an appropriate reason into view which supports the belief in question. Nothing in this line of thought requires us to endorse a representational model of thing-seeing, though the line of thought is consistent with such a model.

But in response to this Ginsborg says that 'the package itself cannot count in favor, either of the belief that it is a package, or of the belief that there is a package in front of you. Not being a fact or proposition, it is simply not the right kind of thing to serve as a reason for a belief' (p. 145). This suggests that Ginsborg is operating with a factualist or propositionalist assumption about reasons such that the reasons which rationalizing psychological states or episodes bring into view must be either facts or propositions, considerations of the form *that such and such is the case*. As we'll see shortly, another aspect of Ginsborg's thinking is more relaxed on this matter, but for now, let's proceed as if factualism about reasons is true (I drop discussion of propositionalism from now on).¹⁰

We are assuming that states or episodes of thing-seeing play a rationalizing role. I now want to suggest that *even if we grant factualism*, and so hold that states or episodes of thing-seeing bring facts into view, that doesn't force upon us a representational model of states or episodes of thing-seeing. Again, we can remain neutral on whether such a model holds. And the flaw in Ginsborg's argument, I want to suggest, is similar to what we've encountered above: neglect

¹⁰For helpful discussion of the ontology of reasons see Sylvan (2016).

of the fact that we can capture what she wants us to capture – something about the rationalizing role of visual perception – in terms of a theory neutral feature of visual perception – conscious character.

Now one might wonder how merely *seeing a package* can make the fact that there's a package there available to a subject if it is not propositionally structured. However, given what we've said above, the question is not whether *merely* seeing a package can make the relevant fact available to a subject, but rather whether seeing a package *where that involves having a certain kind of experience, an experience with a certain character*, can make the relevant fact available to one.

Suppose that Asha sees the package and in seeing it has an experience the character of which can be captured by saying that it appears to her as if there's a package there. Part of what her seeing the package, and having an experience with such a conscious character does for Asha, is make relevant facts available to her – such as the fact that there's a package there. What is explanatorily relevant to Asha's having in view the fact that there's a package there, is that she sees the package *and has an experience with a certain character, a character which can be captured by saying that it appears to her as if there's a package there*. That's not the same as the idea that she sees the package *and perceptually represents* that there is a package there – not unless we have already smuggled in a representational *account* of seeing, experience, and conscious character.

And consistently with this, it might be that Asha's having in view the fact that the package is there is in part a function of what she can *make of* her visual perception. That is, it might be that it is in part a function of her being able to tell that she is seeing a package. And this, we might think, is partly enabled by the fact that she *is* seeing a package, but partly enabled by the fact that she has an experience with the aforementioned character. For in virtue of the experience being of this kind (and not, say, of such a kind as would be captured by saying that it appears to her as if there is a patch of light there), it can reveal itself to her to be a seeing *of a package*. Now it might be that this requires Asha to have certain capacities the exercise of which involves representation – presumably it requires Asha to be a rational, self-conscious subject, with appropriate discriminative and recognitional capacities. But none of this demands a representational model of states or episodes of thing-seeing, or of experience and conscious character.

So even if we assume that factualism is true, and that states or episodes of thing-seeing rationalize beliefs by making *facts* available to their subjects, this doesn't force upon us a representational model of thing-seeing (or of experience and conscious character). We can remain neutral on such a model. What is explanatorily relevant is, again, theory-neutral: that rationalizing states or episodes of thing-seeing are or involve experiences with conscious characters. Asha's visual perception of the package makes the fact that there's a package

there available to her *because it is (or involves) an experience with a certain character*.

A similar point applies when it comes to what Ginsborg has to say about views which don't assume factualism. Consider, for instance, her remarks on the view she finds in Johnston (2006). As Ginsborg notes, on Johnston's view

We can perceive such things as the snubnosedness of Socrates, or the astringency of the calvados, where these are conceived of as states or conditions of Socrates or the calvados, and as being on a par with events such as a particular chiding of Socrates by Xanthippe (p. 146).

Ginsborg notes that for Johnston such things are not facts or propositions (p. 146). And she notes that

the states and events which we perceive might be thought to serve as reasons for belief. Perhaps the "brownness of the package" on Johnston's construal, that is the state or condition of the package constituted by *its being brown*, can count in favor of believing the package to be a package... And in that case your perception of the package's brownness – of its state of being brown – can rationalize the belief that it is a package. Alternatively, your perception can rationalize, as a limiting case, your believing the package to be brown, where that belief in turn can rationalize your believing it to be a package (pp. 146-147).¹¹

One might develop this so as to reject Ginsborg's suggestion that in order to capture how rationalizing perceptions bring reasons into view, we must admit that such perceptions are representational. For one might suppose that Asha's seeing the brownness of the package brings a reason to believe that the package is brown into view, namely, the package's brownness. And here we are appealing to the idea that she *sees* the package's brownness, not any particular account of what such seeing amounts to (representational or otherwise).¹² What, then, is wrong with such an account, according to Ginsborg?

¹¹See also Kalderon (2011).

¹²This also fits the mould of the thing-seeing approach, on the assumption that Asha's seeing the brownness of the package provides *factive* rational support for some of her perceptual beliefs. And presumably, it does, since, given the relationality of thing-seeing, if Asha sees the brownness of the package, the package's brownness is there to be seen. But if the package's brownness is there to be seen, then the package must be brown. So, Asha's seeing the package's brownness, just like her seeing the brown package, guarantees the truth of her perceptual belief that the package is brown.

First, to switch examples, Ginsborg suggests that

whatever plausibility there is to the idea that perceiving Socrates's snubnosedness can rationalize the belief that he is snubnosed, seems to rely on the assumption that, in perceiving Socrates's snubnosedness, one perceives *that* he is snubnosed, and hence is presented with a fact or proposition counting in favor (here, as a limiting case) of the belief that he is snubnosed (p. 147).

But why does Ginsborg think this? She explains with reference to another example:

The point can be brought out most readily in connection with events. It is possible to perceive the event of a chiding of Socrates by Xanthippe without realizing that Socrates is being chided by Xanthippe: one might at the time be capable of describing what one is hearing only as "a muffled voice coming from the next room," and find out only later, if at all, that one had heard Xanthippe chiding Socrates. If that is the way in which one hears Xanthippe chiding Socrates, then, even if one's perception causes one to form the belief that Xanthippe is chiding Socrates, the belief is not rationalized by the perception. It is the fact or proposition that Xanthippe is chiding Socrates which can serve as a reason for, or count in favor of, this or that belief, not the event of Xanthippe's chiding Socrates (p. 147).

The point seems to be that one can perceive the event of a chiding of Socrates by Xanthippe and still not be rational in judging on that basis that Xanthippe is chiding Socrates. For one might hear the event in *such a way* that it would not be rational to judge, on the basis of one's auditory perception, that Xanthippe is chiding Socrates (for instance, one has nothing but an impression of muffled voices in the next room).

Applying this back to the previous claims, presumably the argument is as follows: one can perceive Socrates's snubnosedness and still not be rational in judging on that basis that Socrates is snubnosed. For one might perceive the snubnosedness in *such a way* that it would not be rational to judge, on the basis of one's perception, that Socrates is snubnosed (for instance, if one's perception is confused or illusory).

Finally, Ginsborg considers the case of the package:

If we follow Johnston in assuming that states and conditions are to be understood on the same model as events, the same must hold

true for them. Seeing the package's brownness, or the package's being brown, can rationalize the belief that the package is brown, or a package, only if it involves seeing the package to be brown (p. 147).

To apply the argument: Asha can perceive the package's brownness and still not be rational in judging on that basis that the package is brown. For she might perceive the brownness in *such a way* that it would not be rational to judge, on the basis of her perception, that the package is brown (for instance, if her perception is confused or illusory).

What Ginsborg concludes from these considerations is that insofar as one's perception of the snubnosedness of Socrates rationalizes one's belief that Socrates is snubnosed, it is only because one perceives *that* Socrates is snubnosed, and only because this perception makes available to one the *fact* that Socrates is snubnosed. And insofar as one's perception of the chiding of Socrates by Xanthippe rationalizes one's belief that Xanthippe is chiding Socrates it is only because one perceives *that* Xanthippe is chiding Socrates, and only because this perception makes available to one the fact that Xanthippe is chiding Socrates. And insofar as Asha's perception of the brownness of the package rationalizes her belief that the package is brown it is only because she perceives *that* the package is brown, and only because her perception makes available to her the fact that the package is brown.

Now, Ginsborg is right that when Asha sees the brownness of the package, then whether or not she is rational in judging that the package is brown, on the basis of her perception, depends upon the *way in which she sees brownness of the package*. After all, for her perception to be rationalizing it has to give her a perspective on the world which 'indicates' the truth of what she judges (the perspective claim). And this will be fixed, in part, by the way in which she sees the brownness of the package.

The problem is that Ginsborg assumes that once we acknowledge this point we must appeal to propositional representation. Yet, as I have argued above, it's enough to acknowledge this that we acknowledge that Asha's visual perception has an *appropriate conscious character* (for instance, that in seeing the brownness of the package she has an experience with a character that we can capture by saying that the package appears brown to her). Again, Ginsborg goes straight for something *theoretical* to capture what can be captured with a theory-neutral notion. Similar points apply to Ginsborg's other examples.

Thus, despite what Ginsborg says, one might hold that Asha's seeing the brownness of the package rationalizes her belief that the package is brown, and does so by bringing a reason into view: the package's brownness. We can add

that seeing the package's brownness only plays this rationalizing role when it has an appropriate conscious character. But none of this requires us to take a stance on whether Asha's seeing of the brownness of the package (and the experience and conscious character this involves) is representational.

Thus, the second wave of Ginsborg's argument like the first, doesn't show that we cannot capture the rationalizing role of states or episodes of thing-seeing unless we admit that such states are representational.

6.5 Summary

In the first wave, Ginsborg argues that for a subject's visual perception to rationalize their belief that p , their perception must provide them with a 'perspective on the world' which 'indicates' that p is true, but to capture this we have to admit that visual perceptions are representational. In response, I argued that we can capture this instead with the theory-neutral idea that our visual perceptions have conscious characters. This is what explains how our perceptions afford us a perspective on the world which 'indicates' the truth of the beliefs they support.

In the second wave, Ginsborg argues that for a subject's visual perception to rationalize their belief that p , their perception must make available to them a reason to believe that p , but to capture this we have to admit that visual perceptions are representational. In response, I argued that we can capture this instead with the theory-neutral idea that our visual perceptions have conscious characters. This is what explains how our perceptions make reasons available to us – whether we conceive of such reasons as objects, facts, states, conditions, or events.

7 Conclusion

I've explored a non-orthodox form of epistemological disjunctivism – the thing-seeing approach. On this approach, states or episodes of thing-seeing – such as seeing a black crow and seeing a brown package – are the states or episodes of visual perception which ground paradigmatic visual knowledge. A central motivation for developing epistemological disjunctivism in this new direction is that it is a form of the view which, unlike the orthodox form, is neutral on whether the states or episodes which ground visual knowledge are propositional or representational. It is thus less vulnerable in the philosophy of perception than orthodox epistemological disjunctivism. It is not hostage to the fortunes of propositional or representational views in the philosophy of perception.

I have considered whether we really can put states or episodes of thing-seeing to epistemological work, in the framework of epistemological disjunctivism, whilst remaining neutral on whether or not they are propositional, or representational. According to the *factivity challenge*, unless we admit that these states or episodes are representational, we cannot capture how they provide factive rational support. In response, I argued that the fact that thing-seesings are relational explains how they can constitute factive rational support, and that this doesn't require a commitment to, or denial of, any propositional or representational model of thing-seeing or its relationality. According to the *rationalizing role challenge*, unless we admit that knowledge grounding visual states or episodes are representational, we cannot capture how they rationalize beliefs. In response, I argued that we can capture the rationalizing role of states or episodes of thing-seeing by appeal to the fact that they have conscious characters, and that this doesn't require a commitment to or denial of any propositional or representational model of thing-seeing or of conscious character.

I have argued, then, that with respect to both challenges, what is relevant to explaining how states or episodes of thing-seeing can be put to epistemological work, in the framework of epistemological disjunctivism, are *theory-neutral* features.

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